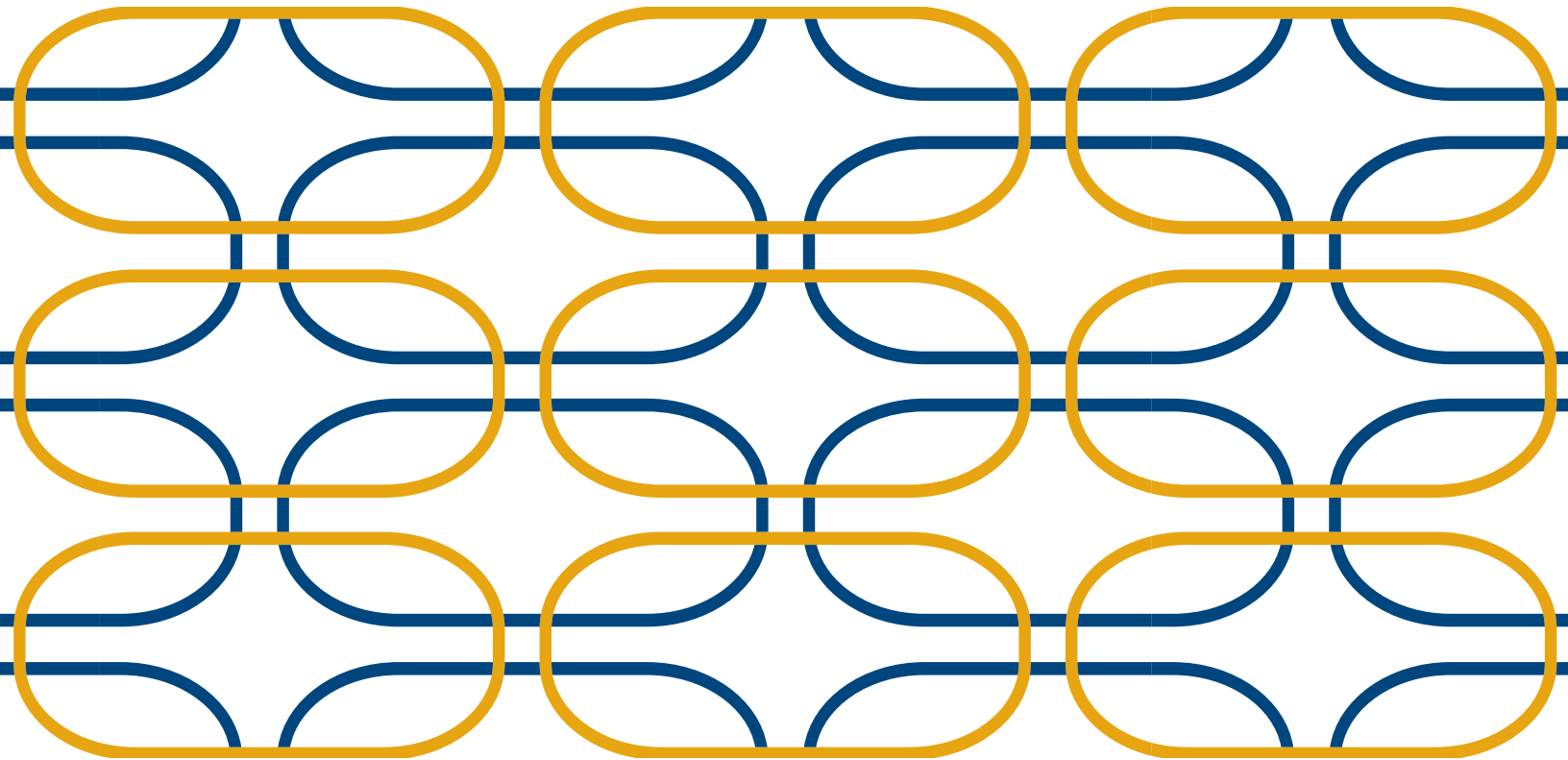


STUDENT ASSISTANCE CENTER

at
PREVENTION FIRST
Building community capacity to prevent substance abuse



Navigating the Course: a Student Assistance Program Sustainability Guidebook





Welcome

...to Navigating the Course: a Student Assistance Program Sustainability Guidebook developed by the Student Assistance Center at Prevention First.

Prevention First is a nonprofit resource center committed to building and supporting, healthy, drug-free communities through public education, professional training and effective tools for those working to prevent drug use and related issues such as violence, teen pregnancy and academic failure.

Student Assistance Center at Prevention First

A Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a K-12 school-based, evidence-informed framework for prevention, early intervention, referral and support for students with needs that may prevent them from fully benefitting from their educational experience. SAPs focus on building supports for students dealing with nonacademic barriers to learning including behavioral health, family and relationship issues as well as other life needs.

The Student Assistance Center was established in 2006 to support Student Assistance Programs in Illinois through training, technical assistance, and resources. The Center grounds all services in evidence-informed practices. SAC services focus on planning, implementing, evaluating, and strengthening Student Assistance services in public and private schools serving grades K through 12.

Headquarters – Springfield
2800 Montvale Drive
Springfield, Illinois 62704
Phone 217.793.7353
Toll-free in Illinois 800.252.8951
TDD 217.793.7355
Business hours 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Funding provided in whole or in part by the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Table of Contents

[Chapter 1: Introduction](#)

[Chapter 2: Introduction to Sustainability](#)

[Chapter 3: The SAP Team Process and SAP Coordinator Role](#)

[Chapter 4: Student Assistance Challenges and Strategies](#)

[Chapter 5: Student Assistance Problem-Solving Processes](#)

Chapter 1: Introduction

Student Assistance Programs developed during the mid-1970s to address the growing adolescent substance abuse problem. By the early 1980's, experts agreed that substance abuse is rarely a singular issue, and students with these problems often deal with mental health issues as well as a host of other life problems. Student Assistance Programs (SAPs) began to address these non-academic barriers to school success through a three-tiered system of support.

Through the years, the types of services offered to students and families has grown while the core intent has remained consistent. SAPs use data-driven processes to provide interventions at the Universal (all students in the building), Selective (subsets of the population with higher levels of risk), and Indicated (individual students demonstrating issues of concern) levels.

Students are coming to school with life issues more complex than ever. Non-academic barriers to success impact students in every school system across America. For more than 50 years, SAPs have helped students improve their chances for success through evidence-based and informed practices to help these students with non-academic barriers.

Student Assistance Programs are grounded in the belief that student's non-academic barriers to educational success can and must be addressed along with their academic and behavior needs in order for them to fully benefit from the curriculum. For students whose attention is directed at meeting survival, safety, and belonging needs, curriculum often goes by the wayside. Cognitive level needs don't get the focus they deserve simply because life issues don't leave room for complex curriculum.

Purpose of this Guidebook

The *Student Assistance Program Guidebook: A Resource for Schools*, also developed by the Student Assistance Center at Prevention First, is a comprehensive information source on developing a school-based Student Assistance Program framework. *Navigating the Course: a Student Assistance Program Sustainability Guidebook* is offered as a companion guide for those schools with new or existing Student Assistance Programs who want to build sustainable SAP structures, practices, and services in addressing the non-academic barriers impacting their students.

This Guidebook will assist schools in creating a common language and understanding around issues identified through both literature and practice that are encountered by many SAPs along with other forms of student support frameworks. The information contained here includes helpful tips and strategies to strengthen services, overcome programmatic barriers, and offer the most helpful services possible in a sustainable design.

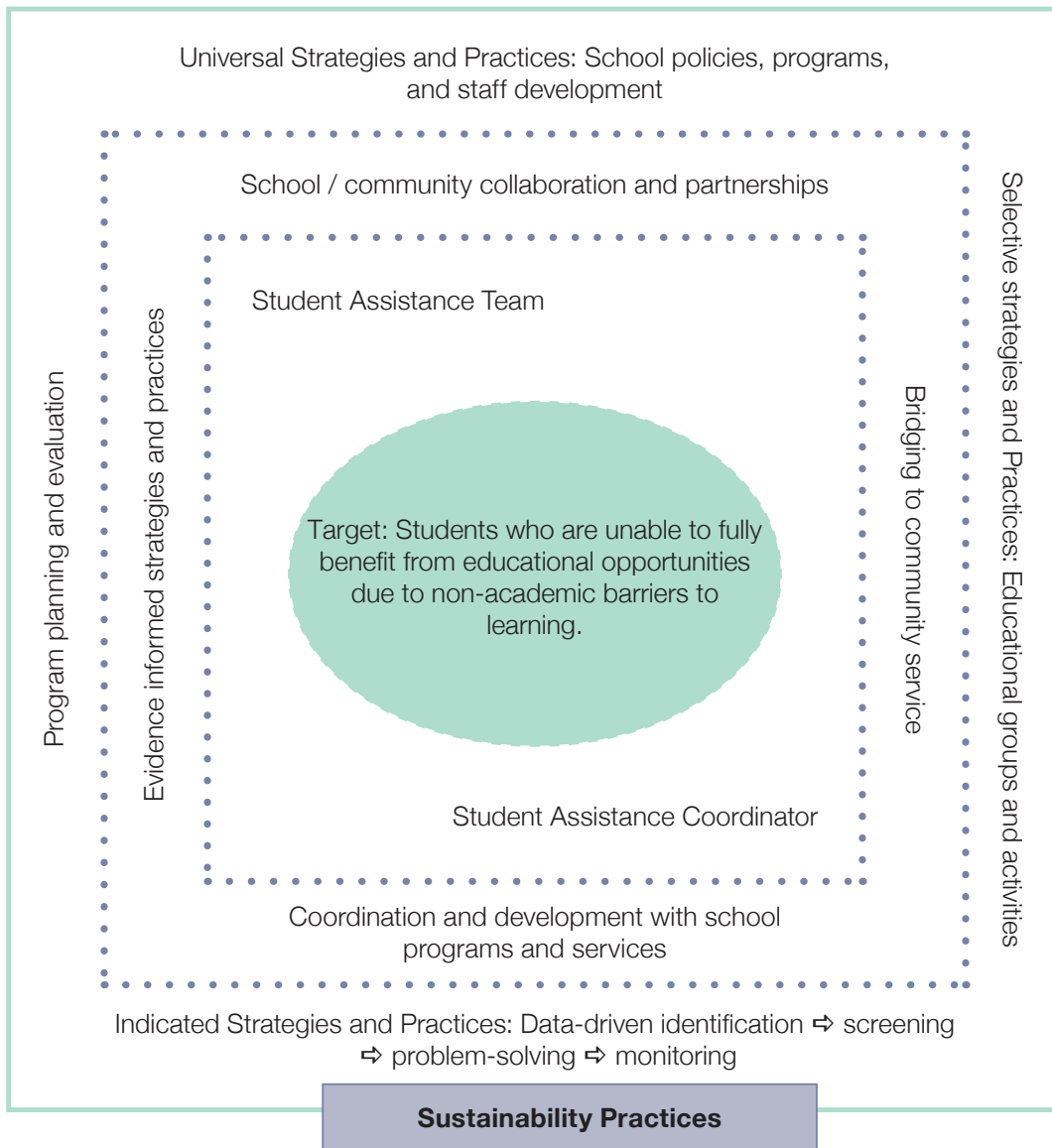
The Student Assistance Program Framework

