

# STUDENT ASSISTANCE CENTER

at  
**PREVENTION FIRST**  
*Building community capacity to prevent substance abuse*

## **Student Assistance and RTI Working Together to Meet Student Needs**

Student Assistance is a valuable tool to complement and enhance Response to Intervention (RTI). Although both Student Assistance Programs and RTI utilize problem-solving teams, the reasons for and types of interventions implemented are quite different. RTI strategies center on how instruction is delivered, and how the student responds to particular instructional delivery approaches. Student Assistance strategies are social-emotional-need-focused including how the student is connecting to and accessing supports.

The basic scientific problem-solving model is utilized with both Response to Intervention and Student Assistance. Both use data-based decision-making, screening processes, evidence-based intervention strategies, and progress monitoring. When the issue is a lack of reading, math, and behavior skills, Response to Intervention implemented with fidelity is the appropriate framework for interventions. When the issue is life stressors and social emotional needs, Student Assistance is the appropriate framework for interventions.

**Student Assistance addresses social-emotional and life stressor issues that are not addressed by most Response to Intervention frameworks.** These issues include mental health, substance use, relationship, family, gender, teen pregnancy, grief and loss among other issues that are often not addressed through Response to Intervention. When students are not progressing as expected with RTI strategies, a referral can be made to the Student Assistance Program to look at what else is going on in the student's life that may be interfering with the ability to focus on the RTI interventions. Adapting Student Assistance interventions means helping the student make changes in response to life situations and changing how the student seeks and responds to support for life issues. Adapting intervention strategies with three-tiered teaching models means changing the way instruction happens based upon the learner's response.

**Student Assistance can be the point of need service for students who do not need Response to Intervention tiered services.** Students without reading, math, or skill deficits may also experience life stressors. Referral to Student Assistance has historically been the logical intervention system for all students with life stressors.



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### **Visit the Student Assistance Center**

at [www.prevention.org](http://www.prevention.org) to learn more about free training, technical assistance, webinars, and resources for standards-based Student Assistance Programs in grades K-12 Contact Dale Gasparovic, SAC Administrator, at [dalegasparovic@prevention.org](mailto:dalegasparovic@prevention.org) or at 217.299.8803 for more information.

**Student Assistance serves as the bridge between the school and community services helping families identify and access the help they need.** SAP can also be the coordinating component to facilitate coordination and communication between the service agency and the school.

**Student Assistance contains a self and friend referral component not provided through the Response to Intervention framework.** The RTI framework is not designed to take self and friend referrals. Students understand that RTI implements curriculum-based strategies that teach reading, math and behavior concepts, and would not see this as a helping system for issues such as self-injury, depression, substance use or relational violence. Students will self-refer and friend-refer for personal issues when they know there is a system in place to help. Many educators see the social emotional needs of students and understand the need and value for a student self and friend referral process when that student is concerned about his or her own well-being or that of a friend. A wealth of self-referral forms is available on the internet as a testament to this need.

**Student Assistance is a low cost and effective option for filling the void of services created by mental health and school funding cuts.** Many schools have limited access to school social workers and guidance counselors who can devote time to non-special education student's social emotional needs. SAP works with less intense mental health and lower level substance use issues leaving social workers more time to address more intermediate mental health and substance use needs.

Response to Intervention shows promising results when implemented with fidelity. However, to place all interventions in an instructional intervention approach leaves many students unserved. RTI and Positive Behavior Intervention strategies can ensure a quality curriculum and strong teaching practices, but instructional interventions on their own "cannot ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school."

Data collected through the Illinois Association of Student Assistance Professionals and the Student Assistance Center at Prevention First shows that between 70 and 80 percent of students with intervention/action plans improve or maintain status in multiple areas, including academics and behavior, while receiving Student Assistance services. Both the percentages over the report years and the consistency of the percentages tells us that Student Assistance makes a difference in success rates for many students receiving those services.

Student Assistance service providers should work closely with RTI as well as other learning support service providers. Simultaneous service delivery can enhance both the response to instructional interventions and the development of social supports that allow the student to be fully focused and engaged with the curriculum. Coordination and communication of efforts are key to keeping appropriate services in place while reducing duplication of efforts.

For more information on starting a SAP contact Dale Gasparovic, SAC Administrator, at 217-299-8803 or [dale.gasparovic@prevention.org](mailto:dale.gasparovic@prevention.org).

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<sup>1</sup> UCLA Mental Health in Schools Center, Moving Beyond the Three Tier Intervention Pyramid Toward a Comprehensive Framework for Student and Learning Supports, <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/threetier.pdf>; Retrieved on 8-9-11.