

STUDENT ASSISTANCE CENTER



What is Student Assistance?

Student Assistance (SAP) is a comprehensive framework for the delivery of K- 12 universal, selected, and indicated prevention/intervention strategies and programs. Student Assistance services are designed to reduce risk factors, promote protective factors and increase asset development. SAP has been implemented by schools across the country over the past 50 years, and is recognized as an evidence-based model. The SAP framework integrates services with other existing multi-tiered systems of support in the school to provide supports for all students, including those not being successful with academic or behavior intervention programs.

Student Assistance focuses on students dealing with life issues (mental health, substance use, family dynamics, bullying and other relational violence, homelessness, gender identity, grief and loss, youth development, and other issues) interfering with educational and life success. These nonacademic barriers to learning are addressed through Universal, Selective and Indicated strategies.

What are the outcomes of implementing Student Assistance?

Student Assistance helps schools in reaching their 5Essential goals through strengthening effective school leadership, strengthening parent-community ties, building professional capacity, and enhancing the supportive environment/student centered learning climate. (See The 5Essentials and Student Assistance: Tools for Strengthening Your School at prevention.org – Professional Resources – SAC.)

Schools implementing Student Assistance Programs report:

- Improved academic success
- Decreased problem behaviors
- Improved staff attitudes toward helping students
- Improved identification of at-risk students
- Increased school connectedness
- Improved communication between staff, students, and parents
- Improved effective intervention plan development
- Increased and improved student support services
- Increased community resource utilization
- Increased creative collaboration among staff to address student needs

Can Student Assistance help us if we already have academic and behavior interventions happening in the school?

Student Assistance is particularly beneficial to students dealing with life, family, and relationship issues impacting their ability to focus on the educational process. Student Assistance integrates well with multi-tiered systems of support. Students receiving SAP services are able to be more fully present and ready to learn from academic and behavior interventions. Many students impacted

by life stressors do not have academic skill deficits or behavior management problems. Students experiencing family, relationship, and other life issues do not always find these issues sufficiently addressed through behavior or academic remediation plans; yet these students need school and community supports to be successful.

“Much of the attention currently given to improving students’ academic achievement addresses issues of curriculum, instructional strategies, and interventions or services for struggling learners, and rightfully so. However, even after addressing these issues, barriers still remain for some students. An estimated one-third of students fail to learn because of psychosocial problems that interfere with their ability to fully attend to and engage in instructional activities, prompting a call for “new directions for addressing barriers to learning.”¹

How does the Student Assistance framework function?

Universal SAP services include evidence-based prevention programs, school policies, and staff development to help staff more accurately identify students and respond to students demonstrating higher levels of risk. School policies are identified that include strategies for getting help for students and families. Collaborative relationships are developed and strengthened with community service providers at this level as well.

Selective SAP Services focus on students at higher risk of not being successful due to nonacademic barriers in order to provide additional support through educational support groups, after-school programs, or tutoring. Students often self-refer for Selective SAP services.

Indicated SAP services utilize a trained Student Assistance team that supports identified students by creating intervention plans grounded in data. The team then monitors and adjusts those plans to build student success. Interventions include utilizing existing school-based services, and connecting students and families to community services and resources.

Who is the Student Assistance Team?

The SAP team is a consistent, trained multi-disciplinary problem-solving team that may be composed of administrators, classroom teachers, school counselors, social workers, school health professionals, and support staff (school resource officers may be included for middle and high school teams). Team members do not fluctuate based upon which student is being helped. The team implements an evidence-based data-driven problem-solving process, and often works directly with students rather than with teachers to change instructional methods.

Additional resources can be found at www.prevention.org/Resources/SAC-Resources.aspx

¹ *Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom*, published by the Institute of Educational Sciences, U.S.D.O.E. *What Works Clearinghouse*, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/4>.