

# Illinois Student Assistance Program Data

## System Change Outcomes

According to the Center for School Transformation, “Change is not optional. Every organization and every leader faces the responsibility to navigate the continually rushing waters of change.”<sup>i</sup> As shown by data collected by the Illinois Association of Student Assistance Professionals and the Student Assistance Center in the annual reporting process, Student Assistance Programs are perceived as one tool that help guide the change process toward stronger outcomes.

System change in schools involves changes in interrelated parts of the educational process and the management system that maintains the capacity for learning to occur. Each strategy can impact part of the systems which, in turns, may impact other parts of the system. No single strategy, program, or curriculum can be considered responsible for improving all aspects of the system within a school.

The following highlights parts of educational process and management systems data. This data is reported as system change data by Student Assistance teams and coordinators, and represents several of the perceived system level outcomes resulting from Student Assistance Program activities. Respondents were asked to check off which outcomes they perceived occurring as a result of having a Student Assistance Program in their school.

**Multiple Categories:** The 5Essential Elements have multiple categories and measures for each element with the combined effect of various strategies creating a compound effect in the overall system. In measuring this change, evaluators look at progress over time with smaller measures that contribute to the whole.<sup>ii</sup> Student Assistance looks at multiple categories and measures understanding that it is the combined effect that creates overall system change. The annual Student Assistance report categories align with best practices, and are considered indicators of movement toward more positive school climate and part of change in the overall system. Several of the indicators are aligned with the 5Essential Elements as well offering insight into a helpful strategy in strengthening the 5Essentials in the school.

**Incremental Change:** System change occurs typically in degrees of change over time and is not measured as a fixed entity unto itself. Because system change occurs over time rather than an immediate cause / effect relationship, responses to indicators can vary widely from year to

year. Smaller changes may be noticeable more quickly while other changes may not be observable for extended months beyond implementation. Similarly, the report data may show that 30% saw a change in an indicator during that year. It is unreasonable to assume that any number of the other 70% did not experience growth in that area during that year. There are a variety of reasons the other 70% may not report the change. A school may not have implemented strategies toward that indicator during the year because that indicator was already particularly strong, and change strategies were not warranted. In another school, a particular area might not have been as effective as preferred, but limitations to resources did not permit the SAP to implement the strategies needed to create a measurable effect. With some indicators such as 'staff morale', multiple factors impact the indicator including a change in administration, financial policy changes, new programs implemented that significantly impact workload, or changes in school population characteristics, among others.

The responses for each reported category represent the percentage of schools responding to questions about that category in relationship to Student Assistance strategies in the building. The data informs us about the number of schools seeing changes in the indicator or measure, and assumes that those individuals completing the report understand the mitigating factors involved in their particular school.

## **Staff Attitudes in Helping and Connecting At-Risk Students**

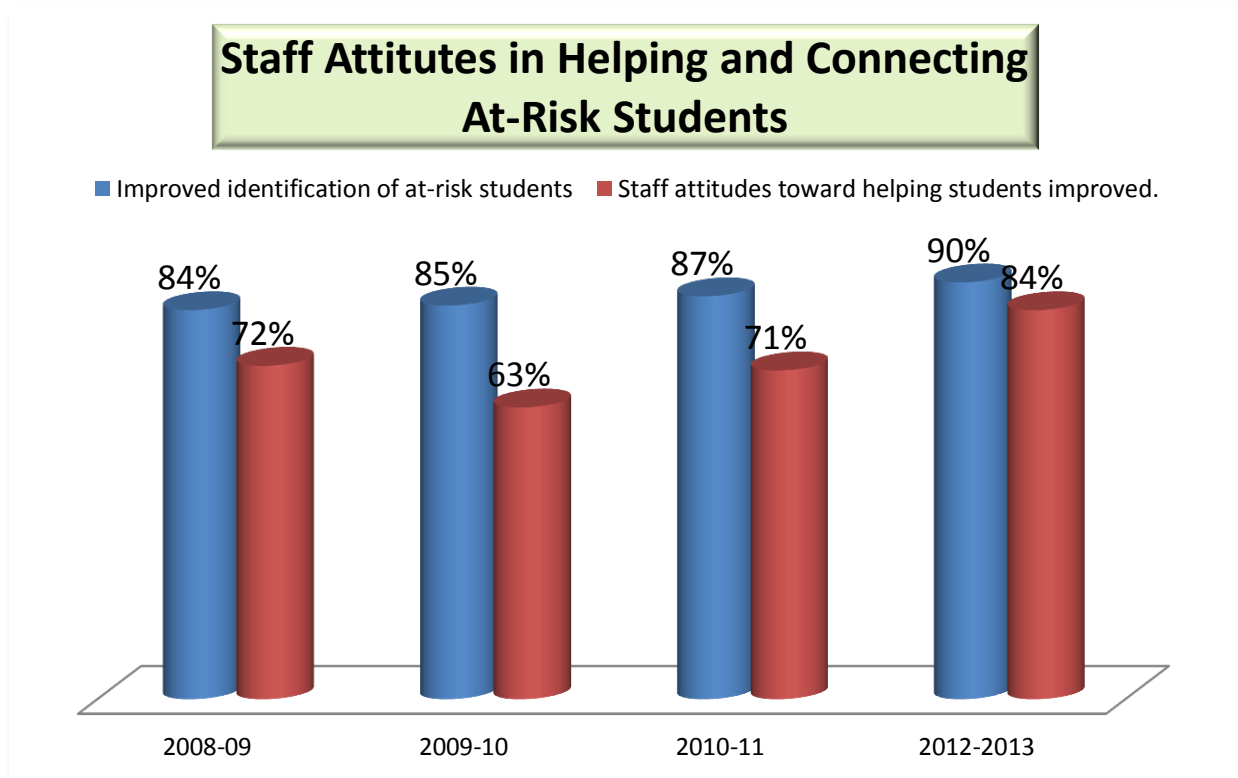
Two categories measured in the annual reports are to some degree inter-connected. Both categories deal with connecting students needing help to the SAP. The first category relates to staff attitudes about helping students with life issues, and the second deals with staff skills in appropriately identifying students needing social supports. The interrelationship occurs due to perception about whether the skill level improves willingness to help, or whether the willingness precedes an improved ability to identify. The inter-relationship was not examined in the annual report; however, because of that inter-relationship, the data is reported together.