The Student Assistance framework is an organizational model for delivering services at three levels to students impacted by nonacademic barriers to learning. All schools must commit to making students the center of the totality of its educational efforts. Surrounding those students must be supports for meeting needs that impact students' opportunities to take advantage of all that is offered in the educational process.

The Student Assistance framework aligns with instructional models placing student success at the center of all efforts. The Student Assistance framework supports effective instructional practices with a focus on addressing the nonacademic barriers to learning through Universal, Selective and Indicated strategies which align with Illinois' ESSA state plan. Effectiveness of these strategies is dependent upon efficient intentional planning, and collaboration with existing programs and services from within the school and the community. Ethically, and part of any effective planning process, on-going evaluation must be included in intentional planning to ensure strategy effectiveness. Direct service delivery may include a Student Assistance core team and/or a Student Assistance coordinator as part of a sound internal structure which involves the entire school. Sustainable practices throughout planning and implementation processes ensure that these types of supports remain available for students.

This Guidebook focuses on those sustainable practices in building sound internal structures that support all students.

The Student Assistance Framework



Student Assistance Program Sustainable Practices

Building sustainable practices involves planning with the intention of realizing long-term goals around offering the best possible services to improve student outcomes. Sustainable practices evolve through more efficient structures and mechanisms being in place as students and systems change so that high-quality services maintain or even improve over time.

Evidence-based practices exist for both Student Assistance Program operations and for problem-solving team processes. Planners don't need to guess at what works. This Guidebook offers up-to-date and time-tested practices for building sustainable SAPs. The focus is on building both a conceptual framework and a skill base for creating these sustainable practices.

The material in *Navigating the Course: a Student Assistance Program Sustainability Guidebook* is supported by numerous articles, tools, and resources on the Student Assistance Center Resources section of the Prevention First website, www.prevention.org.

Chapter 2: Introduction to Sustainability

A dictionary definition of sustainable gives us a basic premise of ‘being able to be maintained or upheld at a certain level without interruption.’ Applying that general definition in more specific terms with Student Assistance gives us a clearer picture of what needs to be done to build practices that are maintained or upheld without interruption.

Capacity is the SAPs’ ability to conduct a set of actions. Just as a classroom teacher must perform a set of actions such as teaching the curriculum, assessing progress, monitoring students over time, developing relationships with students, communicating well, etc., the SAP has a set of actions to be performed. The SAP’s capacity is the ability to conduct actions that lead to effective services over time.

Student Assistance actions include those practices and procedures that allow the SAP to function as well as conducting each step of the problem-solving process for identified students. Capacity, then, refers to the SAPs ability to perform the practices, procedures and processes. A more formal definition, and one that will be used throughout this Guide is that ‘Sustainability is to maintain or uphold the ability of the program to identify and perform the functions of the SAP, solve task and maintenance problems, and set, achieve, monitor, evaluate and adapt referral and program goals.’

The functions of the SAP fall into two areas: performance and governance.

Performance: Includes the tasks and processes related more directly to the services performed such as identifying students, working with school policies, conducting program awareness or professional development activities, administering prevention programs, designing and implementing interventions, along with other service related tasks.

Governance: Includes foundational tasks that allow the SAP to function. For Student Assistance teams, tasks would include team procedures such as when and where the team meets, how documentation is maintained, how team members are chosen and trained, how the team evaluates how they work together as a team, and other foundational non-service tasks. For SAP coordinators, governance relates to foundational functions such as attending school meetings, coordination with other services and programs, and complying with school-related procedures not directly related to services to students, families, and staff.

Without a strong foundation, services can’t be offered. Both functions must be given some level of capacity development in order to sustain the structure and the services of the SAP. Once we identify that we must focus on both functions, the following diagram helps us to break these apart into a more manageable picture for achieving sustainability.



SAP Sustainability

1. Identify and perform functions.

The initial SAP planning process starts with identifying what the planners want to do for students, staff, and families. A need and resource process informs the selection of services and processes to be offered through the SAP (see Chapter 3, *Student Assistance Program Guidebook: A Resource for Schools*). Planners establish goals, and determine what needs to happen in order to get to those goals. How the goals are accomplished become the functions.

Typical SAP performance functions include using identification and referral processes, conducting screening to gather relevant data, using the problem-solving steps, implementing interventions, progress monitoring, and determining next steps for the student. For those functions to work as hoped, the SAP has to perform other functions such as helping staff know how to appropriately identify and refer students; helping students understand how the self and friend referral processes can help them; and, how we help administrators understand the good being accomplished through the SAP.

The SAP also has to answer the question, “How are we going to work together to make these services available?” This question leads to the governance functions of the SAP. Common governance functions include who leads the team, how agendas are used, how documentation happens, or what guidelines are used for acting in respectful ways while dealing with sensitive information. Governance functions, then, fundamentally mean, “How do we govern ourselves so that we can perform SAP services?” The Student Assistance coordinator often works with an intervention team, a pupil personnel team, or other school problem-solving team, and is subject to those governance functions as well.

2. Solve task and maintenance problems.

The second piece of sustainability revolves around trouble-shooting capacity. In the ideal working world, functioning in a good team would mean simply getting the right people with the right skills in the group, and then just trying to get along well with everyone. Experience tells us that is rarely the case; people don’t come in perfect packages just waiting to be opened. Everyone in education and youth service has talents and experience that can be added to the mix to help students. When we bring those together with our human traits, the mix may resemble a box of puzzle pieces more than a complete picture.

The chapters in this Guidebook identify a number of task and maintenance problems and offers a variety of strategies to move beyond the problems into sustainable practices.

3. Set, monitor, evaluate referral goals.

Referral goals focus on the individual interventions being implemented at the indicated service level. The SAP wants and needs to determine whether the interventions being implemented are achieving the hoped-for outcomes. Progress monitoring is the most commonly used term to describe this process. Because the SAP is working with youth who are in the formative stages of life, it is unethical for the SAP or any other intervention process to implement interventions without monitoring the impact of those interventions. We must not only look at whether the intervention is successful, we must also examine whether any harmful unanticipated impacts are happening.

4. Set, monitor, evaluate program goals.

Program goals focus on all three tiers of SAP services and includes team maintenance. Every service in the SAP framework should be designed around a goal. A Student Assistance coordinator, for example, does not create program communication pieces at random. That coordinator knows the intent of any program communication piece, and whether or not that intent (goal) has been accomplished. A starting point, then, must be to set goals annually for every service in the SAP framework.

The SAP would naturally want to set a goal for the number of students with whom to work during the school year. That goal is based upon previous experience with the population, an anticipation of need, and an understanding of the SAP’s capacity to handle the set number. The SA coordinator would also set goals around educational support groups including numbers participating, numbers attending and successfully completing educational support group sessions at certain percentages such as attending 80% of the sessions in their entirety.

Monitoring program services in relationship to goals involves setting benchmarks to be examined at specified intervals. We naturally do that with curriculum for the same reasons we identify and examine benchmarks with SAP services. Benchmarks answer the questions, “Are we doing this the way we said we would do this?” and, “Are we making a difference?”

Evaluation encompasses looking at progress over time in terms of end results. Whether formative or summative evaluation is being conducted, the intent is reviewing what and how about both program services and governance to understand how all the pieces fit together in accomplishing the goals.

Additional information will be offered in the following chapters to help with all four pieces of the sustainability model. Examples, tools, and resources will assist SAPs in capacity development that can lead to sustainable SAP services.

Chapter 3: The SAP Team Process and SAP Coordinator Role

School-level intervention teams emerged in the 1970s. Student Assistance as a team process was part of those emerging intervention systems. The Student Assistance team process through the years has been an important piece of Illinois schools. Experience has shown that SAP teams in Illinois tackle the typical challenges that SAP teams encounter around the country.

Student Assistance teams implement the standard problem-solving process for nonacademic barriers leaving academic concerns to the response to intervention (MTSS) process which also utilizes the standard problem-solving process. Both the problems and outcomes differ for Student Assistance referrals in relationship to curriculum and instructional practices offered through response to intervention. Although the challenges and solutions for problem-solving teams offered in this guide may also apply to multi-tiered systems of support problem-solving teams, the paradigm through which these challenges are discussed focuses on Student Assistance problem-solving teams.

