

# STUDENT ASSISTANCE CENTER



## Getting started with Student Assistance Programs

The goal of the Student Assistance Center at Prevention First is to prepare schools to implement standards-based sustainable Student Assistance Programs. Training and technical assistance are available to schools throughout the development, implementation, and sustainability phases.

The following steps can assist schools in strategically building a Student Assistance Program. The SAP framework can assist 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 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 Attend Student Assistance Development Training
- Step 4 Assess your practices and readiness
- Step 5 Establish a consistent meeting schedule
- Step 6 Plan your approach and implementation
- Step 7 Follow up with technical assistance meetings
- Step 8 Conduct a brief in-service with school personnel
- Step 9 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.

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. SAPs also serve students needing professional services by serving as a bridge between the school and community based service providers.

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 non-academic 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:

- ["Student Assistance Service Delivery – Service Framework"](#)
- ["Why Choose Student Assistance"](#)

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 response to intervention (RTI) by creating a framework to address the non-academic concerns of students. This allows RTI 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.

\*\*Data will be available soon!

## *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, guidance counselors, social worker, administrator, response to intervention coordinator, 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 numbers 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
- conducting educational support groups

### *Step 3: Attend Student Assistance Development Training*

Offered by the SAC at Prevention First, this skill-based training is free to schools and agencies in Illinois. It prepares the school to design and implement their SAP framework. Ancillary costs that may be considered include substitute teacher costs and travel costs to the training site. Click [here](#) for information about training.

### *Step 4: 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. Prevention First SAP trainers will explain the assessment processes during SAP Development Training. 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/response to intervention, 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. The [Student Assistance Center Administrator](#) may be contacted for help with the assessments whenever the SAP has questions.

### *Step 5: 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 6: Plan your approach and implementation*

The SAP Core Team will create the school's SAP framework after training. 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](#). Student Assistance Development Training provides the SAP Core Team or SAP Specialist/Coordinator with the basic knowledge and tools necessary to design the school's framework.

The SAP will create an implementation plan that provides a detailed plan of action to begin working with students through the SAP process. Student Assistance Development Training will help the SAP start this process, and Student Assistance trainers and technical assistants can help throughout the planning and implementation phases of getting started. This step should also include identifying benchmarks the team will use to measure the efficacy of current strategies.

## *Step 7: Follow up with technical assistance meetings*

[The Administrator](#) or another specialist from the Student Assistance Center will conduct an on-site, phone or video meetings with the SAP to help with questions and plans for implementation. Technical assistance is never intended as a "compliance check." Most SAPs find the technical assistance meeting to be a valuable opportunity to get answers specific to their school's implementation.

## *Step 8: 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 9: 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.

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<sup>i</sup> Sebring Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, and Luppescu, (2006). The Essential Supports for School Improvement. Pp. 11

<sup>ii</sup> Sebring Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, and Luppescu, (2006). The Essential Supports for School Improvement. Pp. 11

<sup>iii</sup> Sebring Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, and Luppescu, (2006). The Essential Supports for School Improvement. Pp. 13