








STUDENT ASSISTANCE CENTER

PREVENTION FIRST
Building community capacity to prevent substance abuse

Getting started with Student Assistance Programs

The goal of the Student Assistance Program is to implement standards-based sustainable Student Assistance services. The following steps can assist schools in strategically achieving that goal. The SAP framework can support schools by bringing together the effective strategies a school is already using with additional evidence-based strategies to create a valuable and effective process for helping students in a variety of ways.

Both the time and intensity devoted to laying the foundation for Student Assistance can impact the overall success achieved down the road. The Student Assistance Center at Prevention First provides numerous free resources on the website to assist schools in laying that foundation.

-  Step 1 Learn the goals and intent of Student Assistance
-  Step 2 Identify how to deliver Student Assistance services
-  Step 3 Assess your practices and readiness
-  Step 4 Establish a consistent meeting schedule
-  Step 5 Plan your approach and implementation
-  Step 6 Conduct a brief in-service with school personnel
-  Step 7 Begin implementing SAP services with students

Step 1: Learn the goals and intent of Student Assistance

Research has identified that administrative leadership and support are crucial elements for both sustainable Student Assistance Programs and 5Essentials development. In order to develop the Illinois 5Essentials, a principal must have a strategic orientation that deliberately orchestrates people, programs, and extant resources toward an integrated, sustained, and coherent program of improvement. Understanding more about the goals and intent of Student Assistance is advantageous in that strategic orientation. [Learn more about the 5Essentials and Student Assistance.](#)

Student Assistance focuses on helping students struggling with life issues that are interfering with the student's ability to access and benefit from the curriculum and other aspects of the learning process. Student Assistance concentrates on coordinating services at the early intervention stage. SAPs also benefit students needing professional services by serving as a bridge between the school and community based service providers. Research for a number of years demonstrates that schools should draw on a network of community organizations to expand services for students and their families.

Student Assistance works to build trusting relationships with students' families in order to further engage them in the learning process to improve educational success.

Student Assistance focuses professional development toward more effective identification of nonacademic concerns, along with helping staff understand why they need to be concerned about all students in the building. Additionally, Student Assistance teams and coordinators report that "creative collaboration" is one of the most important benefits of SAP.

For more information see:

- [SAC Administrative Guide](#)
- [Student Assistance Guidebook](#)

This information can help you understand what

Student Assistance can do for your students. To learn more about the positive impact of Student Assistance services, please review the [data submitted since 1999](#).

The school environment must press toward academic achievement, while displaying deep personal concern for students. Student Assistance is not intended to be a response to intervention academic remediation team or a special education pre-referral team. Student Assistance works in conjunction with multi-tiered systems of support by creating a framework to address the nonacademic concerns of students. This allows MTSS supports to achieve stronger outcomes. One of the outcomes in both national and Illinois Student Assistance data is [improved academic achievement](#).

In addition, Student Assistance is not intended to be a school-wide behavior teaching and management model, although SAP teams consistently report [improved behavior by students](#) receiving Student Assistance services.

Step 2: Identify how to deliver Student Assistance services

A school may choose to deliver services through a Student Assistance Core Team, a Student Assistance Specialist/Coordinator, or a blend of these approaches.

The Student Assistance Core Team is composed of a combination of the following: classroom teachers, nurse, school counselors, social workers, administrator, coaches, and other specialists. Team membership is consistent throughout the school year; team composition does not change based on the student of concern. This team works together first as the implementation team making decisions about how the SAP will function, and then as the multi-disciplinary problem-solving team handling referrals, problem-solving and monitoring.

The size of the core team is relational to the numbers of staff and students in the building. The average team size is typically 6 to 10 team members for a school with a student population ranging between 500 to 1200 students. This

number can vary for schools with smaller and larger numbers of students. It is important to note that unlike a pupil personnel team, the SAP Core Team is not intended to be a clinical team composed of only specialists in the building. Student Assistance is intended to meet students at an earlier point of need, freeing clinical staff to focus energies on concerns more appropriate for clinical interventions. When a pupil personnel team exists in the building, the SAP can serve as an additional referral source to that team. Having front line educators on the Student Assistance team has proven to be a valuable asset to many schools over the 50-year history of SAP.

The Student Assistance specialist or coordinator role is typically filled by an individual with specialized training, and has dedicated time during the school day to fulfill responsibilities designated as Student Assistance activities. Responsibilities within this role vary by school district, and typically involve:

- Meeting with students and parents individually
- Facilitating core team meetings
- Coordinating informational sessions with students, parents, and staff in the building
- Coordinating and collaborating with community resources
- Coordinating and delivering prevention programming
- Conducting educational support groups

Step 3: Assess your practices and readiness

The assessment phase is fundamental to the implementation of sound practices that lead to success, and includes needs, resources, and readiness assessments at the school level. Because Student Assistance attempts to build upon what is already working in the school, schools should plan to utilize existing data sources as the primary information sources for assessment. The SAP may want to add to existing data sources during the assessment

process if more data would be helpful. 5Essentials report data will be helpful along with attendance, health, behavior, academic, free and reduced lunch information, grief/loss information, etc. See the [Student Assistance Program Guidebook: A Resource for Schools](#) for more information on need and resource assessment.

Step 4: Establish a consistent meeting schedule

Frequency and intensity of implementation meetings play a significant role in the future success of Student Assistance service delivery and outcomes for your students. Weekly or bi-weekly meetings averaging 45 to 60 minutes are common practice in Illinois.

Step 5: Plan your approach and implementation

Once need, resource, and readiness data is reviewed, the SAP begins designing the framework. Each SAP's specific strategies are tailored to meet the needs and resources of the school. The evidence-based standards of practice for SAPs provide guidance in the strategies that lead to successful implementation practices.

The SAP will create an implementation plan with detailed actions to begin working with students through the SAP process. This step should also include identifying benchmarks the team will use to measure the efficacy of current strategies.

Step 6: Conduct a brief in-service with school personnel

The in-service should cover the following:

- An explanation of the Student Assistance Program and its purpose.
- How to identify indicators for a SAP referral.
- How to respond appropriately to student self-disclosure that creates concern.
- The role of school personnel in the SAP problem-solving process.

The SAP should also conduct brief informational meetings with students in small group settings about the purpose of Student Assistance, and how students can make a self or friend referral when there is concern about someone's well-being. Information for parents and community agencies about the purpose of Student Assistance should be developed and distributed.

Step 7: Begin implementing SAP services with students

It is preferable for the SAP team to begin the identification process rather than 'wait' for referrals from staff who are not part of the core team. The team may start this process by developing a list of 10 or fewer students who team members believe would benefit from support from the SAP. The team may also begin by identifying referrals for SAP screening and problem-solving services because of known life issues currently impacting success.

Additional helpful resources are available on prevention.org, Professional Resources, Student Assistance Center:

Navigating the Course: a Student Assistance Program Sustainability Guidebook

Student Assistance Program Guidebook: a Resource for Schools

SAP Implementation Guide

The Student Assistance Levels of Development Workbook

Quick Tips