Student Assistance coordinators face a number of the same challenges as Student Assistance teams. Strategies suggested for challenges may be applied for both the coordinator and the Student Assistance problem-solving team. Several challenges are particular to team dynamics and processes, however.

The role of the Student Assistance team is routine, structured problem solving. SA teams may also offer Selective services in the form of educational support groups. SA teams have typically not focused on prevention efforts in Illinois. Although the Student Assistance coordinator also employs routine, structured problem solving processes, Universal level prevention strategies often receive a stronger focus. Additional challenges are faced in those processes as well, and are included in this guide.

Combined roles of Student Assistance coordinator and a Student Assistance team exist in some schools. This combination offers distinct advantages, distinct challenges, and distinct opportunities, which will also be addressed in the following chapters.

Chapter 4: Student Assistance Challenges and Strategies

Administrative Support

Administrative support appears repeatedly in literature as a key issue in success of any problem-solving team including SAPs. Student Assistance coordinators and teams have consistently reported that administrative support is crucial to maintaining effective SAP services. Administrative support is one of the evidence-based best practices, and is crucial in gaining building-wide consensus in dealing with academic barriers to learning.

Administrative support ranges on a continuum from passive support to SAP champion.

Passive support with the building administrator

- Understands the basics of the model, and has given permission for the team to meet before school, after school or during planning time.
- Agrees to the distribution of SAP informational materials.
- Gives the SAP coordinator or SAP team representative a brief period of time to talk about Student Assistance services at a staff meeting.
- Realizes the SAP can be helpful to students and families.
- Agrees to let a few staff members attend training in order to train the rest of the team.

Active support with the building administrator

- Attends most SAP team meetings. When unable to attend, another administrator sits in for the regular administrator.
- Understands the connection between SAP services and increased school attendance and reduced behavior problems.
- Understands the need for and approves of basic-level training as well as additional professional development that builds intervention skills.
- Agrees to schedule changes for team members to allow for common planning times for team meetings.
- Offers stipends to team members when meeting before or after school.
- Includes SAP data in reports to central administrators.

- Arranges for the SAP team to attend training together as a team.
- Arranges for the SAP coordinator to attend youth service networking events, meet with local youth service providers periodically, and advocate for community services offered at the school.

SAP administrative champion as the building administrator

- Has a deep personal concern for the success of all students, and sees the SAP role as vital in improving student success. Understands the impact of trauma and other nonacademic barriers in educational success.
- Attends all meetings or has another administrator attend the meeting.
- Debriefs with the SAP coordinator or SAP team leader weekly.
- Proactively looks for opportunities to promote SAP services to central administration, the local school board of education, and school staff.
- Assumes a stance of being a driving force in promoting and supporting the SAP.
- Includes the Student Assistance coordinator or SAP team member as a vital component in planning teams to improve the school.
- Includes the SAP coordinator or a SAP team representative in school policy review and revision meetings.
- Includes the SAP coordinator or a SAP team representative in all crisis team trainings and planning sessions.
- Approves release time for direct student services.

Tips for Building Administrative Support

Clearly explain the Student Assistance Program's role in helping the administrator achieve the school's mission including how SAP addresses barriers that keep students from paying attention, improving school attendance, improving academic performance by addressing barriers, and reducing lost instructional time due to behavioral problems.

Demonstrate with data the role SAP plays in improving attendance and academic achievement while reducing behavior problems.

Communicate that Student Assistance is an evidence-based program (NREPP) and implements evidence-based and evidence-informed strategies.

Keep messages to administrators clear and concise. Use data as often as possible when advocating SAP needs.

Use data to demonstrate the SAP's strategies in gaining family involvement with the school especially in often disenfranchised families.

Give examples of how SAP builds bonding between students with nonacademic barriers and the school which has been shown to increase attendance and improve academics.

Use specific examples that explain how the SAP builds bridges between the school and community services and organizations.

Keep the administrative role on the team reasonable given the significant responsibilities administrators already have.

Encourage administrators to attend weekly SAP meetings.

Ask students involved in SAP prevention activities to meet with administrators to explain the importance from the student perspective about being involved with SAP work.

In presenting a problem, always have possible solutions to present with the problem. When making a request to an administrator, don't just explain the problem. Go into that meeting with a clearly defined problem and several possible solutions.

Use good listening skills when meeting with administrators. Ask questions when you don't understand. Be attentive to nonverbal communication along with the verbal communication.

Keep Student Assistance services on the administrator's radar. Communicate often with building administrators when the administrator does not attend a team meeting.

Hold a debriefing meeting with the administrator as soon as possible after a team meeting in which the administrator does not attend or is not represented.

Prove the value of Student Assistance. At least quarterly give the administrator a brief data synopsis of how many cases are active, how many students have improved, and examples of what that improvement looks like.

Understand that if you don't ask for what you need, the chances of getting what your SAP needs are very low.

See the Administrative Guide and Quick Tips at <https://www.prevention.org/Resources/bbe6b6bc-723b-4830-bdcf-45b0a68fe339/SACAdministrativeGuide.pdf>

Student Assistance Program Team Leadership

Effective team leaders show courage, commitment, communication, passion for the work, a vision that can't be accomplished without the team, good judgement, emotional intelligence, good organization, integrity and perseverance. Regardless of how lengthy the list appears, these are traits already found in most educators.

Team leaders understand that their role is to guide the team toward high levels of team performance rather than micromanaging every detail.

What SAP team leadership is not:

- Managing a small group of individual achievements.
- Taking on roles no one else will take.
- The only or the final decision-maker.
- A blamer.
- Power.

What SAP team leadership can be:

- Facilitator of the overall purpose of the SAP.
- Facilitator of group decision-making.
- Negotiator with administration to assist the team in getting what it needs.
- Communicator with other service groups in the school.
- Encourager to staff and team members that the team together will succeed in helping students become more successful.
- Promoter of the value of SAP services to students, staff and families.
- Confidence builder in the meaningful work being done by the SAP and the team members.
- Task-master for keeping the work focused on what is necessary and not just what is interesting.
- Promoting team problem-solving, decision-making, and team communication over individual actions.
- Opportunity creator for team members to strengthen knowledge and skills.
- Delegator.

Responsibilities:

- Create an agenda for every meeting. Connect with case managers to determine which cases should be up for new data and problem solving.
- Start every meeting on time, and follow the agenda.
- Facilitate or delegate facilitation of the team meeting to keep team members focused, balanced in discussion, and moving through the agenda.
- Facilitate balanced communication among team members.
- Meet with the appropriate administrator after every meeting in which the administrator is not in attendance to debrief what happened in the meeting.
- Maintain or delegate a team member to maintain time allocations during the meeting.
- Ensure all roles are fulfilled during the meeting.
- Help team members use good problem-solving skills.
- Talk with any team member who is not functioning as a team member.
- Advocate with administration for professional development, additional time or compensation, and other needs of the team to accomplish their purpose.
- Meet periodically with other service teams in the building to maintain on-going dialogue about how to work together more effectively.
- Assist the team to use best practices in problem-solving.
- Create a culture of respect within the team and others in the building around how students, staff and families are treated.
- Cultivate positive relationships among team members.
- Ensure that data is consistently used and maintained appropriately.
- Participate in selecting new members for the team.
- Work with new members to get them up to date, trained, and ready to function with the team.
- Facilitate with other team members on-going SAP information distribution and marketing to staff, students, and parents.
- Conduct or delegate periodic formative assessment of the SAP's services to ensure activities are being conducted as determined in goals and objectives.
- Conduct or delegate summative assessment at the end of the school year to inform decisions about the next year's services.
- Facilitate annual discussion of protocols and norms for the following year.

Student Assistance Program Team Membership

Forming a Student Assistance team is not enough; it is instead a beginning. Teams have proven nationwide to be helpful in addressing student nonacademic issues. The essence of the SAP team is that well-assembled teams do more effective work in helping students be successful. More effective teams are intentional about who should be on that team along with how team members function together. The role an individual serves within the school, the individual's approach toward working with students, and the individual's approach to working with other adults in the building should be considered when looking at team membership.

The diverse team becomes a vehicle for allowing SAP work to more effectively happen. Students are not their issues; they are unique individuals that must be approached as more than issues. Broad diversity in team membership allows more effective SAP reach and help to the unique students that comprise the school. Diversity brings together the collective wisdom and experiences of professionals who examine issues and consider options from different lenses. SAPs that learn to appreciate the diversity in other professional's thinking strategies experience richer opportunities for building student success.

SAP team composition includes grade level and subject matter classroom teachers, an administrator, school counselor or social worker, a school health professional, a school psychologist as well as specialists in the building. The typical team size ranges between 6 and 10 people depending on the size of the student population. As a team grows larger than 10, team members may consider forming two smaller teams which allows for even greater access to help for students.

Terms of membership on the SAP team vary. Fixed roles such as the school counselor and administrator would not rotate off the team. Rotating roles including classroom teachers and specialists (when a specialty can be represented by another individual) may have more flexible terms. Guidelines for length of term have not been included in best practices literature. Experience has shown that team members serve longer than one school year, and it is not unusual for team members to serve multiple years.

Best practices include SAP team members being trained in evidence-based Student Assistance practices including the core team problem-solving model. Student Assistance teams function more effectively when they have received specialized Student Assistance entry-level training. New members added to teams following the initial training should also receive entry-level training.

Additional training in at-risk topics such as Mental Health First Aid along with other mental health related topics, substance abuse impacts and related information, gang impacts, sex trafficking, grief issues, self-injury and disordered eating, along with aggression and other important topics should be considered. The more SAP team members understand about issues impacting safety, survival, belonging and power, the better prepared team members will be to effectively address those issues. Empowerment and intervention topics including the 40 Developmental Assets, Positive Youth Development, and risk and protective factors are important in taking a strengths-based approach to working with students impacted by nonacademic barriers.

