

Coordination of Services Team (COST)

This backgrounder was informed by the work of [Alameda County Healthy Care Services Agency Center for Healthy Schools and Communities](#).

Now a nationally recognized best practice, Coordination of Services Teams (COST) support students in schools and districts across the country and they continue expanding. COST, and the strength-based approach it promotes, not only **increases student access to services**, but **enhances young people's connection to the school and community**, helping all the adults in a child's life work collaboratively.

What Is a Coordination of Services Team?

A Coordination of Services Team (COST) constitutes a strategy for managing and integrating various learning supports and resources for students. COST teams identify and address student needs holistically and ensure that the overall system of supports works together effectively.

A COST is a multidisciplinary team of school staff and providers who:

- Create a regular forum for reviewing the needs of individual students and the school overall.
- Collaborate on linking referred students to resources and interventions.
- Support students' academic success and healthy development.

COST uses a centralized, easy-to-use referral system so that anyone in a school community can refer or self-refer students most in need of additional supports. COST then provides a structure for school staff, administrators, and school-based providers who may normally work in separate areas to come together to discuss the strengths and needs of students who are struggling and need support. Together they develop tailored interventions that connect students to **academic** and **social-emotional supports** available in a school community.

A school may have other existing systems and structures in place for different purposes such as Student Support Teams (SST), Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, School Attendance Review Board (SARB) process, disciplinary meetings, etc. The main difference is that **a COST team triages ALL students**, not only those who are diagnosed with a learning or other physical challenge.

Source: 2023. *Life-Changing Schools For All Students: California Partnership for the Future of Learning Community Schools Toolkit*. Partnership for the Future of Learning, California, pp. 111-114. <https://toolkit.futureoflearningca.org/>

WHO IS ON A COST TEAM?

COST team members will vary by school depending on available staff resources and community partners but may include:

- School Administrators (Principal, Assistant Principal, Teacher on Special Assignment, Community School Manager)
- Attendance clerk
- School Linked Services (SLS) Coordinator, school-based mental health provider and/or county behavioral health liaison
- School Security officer
- Teacher Representatives for Student Study Team (SST), Individual Education Plan (IEP), 504
- School Counselor
- Culture and climate liaison/Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) lead
- School Health Center staff
- Family liaison
- Social workers or case managers
- After school provider

Helpful tip: Every school has “culture keepers” and staff who have developed a close rapport with students, but their role/title may differ by school. Seek out these individuals within your school campus and meet with them.

What Do COST Teams Do?

COST teams perform four major tasks:

- Identify students who need additional supports through a schoolwide referral system.
- Assess referred students and explore strengths and supports needed.
- Coordinate efforts to link referred students to appropriate supports by tracking progress and tailoring interventions over time.
- Assess learning supports and needs school-wide, make recommendations about resource allocation to the administration, and recruit new resources.

Why Start a COST?

What are the Benefits?

COST will strengthen your school's ability to support its students holistically. Having a COST maximizes and expands available resources, increasing your school's capacity to respond quickly and appropriately to a wide range of student needs. With this enhanced support, more students are able to stay engaged in school and ultimately graduate healthy and successful.

COST improves coordination, communication, and collaboration across providers working on behalf of students, which leads to:

- Improved capacity to tailor interventions to each student's unique needs and strengths.
- Higher efficiency and use of limited resources.
- Increased sense of belonging and quality of services among providers on the team.
- Expanded range of universal and prevention services.

An effective COST structure builds upon a school's Multi-Tiered System of Support and Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 services. Prior to a COST referral, a COST team member can work with a teacher or other staff member on other strategies that can support students to be successful (e.g., 1:1 convo with a student, call home to family, classroom agreements, etc.)

Why Are COST Leaders Important?

