

# STUDENT ASSISTANCE CENTER



## Student Assistance Programs: Impact on the Seven School Turnaround Principles

*“No matter how well teachers are prepared to teach, no matter what accountability measures are put in place, no matter what governing structures are established for schools, educational progress will be profoundly limited if students are not motivated and able to learn.”<sup>i</sup>*

-Charles Basch.

### **Student Assistance Programs: an Effective Student Support Team Framework**

Historically, the non-academic student support team has been a commonly utilized early intervention approach to improve the success of struggling students, and is recommended by educational experts as an important strategy in helping students succeed.<sup>ii</sup> Student Assistance Programs (SAP) are a three-tiered (Universal, Selective, Indicated) student support team (SST) model that has demonstrated success in Illinois.<sup>iii</sup> Student Assistance is also an effective, low cost SST framework in ensuring access to needed physical, mental, and oral health care which leads to improved attendance, behavior, and achievement. SAP promotes evidence-based approaches in developing a positive social and emotional climate which increases academic success, reduces stress, and improves positive attitudes toward self and others.<sup>iv</sup>

### **The Seven School Turnaround Principles Leadership**

It is essential for those in leadership to have an understanding of the focus of Student Assistance in addressing the non-academic barriers to learning that impact a student’s ability to be successful in school. Effective Student Assistance Programs work collaboratively at a Universal level to address policies and procedures. Student Assistance teams are involved in discussions of adapting policy to encourage processes/policies that are not just punitive in nature, but also include building supports for students. Illinois data shows that 46 percent of reporting schools reviewed/revised policies in any given year. At both Selective and Indicated levels, Student Assistance includes administrator involvement in the data collection process, the problem-solving process, and keeps administrators updated on progress and interventions conducted with individual students including participation in educational support groups or other interventions.

### **Strong Instructional Program**

While academic rigor is not a core focus of Student Assistance, effective SAPs are guided by the desire to help students be fully present, focused and able to attend to the strong instructional program designed by the school. Students whose needs are met are increasingly able to fully attend to the instruction they receive.<sup>v</sup> SAPs accomplish this at the Indicated level through integration with other school programs and practices in the school, utilizing an internal referral process, problem-solving team and case

management. SAPs ensure that paperwork, processes, and practices are seamless and fully integrated with other programs including RTI plans. This helps to ensure students receive vital services without duplication. Illinois' data notes academic progress for SAP students in two ways: those who improved academically only, and those that improved in multiple areas. Up to 57 percent of students improved in academics only. Up to 80 percent improved in multiples areas of concern including academic progress.

### **Use of Data**

SAPs collect and use data in multiple ways. At the Universal level, SAPs collect data (through year-end reports collected by the Student Assistance Center at Prevention First) on a school-wide basis to determine the need for Universal prevention strategies to support the needs of all students. SAPs also collect data at the Universal level annually to determine the success of programming and impact of Student Assistance services on the school environment. SAPs collect programmatic data to assess effectiveness of strategies on Selective populations. At the Indicated level, SAPs collect archival data on students which include grades, behavior, attendance, and health status. SAPs also collect data through a staff indicators-of-concern form to facilitate data driven decision-making. SAPs collect qualitative data from student and parent interviews to develop a full picture of the whole child's support needs. Student Assistance Programs collect progress monitoring data throughout SAP services to inform decisions about intervention success. SAPs use all of this data to inform and direct decision-making with regard to current and future programming needs.

### **Effective Teachers**

Illinois data shows 86 percent of reporting SAP schools increasing effectiveness at identifying at-risk students. Student Assistance contributes at the Universal level to strengthening professional capacity by focusing on professional development for all staff to increase capacity to identify indicators of non-academic barriers to learning (e.g. mental health issues, substance

abuse issues, violence, trauma, etc.). Staff being more aware of non-academic barriers to learning often improves staff attitudes about helping students (71 percent of SAPs report improved staff attitudes about helping students). A staff's increased ability to identify non-academic barriers to learning and improved attitudes toward helping students results in groups of students with similar risk factors being identified for help through educational support groups at the Selective level and individual interventions at the Indicated level. Creative collaboration is one of the primary benefits identified by Student Assistance teams across Illinois. Student Assistance uses a collaborative problem-solving process at the Indicated level for identifying interventions for life issues which facilitates a close collaborative relationship among teachers.

### **Extended Use of Time**

SAPs strive to creatively make use of time within a school day. SAPs regularly schedule meetings before or after school hours or use common planning times for meetings and other interventions (tutoring, mentoring, etc.) to meet students' needs. During the school day SAPs incorporate educational support groups for students, universal prevention activities, and individual meetings to provide support services. SAPs minimize the impact on necessary instructional time by rotating through different times of the day for meetings with students to limit time lost from any one class.

### **School Environment**

School environment impact includes a reduction of problem behaviors as well as increased:

- communication between staff/students/parents community resource utilization
- student support services
- effective at-risk student identification
- positive relationships between students and non-familial adults
- connections to community services

SAPs build social capital for students through a network of relationships that offer support, information, and access to resources which

contributes to a Supportive Environment/Student Centered Learning Climate. SAPs build social-emotional skills at the Universal level through prevention programming including skill building centered on decision-making, goal setting, relationships, and other topics. Selective level strategies build positive coping skills, stress management, and healthy relationships through educational support groups. SAPs develop individual interventions at the Indicated level which includes social-emotional skill development. SAPs also promote student connectedness through connecting students with positive adults in the building as short-term mentors.

### **Family and Community Engagement**

SAPs collaborate at all three levels (Universal, Selective and Indicated) with families to engage them in interventions that support students. Illinois SAP data shows, 83 percent of schools report communication between staff, students, and parents improved as a result of having SAP. SAPs consistently develop relationships with community service providers at the Universal level to develop and implement prevention programming targeted at key risk factors, and processes to connect students and families to services. Student Assistance engages families at the Selective level through informed consent to participate in educational support groups, mentoring and tutoring programs. Improved communication creates a bridge between the family, school and community services at the Indicated level to address student needs. Students through SAP are consistently, and at a higher rate than reported nationally, linked to the behavioral health care system.

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<sup>i,iv</sup>ASCD, 2014, Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child: A Collaborative Approach to Learning and Health, ASCD, 1703 North Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311

<sup>ii</sup>Osher, David et. al., 2008, Cleveland Metropolitan School District Human Ware Audit: Findings and Recommendations, American Institutes for Research, 1000 Thomas Jefferson Street, Washington, DC

<sup>iii,vi</sup> <https://www.prevention.org/Resources/SAC-Resources>

<sup>v</sup>Student Assistance Center at Prevention First, 2009, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Student Assistance Center at Prevention First, 2800 Montvale Dr., Springfield IL