Formal Procedures and Decision-Making Processes

Student Assistance best practices include formal procedures and decision-making processes. Given that most SAP team members have functioned on numerous teams, the reasons behind this best practice are obvious. Educators just don't have time to waste, especially on ineffective processes. Literature notes that lack of continuity with problem-solving teams is significant in program success. Studies have long confirmed the value to teams when formal procedures are in place. Literature often uses the term 'protocols.' Whether using that term, or procedures or guidelines, the concept is the same.

Formal protocols are written descriptions of how processes are handled, and help keep teams out of unhealthy habits as well as curb power seeking by team members. They also empower team members and provide principles for understanding how the team is functioning.

What formal procedures should the SAP have in place?

- All meeting details including where, when, and how long each meeting will occur
- Each fixed and rotating role within the team along with role descriptions
- File opening and closing processes
- Record management for active SAP files and closed SAP files
- Parent involvement and notification processes
- Form usage
- Data usage
- Electronic communications
- Referral and identification processes
- Progress monitoring processes
- Year-end closing processes
- Confidentiality guidelines
- Working with other service groups in the school
- Linkage agreements with community service providers
- Identifying and preparing new team members
- Communication with referring staff and other case-involved staff
- Communication with community service providers
- Choosing team leaders along with length of service
- How and when staff development training is chosen and delivered
- Co-participation on other school teams such as a MTSS team
- Report writing and distribution
- Handling complaints from administration, staff, parents, and students

Formal Decision-Making Processes

The decisions made by the SAP can significantly impact a student's life. The quality of decisions being made can be significantly impacted by the quality of the decision-making process. Logically, the SAP that invests in creating effective decision-making processes would potentially impact students in more positive ways.

Individual decision-making is a process of determining a course of action for the individual. Team decision-making is a process of selecting one from a number of possible alternatives. Ineffective small decision processes waste large amounts of time and efforts. Ineffective large decision processes can kill valuable opportunities.

Quality decision making enhances team unity, as well as strengthens the sense of purpose for team members. Quality decision making also enhances members' appreciation for each other in doing the important work handled by the SAP team.

With all of these dynamics in mind, the SAP would do well to establish formal protocols for handling decision-making factors and processes.

Factors that impact SAP decision-making protocols include:

- Team environment for making decisions
- Methodology for making decisions
- Tools used to help make decisions

Team Environment

Team members need to:

- Feel heard and valued when conflict arises.
- Believe what they have to offer in discussion for a decision will be valued.
- Have time allotted for expressing opinions.
- Believe that they have the right to be heard.
- Have a listening environment with respect and interest to all opinions.
- Be assured everyone's opinion is valued equally.
- Be free to question another team member's perceptions and assumptions.

Methodology

- Set the expectation that all team members are responsible for the decisions made by the team.
- Establish routine decisions – those made often – deserve more work to establish effective methods.
- Establish special incident protocols.
- Define a methodology that sets consistent steps and processes for making decisions and working with conflict.
- Work toward decisions using consensus rather than majority rules.

Key steps to include in methodology include:

- Identifying the key concern
- Setting a goal for intervention
- Evaluating potential interventions to address the concern
- Developing consensus on which intervention to implement
- Establishing who will carry out the intervention when
- Identifying progress monitoring details

Tools to Help Make Decisions (prevention.org – Professional Resources – SAC)

- Student Assistance Team Functional Analysis
- Student Concern Prioritization
- Problem-Solving Team Best Practices Protocol
- Integrating a Solution-Focused Model into SAP

Helpful Questions in Identifying Consensus

- What information and questions do we need to clarify in order to agree?
- What part of the solution do you oppose?
- What would it take for you to set aside your opposition?
- What would be necessary for you to be willing to live with this solution for a while?
- Under what conditions would you be willing to put aside your objections to the solution?
- What part of the solution would you want to modify before you accept it?

When Not to Use Consensus in Decision-Making

- When deep divisions exist in the team and team functioning has broken down
- When the issues are trivial
- When the issue is an emergency
- When the team has insufficient data about the issue

When Consensus Can't Be Reached

- Determine what parts of the proposed solution are objectionable.
- Identify what all team members can live with for a brief period of time.
- Change the proposed solution to reflect both of the above.
- Move forward with the decision even though it may not be ideal with the understanding it can be revisited soon.

Student Assistance Program Roles and Responsibilities

Maintaining clearly defined and implemented roles on the team maximizes time and efforts. Rotating roles change from meeting to meeting, help to prevent stagnation, and may grow new skills. Static roles function best when fixed because the consistency of responsibility improves operation. Role clarification allows for more responsible functioning and efficiency. Roles, along with the functions of those roles, should be clearly described as part of the team's working protocols.

Team Roles:

Team Leader:

- Should be a static role
- Term of leadership can vary; typically, not less than the school year
- Oversees the functions of the SAP team
- See Student Assistance Program Team Leadership for more information on this role.

Meeting Facilitator:

- Facilitates team meetings
- May be incorporated into team leader responsibilities
- Does not need to be a fixed role; may rotate among team members
- Guides the team through the agenda

Case Manager / Facilitator:

- Assigned when a student is identified as appropriate for SAP services
- Responsible for managing documentation and data
- Presents student of concern data at the team meeting
- May conduct student and parent interviews
- May implement interventions with student*

Recorder:

- Records basic meeting notes primarily focusing on key discussion points for student cases discussed including interventions, responsibilities and time schedules.
- May be a rotating role.

Record Keeper:

- Maintains SAP files.
- Records data in the student file during the problem-solving meeting.
- Maintains log of all files with case numbers for the year.
- More effective as a fixed role for a school year.

Time Manager:

- Watches time allotments during the problem-solving meeting and alerts team when allotment is reached.
- May be a rotating role.

Communications:

- Handles communication not designated with the team leader's role.
- Typically focuses on group communication to school personnel, students and parents such as program marketing information.
- Is more effective as a fixed role for a school year to create consistency in messages

*Interventions are implemented by the team member that makes the most sense for each student case, or may be designated to one team member (such as a health professional or school counselor). Interventions are for nonacademic barriers and may never involve classroom teachers.

Specialized Roles Within the Student Assistance Program

The diversity represented within a Student Assistance team includes integrating specialized service roles that add value to SAP services. The following roles should be considered as a natural part of Student Assistance services.

School counselor

Student Assistance coordinators often have a school counselor background which brings a broad understanding as well as specialized skills in working with nonacademic learning barriers. School counselors:

- Have a broader understanding of working with the student through the whole-child lens.
- Have additional training in mental health issues, and will be valuable in understanding student issues, seeking appropriate interventions, and helping with professional development in identifying students appropriate for SAP referral.

- Have specialized training in implementing more difficult interventions.
- Typically develop relationships with community mental health and substance use providers.
- Have more specialized training in identifying child abuse and neglect issues

School Social Worker

School social workers, like school counselors, have specialized training in working with nonacademic barriers to learning, and can often pinpoint nonacademic issues helping the SAP to hone in on the problems of concern. School social workers:

- Have a broad range of intervention options for nonacademic barriers.
- Have specialized training in talking with students experiencing nonacademic barriers especially in relationship issues.
- Have additional understanding about how to ask questions and respond in ways that help students feel heard and understood.

School Health Professional

The school health professional represents greater expertise in understanding how physical issues play a role in nonacademic barriers to learn. The school health professional looks at student problems from the lens of how a student's physical condition, including medications, can impact school success. The school health professional:

- Has often received specialized training in asking students health-related questions.
- Understands a variety of health-related interventions that will enhance the SAP's ability to choose a broader range of possible interventions.

Each of these specialized roles broaden the SAP's ability to identify concerns and create effective interventions. Although some schools use these specialized roles as consultants for student support, their steady presence allows less opportunity for student issues to be missed, and secures more opportunity to understand how to consistently work with the whole child.

Community Liaison

School districts have begun to focus more on interconnection and involvement with community members as more and more research confirms the benefits. The role of community liaison in districts and larger schools is emerging as an important role within the school to forge relationships that previously were unexplored. This role should be represented on the SAP team to provide expanded knowledge of community services available to students and families.

Tips for Effective Meetings

- Start on time – always!!
- Use an agenda for each meeting.
- Be consistent with how meetings are conducted. Teams function better with predictability.
- State the goals for the meeting at the beginning.
- Walk into each meeting prepared to begin work.
- Maintain a clear sense of purpose and responsibility during every meeting.
- Quickly fill roles needed for the meeting.
- Keep a consistent meeting log for each meeting. Use bulleted notes to record issues discussed with the strategies to be implemented. Avoid writing paragraph narratives.
- Follow your protocols established by the team for keeping the meeting on task.
- Use a time keeper to keep the team on task.
- Stay on task.
- Ask one team member to be the task manager for the meeting to redirect the team when the discussion moves in a direction other than the specific task at hand.
- End each meeting by stating the next meeting date and time; briefly summarize any agenda items known for that meeting.

For more information, download the PDF entitled “Team Effectiveness Qualities” (prevention.org – Professional Resources – SAP)

SAP Entry Level Training

Both Student Assistance best practices literature and problem-solving team literature in general state that an evidence-based principle to ensure effectiveness of operation is to acquire entry-level SAP training for educators and other school helping professionals who will function as the core of the process.

What is entry-level Student Assistance training?

This professional training experience focuses on understanding how nonacademic barriers to learning impact significant numbers of students. The training then moves into the four primary steps of the model including theory and application. Training should be provided by individuals with multiple years' of experience working in the Student Assistance field who have also had formal training in designing and delivering quality professional development.

Why is entry-level SAP training valuable?

Parents and community members want the best possible educators in the building. That can't happen without effective professional development. Administrative leaders have the responsibility of ensuring sufficient professional development can occur in order for the best possible educators to be available.