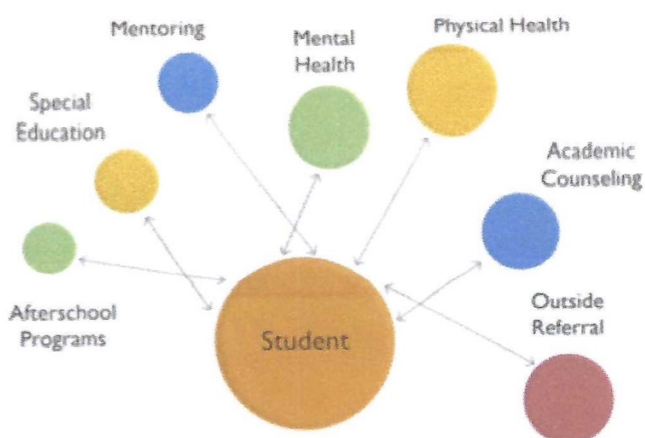
COST leaders play a critical role in contributing to a school's culture and climate amongst students and staff. COST leaders become change leaders by:

- Bringing together a team to work in new ways.
- Challenging the team to create solutions.
- Guiding the team and setting high expectations.
- Creating a collaborative and trusting environment that supports a student-centered approach.
- COST leads often hold other responsibilities at the school site (e.g., family liaisons, social worker, community school coordinator, etc.) but it is important to have a designated COST lead responsible for moving the work forward at a school.

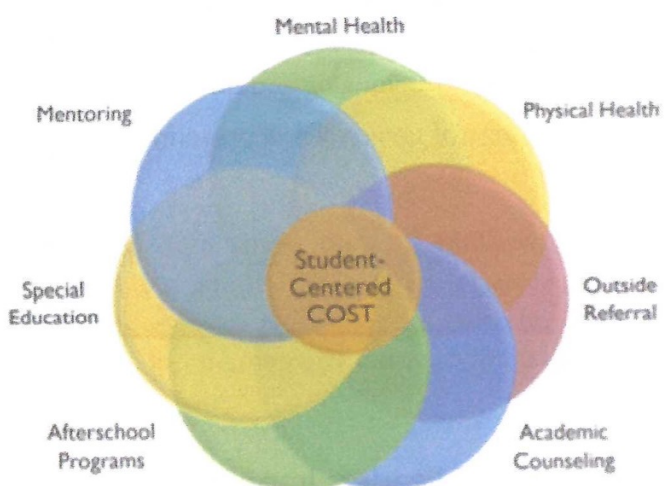
Helpful tip: Identifying and supporting COST "champions" at your school will help to expand the reach in the school community. Taking the time to develop relationships with staff and partners will go a long way.

Student-Centered Approach Provides More Coordinated Supports

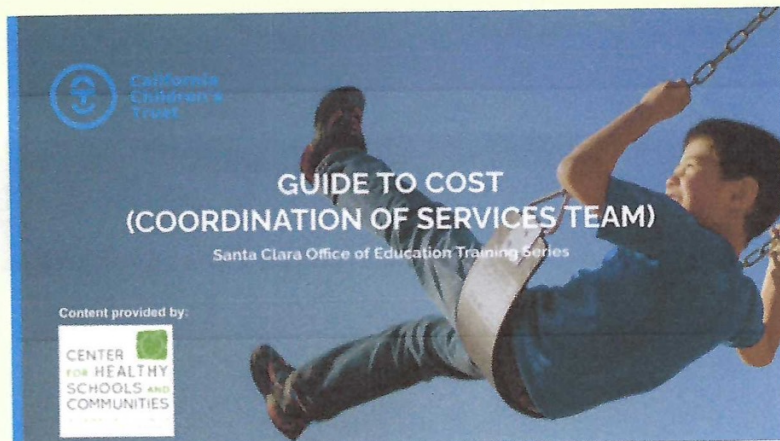
Before COST



After COST



Learn more about how to fund and implement COST referral systems in schools in the [Californian Children's Trust slide deck](#)



Additional Resources

- Coordination Practices
 - [Coordination of Services Team \(COST\) Guide](#)
 - [COST Introduction](#)
 - [COST Handouts](#)
 - [COST Tip Sheets](#)
 - [COST Training Sheets](#)
 - [COST Forms](#)
- [Readiness to Learn COST Progress Report](#)
- [District Health and Wellness](#)
- [HIPPA or FERPA? A Primer on School Health Information Sharing](#)
- [Consent and Confidentiality at schoolhealthcenters.org](#)