Entry level Student Assistance training engages a team of educators in focusing on nonacademic needs of students as well as the process and strategies to address those needs in the most effective methods possible. Student Assistance teams and coordinators learn and apply through problem solving together in each aspect of entry-level training concepts.

Entry level training for all SAP team members sets the team on the right path to implementing the model with fidelity. The benefits to students, families, staff, administration and the community far outweigh the inconvenience of scheduling time for training.

The role of educating has become increasingly complex for the current generation of students. Life needs, although not new, are coming to the forefront as major factors in school success. Educators must be prepared to meet those needs, and there is little time spent in pre-service training that equips educators to do just that.

What is the Difference in Training a Team Versus Training One Staff Member Who Is Then Expected to Train Other Staff Members to Form a Team?

Rarely does a school send just one staff member to entry level training expecting that person to train others in the building to become the team. Although it is rare, this perspective does exist.

The enthusiasm and commitment with which an administrator approaches entry level training is a reflection of how both the training and the work the team will be doing is valued.

A team that attends training together has the greatest chance of functioning as an actual team. The team learns how to function as a team correctly using the Student Assistance process. The fundamental concepts that make the model more effective are more completely understood by team members because all team members have heard the same dialogue including questions and answers posed during the training time.

Relevance increases when team members have the opportunity to assess and discuss both the content and application of concepts when they attend training as a whole team. Team members are able to discuss important concepts to answer questions such as, “How do we see this concept working for us?” More effective implementation occurs with the variety of perspectives represented.

A team member who attends training without the remainder of the team faces potential isolation in the training as well as upon return to train others. Training applications are intended to be approached as a team application. Without the other team members, the individual attendee does not experience the learning application in the same manner. A single staff member attending a training without the other team members may be looked upon as the expert who will then carry more ‘power’ than the others.

A team that attends training as a whole will develop their own team dynamic with a more evenly distributed power base. Teams attending training together develop ownership of implementation and ongoing learning in order to begin implementation and improve SAP services over time.

Coaching and mentoring of newer team members who have received entry-level training is very appropriate and helpful.

Who should go through entry level Student Assistance training?

All team members including administrators should participate in entry-level SAP training. Team composition should include grade level or subject matter diversity, administrators, support staff including school counselors and social workers, health professionals and other specialized personnel that work with students in the school. A variety of perspectives must be valued in formulating the team.

Over time, team membership changes and new team members are added. It is unreasonable to expect new members to gain the knowledge and motivation for implementing SAP without receiving training. Just ‘picking up what you’re supposed to do by sitting in team meetings’ is about as appropriate as learning to be an effective educator by simply sitting in a classroom and observing another teacher.

SAP Team Maintenance and Program Improvement Processes

Student Assistance is a youth-centered service. It is an ethical responsibility of every adult in the school to see that no harm is done through the school. The SAP team maintenance and improvement process is part of overall school practices to ensure that what is offered through the SAP is effective.

Evidence-based practice for Student Assistance Programs has identified SAP team maintenance and program improvement processes as a best practice. Attending entry-level Student Assistance Program training is a beginning. People, systems, and trends change; the SAP must assess practices as a part of its operations to stay current and effective. When the SAP team is initially trained, some may think the hard work is done. Just as we perform periodical maintenance on a car to keep it running, the team should be doing periodical maintenance to keep the team running smoothly.

Most teams develop an operating rhythm, and team members often think that operating rhythm will carry them through year after year without checkups or reflection. That approach creates negligence over time leading to less than optimal performance. Less performance results in fewer students getting the help they deserve. The term **team maintenance** is basically the upkeep of the team and the processes used by the team. The term **program improvement** processes is self-explanatory. The essence of these practices is an under-the-hood look at how the team functions, and whether changes need to happen in order to improve those functions.

Progressive-thinking leaders promote team maintenance and use improvement mechanisms at least annually. More benefit is gained when teams approach maintenance twice yearly. Team maintenance involves team work – dynamics of the team's practices of working together, and task work – how the team accomplishes the tasks that support its mission.

Team maintenance considers how the team functions together, how team members function individually when working with students, and whether or not overall practices are accomplishing what the team intends to accomplish.

Team maintenance meetings can be composed of using a series of questions that challenge team members to examine their practices, and realign practices not serving their objectives.

There are several questions SAP teams can use to help examine practices.

- What is our mission, and does it still serve the work we want to do?
- What individual characteristics and practices impact how we do the work that helps us to accomplish our mission?
- What collective characteristics and practices impact how we do the work that helps us to accomplish our mission?
- What actions do we need to take individually to change our effectiveness as a team?
- What actions do we need to take collectively to change our effectiveness as a team?
- What are we doing that we don't need to do?

Areas to examine during maintenance meetings include:

- Participation
- Communication – both verbal and nonverbal
- Attitudes and climate
- Power struggles
- Team norms
- Motivation

Areas to examine during task work analysis may include:

- Individual task completion practices
- Team task completion practices
- Following best practices in problem solving
- Following practices the team established when first forming
- Trends that may change task practices (technology, scheduling, etc,)

Prevention First offers valuable resources for looking at team practices and task practices. These resources can be found at prevention.org, Resources, Student Assistance Center. Resources include a variety of assessment tools and helpful articles.

- SAP Best Practices Formative Assessment Tool
- Student Assistance Program Levels of Development Guide
- The Levels of Development Assessment Tool
- Problem Solving Team Best Practices Protocol
- Student Assistance Team Functional Analysis
- Student Assistance Core Team Assessment Tool

Student Assistance Program Documentation

Documentation processes should be finalized with school administration prior to implementing. Active rather than passive approval for documentation practices should be sought.

Several types of documentation can be helpful.

Team Log:

Information is entered into a central electronic or paper log recording key discussion points, decisions, and actions by the team. The team log should be used for each team meeting.

Information is typically recorded in brief statements rather than narratives. This log may be subject for review by administrative personnel or others outside the school with approval. Therefore, team members may not want to record first and last names of students discussed in team meetings. This is particularly applicable to any student identified as receiving mental health or substance use services inside the school or in the community. Other information protected by HIPPA regulations must be protected in the team log as well.

Student Case Files

Data, decisions, interventions, and progress monitoring information is typically contained within the student case file. As with the team log, information is recorded in brief statements. Teams must use carefully determined practices that protect federal confidential and protected health information.

File Maintenance Procedures

As with documentation practices, file maintenance procedures should be approved by school administration prior to implementation. These procedures allow the SAP to systematically approach an important part of service delivery.

- File maintenance should be a priority taken as a serious responsibility.
- Regardless of the procedures established, students should never have access to student case files; this includes student workers who assist with school files.
- Files should contain data with basic notes on key discussions, interventions, and progress monitoring data.
- Individual completed forms may or may not be stored in the file determined by administrative preference.
- Files should be stored in secure locations with access limited to approved individuals.
- Files may be divided into active and inactive cases. Inactive cases include students that no longer need SAP services and students who have transferred to other districts.
- Inactive cases may be reactivated when students need additional help or transfer back into the school district.

Year-End File Closing

Some students experience especially difficult summer months starting the new school year agitated, undisciplined, traumatized, or unmotivated. The SAP may want to develop a list during spring file closing of students they already know will have a difficult summer. The list will allow the SAP to start monitoring those students at the beginning of school. This does not mean the student's case file is not closed in the spring, or that it is automatically reopened when the new school year begins. These students are monitored enabling the case file to be reopened quickly if needed rather than waiting for a staff member to make a referral.

All SAP case files should be closed before the end of the school year.

The status of a case at the time of closing should be noted in the file.

If the SAP believes a student would benefit from SAP monitoring at the beginning of the school year, the student's name can be placed on the monitoring list.

All SAP files should either be locked in a cabinet for the summer or sealed in a box and placed in a protected location.

The Issue of Time

The Jefferson Middle School meets on Wednesdays after school. Jerry comes to the meeting and waits for the others to arrive. Maddy arrives stating, "Oh, nobody's here yet; I'll be right back," while she turns and strides out the door. Steve arrives, and seeing only Jerry, pivots around saying, "I'll be back in a few." As Eva walks in, she follows the ongoing theme. The meeting finally begins 15 minutes after the scheduled starting time. Patient and frustrated, Jerry has been waiting for everyone else to take their place at the table and get serious about the work.

The school name is fictitious; the example is real from a Student Assistance team complaining about not having enough time to get everything done. Their perception that there wasn't enough time was right. Their practices stole valuable minutes from their purpose. Be efficient with the time you have; use efficient practices and procedures in team meetings.

- Good time usage in team meetings builds momentum, creates satisfaction, and gets the work done.
- Literature shows that most teams meet weekly. Experience has shown that most teams meet for about 45 minutes.
- Teams most often meet before or after school.
- Teams are often given a common time to meet during the week. Ask for what you need for getting common planning times. You don't get what you don't ask for.
- Consider separating into two smaller teams that meet at different times and meet together once per month.
- Start exactly on time whether everyone is there or not.
- Follow the agenda.
- Establish a norm that all team members are to come to meetings prepared.
- Use an established protocol for reviewing data so that all data can be reported in five minutes or less.
- Stay focused on each part of the process in discussion rather than jumping around the process steps.

Student Assistance Program Buy-In and Support

Staff responsible for delivering SAP services to students and families just want to build the SAP so that others will want to use it to help students. Educators who are student focused and not just curriculum focused want to buy in to efforts that work, such as SAP. The Student Assistance Coordinator and Student Assistance team will want to communicate the importance of helping students with nonacademic barriers to learning along with spelling out the role that school personnel have in working alongside the SAP.

What is the concept of programmatic buy in?

Programmatic buy-in means programmatic commitment. That commitment ranges on a continuum, and doesn't look the same with every individual. No matter how it looks, the bottom line is whether an individual will use the services to help students in need. At the higher end of the continuum is ownership, which would include embracing and advocating. Not everyone will respond at that level. Commitment means understanding that every student deserves help for nonacademic barriers to learning, and every adult in the building is a conduit for getting help when connecting to Student Assistance services.

Programmatic / SAP buy-in rests in belief systems; and when you want to gain or increase buy-in, you need to address some commonly held beliefs. Buy-in is not a matter of word-smithing; it is a matter of understanding. Cutting through the blocks of negativity or just ambivalence will be key to gaining buy-in.

Belief One

School staff embrace what they believe is important. Offering school staff the 'how to' for SAP without offering the value-added of helping students with nonacademic barriers to learning leaves a hollow feel to the importance of the work. Foundational information for buy-in must include ground-level information on trauma such as the Adverse Childhood Experiences study. Educators are frustrated when students don't pay attention, complete classwork or withdraw emotionally when they are in school. The ACE's study and accompanying information clarifies causes that are out of the educator's control. Anxiety indicators are also considered foundational information. School staff who have not experienced mental health issues in their own families will benefit from learning about the more common issues.

Most educators from elementary through high school have experienced, through extended family or friends, the destructive family dynamics of substance abuse and its impacts on students. Enabling patterns leave everyone frustrated. SAP program awareness helps these educators learn new ways of coping and seeing the crucial role of professional help.

Most educators can benefit from additional training on nonacademic barriers to learning, and are often receptive to helping students with those life issues. When SAP team members and coordinators approach buy-in with the attitude that adults in the building want to help, moving toward strategies to increase buy-in will happen more readily.

Belief Two

School staff buy into what they believe they can do without adding hours upon hours to what they are already doing. The SAP must have clear understanding about the roles and actions of others in the building. Want teachers to make referrals to the SAP when they identify a need? Train them to make a referral in the most efficient way possible. Designing the intervention referral process should accommodate an efficient process for making referrals.

Consider a five-minute rule. If the paperwork can't be completed in five minutes, tailor it to fit a five-minute time point.

Make referrals electronic or verbal friendly. School staff should not need to click through four different links to get to a referral form. Help school staff understand that they can walk into a team member's office or classroom to make a verbal referral.

Belief Three

School staff buy into what they believe will be around for a while, with this as not just another initiative here this year and gone next year.

Administrative commitment demonstrated through advocacy with school staff is a strong starting place to overcome initiative fatigue.

Personal one-to-one conversations between colleagues helps uncover resistance and builds personal support for using the SAP.

Download the "Key Stakeholder Interviews Need Fulfillment Framework" in the New Tools 2016 section (prevention.org – Professional Resources – SAC).

What does buy in look like with staff, students, families, and community members?

- The indicators for buy in with Student Assistance are similar to other school initiatives.
- Staff are identifying students, and making referrals
- Staff provide data about individual students in a timely manner when requested
- Staff follow through with implementing interventions that are classroom related
- Staff talk with parents about the SAP when dealing with problems
- Administrators promote using the SAP in staff meetings
- Administrators attend SAP meetings
- Administrators are intentional about getting the SAP team what it needs to function well
- Administrators talk with parents about the SAP when dealing with problems
- Administrators want to share aggregate data with the district board of education
- Students seek SAP help for themselves and friends
- Parents understand the purpose of Student Assistance when contacted

What is the difference between program awareness and SAP staff development?

Both program awareness and staff development are necessary to impact staff usage of the Student Assistance Program.

Program Awareness

Information shared specifically about how to use the Student Assistance Program, information about the purpose of SAP, and aggregate information about results of SAP interventions fall in the category of program awareness. Information may be shared formally or informally through a variety of channels in the school.

A Formula for SAP Program Awareness

A simple formula can help SAP teams target Student Assistance Program awareness efforts. The intent of these efforts is clear: When staff know how to use SAP services along with the benefits of getting students help for social emotional issues, students benefit. When staff don't use the SAP, students lose the opportunity for the help they need.

The formula contains three primary questions.

1. Who are our SAP clients?
2. What do they need to know to use the SAP?
3. How are we going to communicate that information?

Who are our SAP clients?

Use another question to arrive at the answer. Who benefits from SAP services? Think first about who internally benefits and then who externally benefits.

What do our clients need to know to use the SAP?

For each client, specific information is needed in understanding how to use the SAP. What is communicated to students will be different than what is communicated to staff, which is different than what is communicated to administrators. Individuals outside the school will get even different information from those inside the school.

How will we communicate what clients need to know?

The channels of communication must be well thought through so that individuals understand what is needed without information overload. Most people rarely read long pieces of information.

Wisdom rests in examining how technology can help fill need.

A single channel used exclusively may succumb to over familiarity.

Staff Development

Staff development goals in relation to Student Assistance Programs focus upon an increase in knowledge and skills that support the SAPs' efforts in improving both the learning environment and services to students. Within that goal is the understanding that it is everyone's responsibility to identify students and document needed information appropriately. Strong staff development from the Student Assistance perspective means equipping staff members to do just that.

Information shared about topics connected to nonacademic barriers to learning fall under staff development. Topics may include indicators for a number of barriers including:

- Gender identity
- Depression and anxiety
- Bullying
- Self-injury and disordered eating
- Homelessness
- Abuse and neglect
- Military family connectedness
- Relationship aggression
- Sex trafficking

Information is designed to increase the knowledge base of professionals in the building in identifying students, how to and not to talk to students, enabling behaviors, information sharing and respect, as well as when to seek help.

Look for information and materials under Newly Trained Team Resources on the Prevention First website. (prevention.org – Professional Resources – SAC)

Evidence-based problem-solving has been part of health, education, and social problem solving for many years, and is not new to response to intervention or multi-tiered systems of support. Student Assistance coordinators, SAP teams, and other problem-solving teams progress through a series of steps that are segmented into activities occurring within and outside the problem-solving team meeting.

Evidence-based protocols exist that guide the process so that maximum outcomes can be achieved. It is in reality a circular rather than linear process. Progressing through the steps initially often reveals the need for new data, new interventions and consistent progress monitoring. Following the evidence-based protocols allow the potential for the very best outcomes.

Most educators are quite familiar with the steps in problem-solving. Research findings support what many people have experienced: we don't always follow the sequential steps. The following three steps summarize the primary evidence-based practices. For more detailed information, see *Problem-Solving Team Best Practices Protocol* at <https://www.prevention.org/Resources/d8679e8f-146c-4a65-8d54-779283c46b2f/BestPracticesProtocolProblemSolvingTeams.pdf>. This document offers more detailed information including benchmarks that help SAPs assess how they are following the steps.

Students needing intensive SAP interventions don't have to progress through tiers one and two in order to get the needed help which distinguishes SAP from other services. SAP services are delivered at the point of need, and for some students experiencing trauma, a need may be immanent. The core of SAP services rests in individualized interventions at the point of need. A student experiencing gender issues, bullying, or school anxiety doesn't have to go through tiers one and two in order to get the level of help needed. The intent is to offer focused, effective interventions in a timely manner regardless of tiers.

Student Assistance does not offer one size fits all interventions. SAP doesn't employ a list of evidence-based interventions that appear to meet the student's need. The steps of the problem-solving process guide the SAP through an evidence-based protocol that allows tailoring interventions and services directed at specific need. Once a student is identified as appropriate for SAP services, the steps begin.

Confidentiality is essential when working with students. Federal confidentiality regulations must be adhered to in all SAP work. Therefore, it becomes the SAP coordinator and SAP team's responsibility to learn and observe these regulations. Confidentiality also means respecting a student's and family's privacy when dealing with sensitive issues.

Students should understand when information discussed in the student interview will be shared with the SAP team or other team. Students have the right to request certain information not be shared. Responsible helpers need to understand guidelines about the necessity of sharing harming behavior with appropriate people.

If sensitive information gained in the parent interview will be shared with the team, the parent needs to understand that and have the same rights as the student to refuse that sharing.

Respectful actions include keeping SAP data within the SAP team and sharing only with those in a need to know situation.

Chapter 5: Student Assistance Problem-Solving Processes

The overarching steps include:

Step 1: Framing the Problem – Screening and Assessment

- Conducting a screening process exploring relevant sources of information.
- Collecting sufficient information about the student’s functioning inside and outside the classroom.
- Define in observable, measurable terms: what are the indicators of the concern? What is it that the student does or does not do, needs or does not need that causes concern?
- Conduct analysis of concern: expected vs demonstrated. What is the situation of the concern? (Environmental)
- Conduct a basic functional behavior analysis when it appears the situation is primarily behavior centered.
- Analyze global academic and social emotional skills and break down into sub-skills that appear to be the weakness.
- Avoid ‘admiring the problem.’
- Prioritize concerns identifying those as most critical or immediate needs.
- Identify concerns in order of short term vs long term.

Step 2: Designing and Implementing Interventions

- Prioritize targets.
- Establish goals that are specific and measurable.
- Establish multiple strategies that can address the goal. Selection should be based on evidence-based practices.
- Identify resources necessary for implementing strategies.
- Establish the plan of action that specifies what will occur, who will do it, where the actions of the intervention will occur, and when the actions will be implemented.
- Identify instruction or coaching needed for any staff involved in implementing the intervention.
- Determine when and how progress toward goal will be monitored. Establish clearly stated benchmarks or criteria for measurement.
- Implement with the frequency and dosage necessary to maintain fidelity to the evidence base

Step 3: Monitoring and Adapting

- Determine the who, what, and when for observing and measuring the benchmarks or criteria for measurement of progress.
- Tie monitoring schedule to sufficient frequency and dosage of interventions.
- Chart and plot the student’s progress.
- Conduct a review meeting to establish expected and achieved rates of progress
- Establish reasons for negative or positive growth toward goal.
- Revise strategies based on progress.

Tips for Using the Steps

A deeper dive into each of the steps can highlight valuable strategies and resources that enhance the steps.

Step 1: Framing the Problem – Screening and Assessment

A dichotomous approach to addressing the needs of a student ignores the whole child. A student does not have an academic branch and a social emotional branch. The student is one whole being who performs tasks, or functions, in various ways. It just doesn't make sense to address one branch without regarding the other branches; the trunk of the tree is the center from which all branches grow. It is the core of the student from which all beliefs and actions arise. In Student Assistance, we must look at the trunk of the tree, not just a set of singular branches, if we want to improve outcomes for the student.

Problems that students bring to school can be very complex. Screening data creates a clearer picture about which variables are fixed where SAP efforts are not likely to make a difference versus which variable are malleable given the SAPs investment into working with the student.

Develop a problem variable chart – a form divided in half with unchanging variables on the left and changing variables on the right. The team, not the case facilitator, decides which variables go in which column because we see variables differently.

The intent with Step 1 is to break down a general concern into specific concerns that can be more adequately addressed through short-term interventions. The coordinator or team is trying to determine both what is happening and why this is happening. Creating the best possible interventions can happen more readily when specific observable goals are established. When substance use and/or mental health needs are identified, the goal may be connecting the student to the appropriate resources.

Most people individually or collectively have developed habits of solving problems. Some of these habits have served them well. Some habits are just that – habits – and they simply don't work well. Because they are familiar, we continue to use them. This is just everyday life.

Develop a problem-solving, not problem admiring, mindset. Don't waste time admiring the problem.

Addressing big problems takes a lot of time and uses a lot of already limited resources. When we look at a student's issues as a big problem, we can feel overwhelmed at the work ahead. Breaking big problems into smaller pieces that we can peel off and address not only provides a sense of optimism to us and the student, it also offers building a foundation of success in small ways that accumulate over time. A student is much more likely to agree to smaller interventions that allow them to see they can be successful than facing what may seem like yet another hill to climb when the mental energy just isn't there.

Access to data isn't enough to create high quality and effectively applied interventions. The goal of collecting data is to inform the SAP more specifically throughout the problem-solving process.

In this phase of problem-solving, one question being asked and answered is ‘why is this happening?’ The SAP team approach, which is grounded in the multidisciplinary problem-solving team approach, allows for questions and assessment from varying perspectives rather than a single strand of thinking. One team member may ask about basic life needs including food, sleep, shelter, hygiene, health needs, etc. Another may strive to assess more of the student’s social acclimation and supportive relationships. A third team member may probe the student’s bonding to staff and students in the school. And yet another team member may start to ask about the student’s supports outside the school day. This type of questioning allows the team to avoid ‘groupthink’ that readily travels down one path while not looking at the student from a whole child perspective.

Don’t make assumptions about where the problem should be solved. Use the data, identify priorities with variables that can create opportunities for progress, then make decisions.

Academic performance and attendance problems are often indicators of nonacademic barriers to learning. Look beneath the surface when academic interventions aren’t helping or it is obvious that a student’s problems are not skill deficits.

Identifying strengths is as important as determining problems prior to creating interventions.

Include archived data from school records including attendance, academic status, behavior issues, and special needs.

Include experiential data from adults more familiar with the student. Typically, this includes the classroom teachers, coaches, and specialized staff.

Conduct an initial screening interview with the student to identify the student’s perspective on what is happening that may have prompted concern. Ask the student’s perspective about what is happening.

Ask the student about his/her concerns, and what is important. That perspective may be very different than what the SAP coordinator or team members assess is important.

Include the parent in the process, but not in the problem-solving meetings. The intent is to determine the parent’s experiences with the student. Many student issues are prompted by what is happening outside the school. Because the problem-solving meeting is an exploratory meeting to discuss the data, and not a behavioral plan meeting, gathering data from the parent prior to a problem-solving meeting may protect sensitive information shared by the student while exploring the issues.

Invite the referring staff member to the data review meeting. Include the referring staff member in the problem-solving meeting when appropriate. If collected data reveals issues that are unrelated to the referring staff member’s classroom or group situation, it may not be appropriate to include the referring staff member.

When identifying data, identify what would be expected vs what is happening in terms of life needs. Try to identify the variables that are impacting the deficit between what is expected vs what is happening. When a student comes to school, it can reasonably be expected that the student would have acceptable hygiene. When that isn’t happening, what are the variables that prevent that student from achieving the desired state of good hygiene?

Check the Professional Resources / Student Assistance Center section at prevention.org for a variety of tools and forms that help with the screening process.

Step 2: Designing and Implementing Interventions

Educators have years upon years of experience solving educational problems. Bringing those years together gives remarkable opportunity and power to make effective changes. The ultimate goal of problem solving is to create. All educators are creative; that is just part of the job. Not all educators are creative in the same way, which can make group problem-solving challenging.

What is the value of collaboration within the team? The process of developing nonacademic interventions is a creative process. We cannot look at a chart of skill deficits and simply choose one. SAP issues are often complex and sensitive requiring a different mindset than academic issues. Behavior issues frequently are not the result of skill deficits that can be addressed by changing the way behavior skills are taught. Creativity, then is key to developing the interventions needed.

Don't feel threatened by student issues that are complex. Avoid aversion to problems that don't resolve quickly.

First, look at foundational needs for the student. When dealing with nonacademic barriers, foundational needs are not academic skills. Foundational needs deal with basic human needs including housing, sleep, food, safety, human connection. Use Maslow's Hierarchy for a more thorough description of foundational needs, and prioritize those.

It is not necessary to remediate a problem in order for the student issues to improve. When issues of survival or safety are evident, those must be addressed prior to working with other interventions. Positive youth development needs and strategies and the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets should be considered when designing interventions.

School connectedness and school bonding are considered foundational in looking at needs and interventions. Students need to feel connected to positive adults in the building.

Students also need to be connected to peer groups in school. Help the student identify which peer groups may be appropriate, and assist the student in making the connection rather than just suggesting the student try to join a particular group.

Create specific targets for intervention selecting those with maximum effect and those that are foundational skills and needs.

Set short-term reasonably achievable goals for the student. These goals may be using particular coping skills or safety skills.

Establish intervention actions based on achieving the goal.

Write goals in positive rather than negative terms. Student success builds on success. When students feel successful, they often want the opportunity to create more success. One option is to begin by asking the team to take a minute to write as many possible interventions as they can. This one-minute think-to-write time results in a broader range of intervention generation. The team leader or individual facilitating the meeting should set up this process by reviewing the goal or desired behavior(s), the function of the behavior, and student strengths. This will provide focus and increase the likelihood that ideas generated will be relevant to the problem. It may be helpful to prompt the team to think of interventions that: 1) teach missing academic skills in conjunction with alternative behaviors, 2) recognize or encourage appropriate behavior, 3) intervene or provide consequences when the problem behavior occurs, as well as 4) strategies that deal with setting variables. The team should be encouraged to consider all possible solutions from simplest to complex, to more obvious or obscure. They can also be prompted to prioritize their ideas should they have time.

Ensure that the student and adult responsible for implementing the strategy have the knowledge and skills to accomplish the intervention. The 'how to' is as important as the intervention itself.

Ask the student if he/she would like to chat about some basic steps to be successful. A student isn't likely to tell an adult they don't know how to get from here to there with an intervention.

SAP interventions often go far beyond classroom-based interventions. A primary function of Student Assistance is building bridges between students, families and community resources.

When attempting to connect a student to community resources, serve as the bridge - not just the information source. Studies have shown that students follow through with community connections with SAP when they are given specific connections.

Look for tools and resources to help with Step 2 in the SAC section under the Professional Resources tab at prevention.org.

Step 3: Monitoring and Adapting

Teams have often commented about wanting to do a better job of monitoring progress with interventions. Step 3 cannot be omitted without failure to meet best practices.

Consistent monitoring forms should be used for each intervention.

Monitoring indicators established during Step 2 should be followed in determining progress.

It is important to ask students what they see as their successes and pitfalls. These may be different than what is suspected. Ask students what they see as the causes for success and pitfalls. Build upon the successes. Address pitfalls.

Ask the student about the opportunities to practice any new skills, and how the student felt about using the new skills.

Make sure students understand that the success was due to their efforts, not the SAP's efforts.

When a student isn't making expected progress with an intervention, consider changing the adult that is working with the student.

Fidelity is important to interventions. When that doesn't happen, it is important to understand what went wrong where, and then correct the roadblock in positive ways. When staff fail to do their part in working with an intervention, try to determine whether it is lack of understanding about how to implement, and provide the needed coaching. When cooperation is due to lack of motivation, change the intervention.

Fidelity with a student requires engagement. Part of the screening process is to find out what motivates or engages the student. When students don't follow the intervention plan, try to understand what is happening from their perspective.

You can find tools and resources for progress monitoring in the Professional Resources section under Student Assistance Center at prevention.org.

Student Assistance Program Evaluation

Program evaluation may seem terribly complex and daunting, when in reality it needn't be.

Program evaluation is a systematic process of answering questions about what works and what doesn't work in order to do more of one and less of the other. This definition inherently includes tasks that must be performed in order to decide which is which.

First, we need to create practical questions that help us discover what we want to know for our unique situation. Then we must look for data to inform our decisions. Moving on to analyze the data helps us get closer to informed decisions rather than going with a hunch or doing things the way we've always done them without seeing if those things are actually working, or even making things worse.

There are several very valid reasons for doing program evaluation.

- Program evaluation improves our practices in working with students at risk of not being successful.
- Showcasing effectiveness of the important work being done through the Student Assistance Program allows others to understand more about nonacademic barriers as well as the value of Student Assistance. Evaluation is the process used to get to the showcase point.
- Program evaluation serves as a map guiding the SAP to make changes and improve in the future.
- Administrators want to know if SAP as well as any other program, merits the time and resources to keep the program for the next year.

How do we move from understanding that SAP evaluation is good to understanding what to do?

Student Assistance can look at two forms of evaluation that will provide helpful data. Formative assessment looks at needs and helps determine direction for services. Summative evaluation looks at the impact of services examining whether anything changed as a result of the services.

Formative Assessment

This is the most helpful evaluation in the early stages of the program when longer-term stability hasn't had the opportunity to grow. Formative assessment looks at implementation, efficiency, and cost effectiveness.

Formative needs assessment wants to see how needs are being met and not met. The SAP looks at how the population trends and needs may have changed over the school year, and whether changing needs are being currently met through SAP existing services. Decisions may arise about what changes to services would have to happen to meet those needs, and whether those changes are doable.

Formative process evaluation is a program implementation evaluation that looks at how SAP was implemented, whether it was efficiently implemented, and cost effectiveness. The questions used in this type of assessment include whether the SAP is doing what it planned to do.

- Is the SAP reaching the students identified as needing service?
- Are students needing SAP services getting connect to services, and are those the right services?
- Are staff and administrators making referrals to the SAP?
- Are students following through with interventions?
- Is the SAP using the right progress monitoring practices to see if interventions are followed?
- Is the SAP following best practices in problem solving and multi-disciplinary team best practices?
- Do we have the appropriate numbers and types of students in educational support groups?
- At what rate do students complete all educational support groups? Or, what is the average number of sessions attended by students in SAP educational support groups?
- How satisfied are the SAP customers with the services?

Formative process evaluation can be ongoing through the school year or conducted annually. Participant evaluations collected after the completion of the designated sessions give data about participant satisfaction, which is an important factor in youth change.

Tracking the number of referrals from staff, self-referral, and policy violation referral is helpful data for the SAP.

- What percentage of referrals were appropriate for SAP?
- Were interventions developed for all referrals?
- For what percentage of referrals was the screening process completed?
- Was progress monitoring completed for all interventions?
- Where are the glitches in each phase of the problem-solving process?
- What processes take longer and use more resources than anticipated?
- How do we look at cost effectiveness with our services?
- Can we equate staff time as a variable in looking at cost efficiency?
- In what months does the SAP receive the fewest referrals or the most referrals?

When the SAP is new to a school, it makes sense to use formative assessment data routinely to help with designing the right pieces at the right time. The SAP framework hasn't had time to be integrated in the school and have longer-term stability. Although the SAP should collect outcome data in the early stages, outcome data may not be as strong an indicator of effectiveness in the early stages as it will become in the future.

Summative Assessment

Summative evaluation looks at how participants changed over time, as well as how the system changes over time. Two facets that can be considered are outcomes and impact. With outcome evaluation, we are looking at what changed in who over time as a result of SAP work. With impact, we look more at how systems changed as a result of SAP services over time. Outcome evaluation looks at how a participant's knowledge, skills, attitudes, intentions, or behaviors changed over time. Several indicators can be helpful in measuring outcomes with Student Assistance.

- How many students working with the SAP improved attendance?
- How many students working with the SAP showed academic improvement?
- How many students working with the SAP that were referred to community services followed through with the recommendation?
- For how many students working with the SAP did an attitude about attending school improve?
- How have behavior referrals, suspensions and expulsions changed as a result of SAP services?
- How many students stopped a particular behavior such as smoking or texting and driving as a result of SAP services?

Impact data looks at how systems changed as a result of Student Assistance participation.

- Was there a change in school policy as a result of the Student Assistance Program?
- What new community organizations are more involved in the school due to Student Assistance?
- How did parent engagement practices change as a result of Student Assistance?
- How are students on the monthly juvenile probation list helped through SAP in ways that did not exist previously?

A practical approach to data would be utilizing technology to record both formative and summative data during the school year. Totals at the end of the year provide appropriate process and outcome data.

Analysis

The evaluation questions were created and data to answer the questions has been collected. What happens next? Analysis means looking at data in ways that tell us about trends, relationships, and patterns. It can mean comparing data to previously collected data. One of the primary questions being asked at this point is, “What difference is Student Assistance making in this school?” If the SAP doesn’t like the answers, changes can be made by looking more specifically at parts of the data. If the SAP does like the answer, the question can be, “Where do we go from here?”

Analysis should particularly look at data in relationship to meeting your goals; then deciding what helped that happen or hindered that from happening. From there, the SAP needs to ask what we need to do more of in the future, and what do we need to do differently. All formative and summative data should be used in answering those questions.

Numbers are good; they give us quantitative data. Student Assistance works with people, and there is always more to the story when working with people. Qualitative data can also be considered a valid source. Self-reports help to shed light on numbers. The SAP can ask students, staff, and families to answer opinion questions or request anecdotal stories which reveal far more than just numbers.

Reports

One of the reasons stated previously for collecting data is showcasing the Student Assistance Program. Showcasing increases awareness and can change peoples’ opinions about using the SAP, as well as garner more resources for the future.

Report Tips

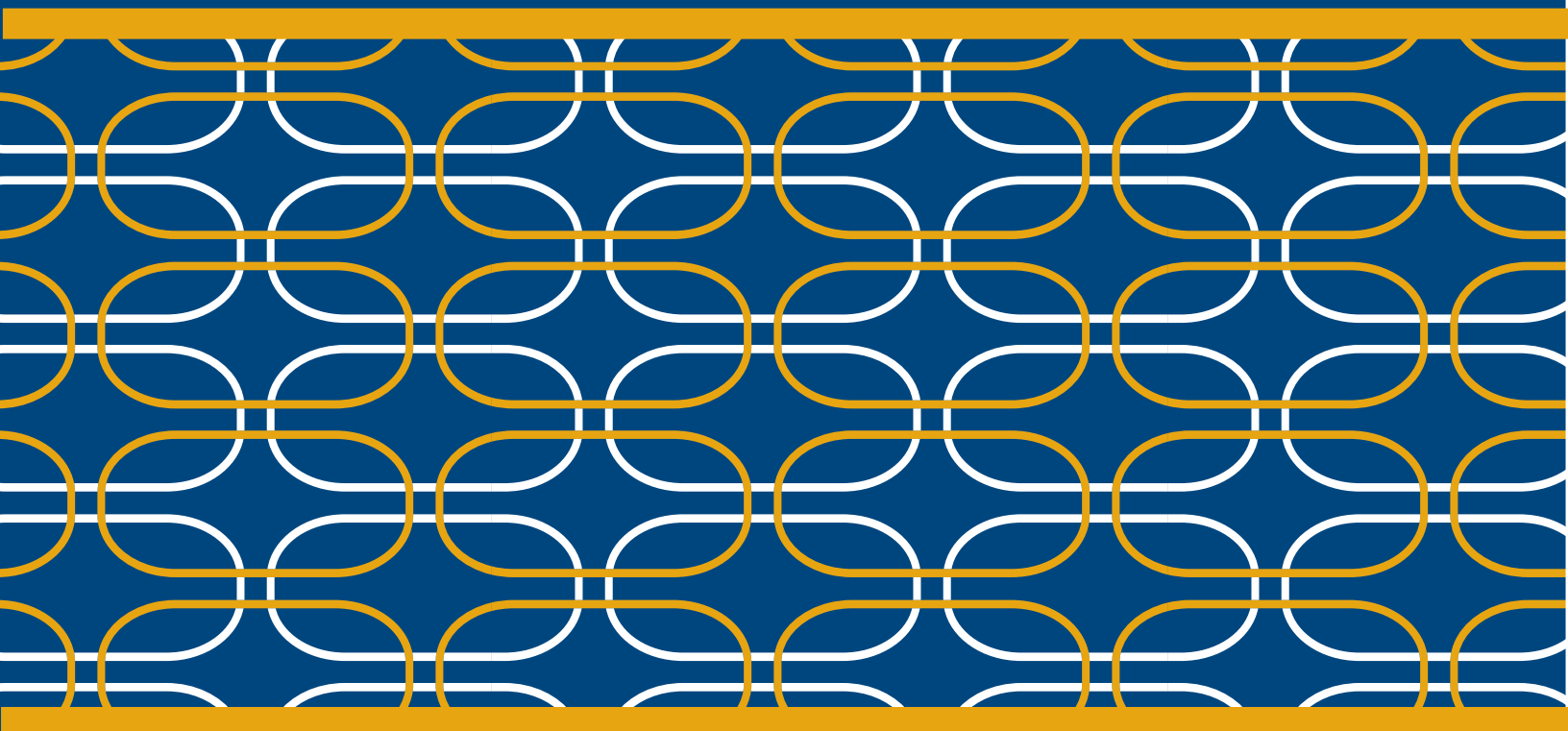
- Keep reports simple.
- Keep narratives simple.
- Use graphics through charts, graphs, and pictures when possible.
- Make reports visually attractive.
- Use numbers and percentages.
- Highlight the impacts of the services.
- Highlight the successes of the services.
- Protect individual data by using aggregate data.
- Distribute reports to people that matter.
- Put reports on line.
- Give print copies of reports to people who make decisions that affect the SAP.
- Create talking points to use when distributing reports to administrators, staff, students, parents, and community members.

Setting New Goals and Benchmarks Based on Evaluation

Either at the end of the school year when evaluation data is fresh or at the beginning of the school year when spirits are more refreshed, the SAP has the task of setting the goals and benchmarks for the year. The question to answer is “What do we want to do more of this year, and what do we want to do less of this year?” Following that question comes another natural question, “How do we go about doing that?” and “How do we know if we are getting there?”

Conclusion

There is no alternative to sustainable practices in working with youth. Sustainability happens with intention. Intention must be grounded in knowledge that leads to good decisions. To not be intentional, a group can only hope they will be around next year without putting the effort into building and maintaining sustainable practices.




PREVENTION FIRST
Building community capacity to prevent substance abuse