As schools go about the business of pressing toward high standards for academic achievement, ample social supports to sustain students must also be available. Staff must couple high personal concern for students while emphasizing high academic standards. Student Assistance Programs offer a platform for building individualized social supports as well as creating networks of social supports at the larger group level. At the heart of providing those social supports is the bridge between the student needing supports and the system in which those supports are contained. The efficient process provided by SAPs includes a primary pillar of effectiveness through multi-pronged identification procedures. Staff referrals account for the

vast majority of referrals to the SAP. Staff skills in identifying along with positive attitudes about helping students with life issues influences whether staff will connect students to social supports.

Improved identification may include professional capacity development around indicators of need for additional social supports. Information about indicators for signs of distress in students including self-disclosure and appropriate responses to the indicators can occur through formal in-service sessions or less formal means such as fact sheets, one to one conversations, departmental or grade level meetings.

Trend data from the annual report shows 85% to 90% of responding schools saw improved identification of at-risk students as a result of having Student Assistance in the school. Similarly, trend data about staff attitudes toward helping students improved in 63% to 84% of reporting schools during the years indicated. Both of these measures contribute significantly to getting students in need connected to social supports provided by or connected through the Student Assistance Program.



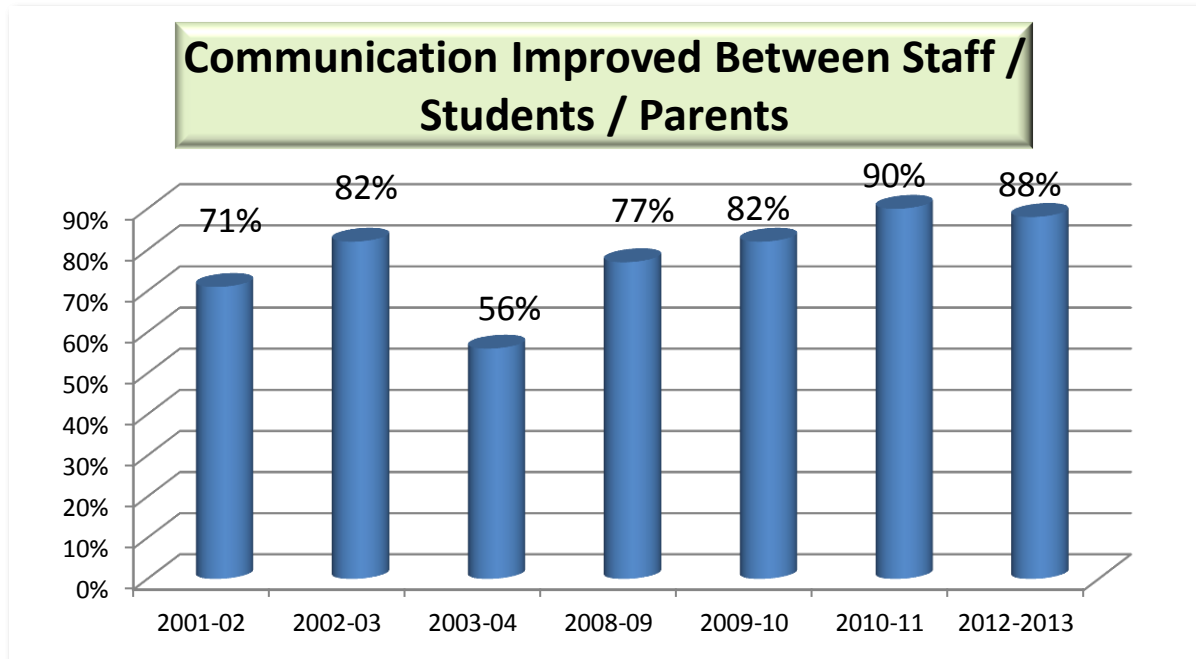
## **Communication Improved Between Staff / Students / Parents**

An essential support for school improvement is teachers talking to teachers out of the isolation of the classroom. Student Assistance provides a structured format for collaborative meaningful dialogue around life issues presenting barriers to learning and the problem-solving process to address those issues.

Strong educational environments include administration, staff, students, and parents communicating about needs, resources, policies and strategies. Effective communication emphasizes dialogue, and brings staff together creating a collective sense of responsibility for all students in the building, developing more trusting relationships, and establishing realistic and appropriate expectations. Student Assistance offers the opportunity for staff to dialogue with others outside their area of expertise for the purpose of collaborative sharing of expertise to address non-academic barriers as a core problem of practice.

Dialogue is a key Student Assistance component in the multi-disciplinary problem-solving procedure in facilitating constructive staff creative collaboration. Student Assistance teams report this creative collaboration around strategies for life issues as one of the most valuable features of the Student Assistance process. Because this creative collaborative problem-solving process includes staff who are part of the problem-solving team but do not work with the student directly on a day-to-day basis, this process facilitates the sense of responsibility for all students in the building.

Annual report data regarding improved communication shows favorable responses for the years reported below. All seven of the report years for this category show significant numbers of SAPs reporting improved communication between staff, students, and parents. Six of the seven years showed at least 70% of SAPs reporting improved communication with four years reporting over 80% of schools reporting improved communication.



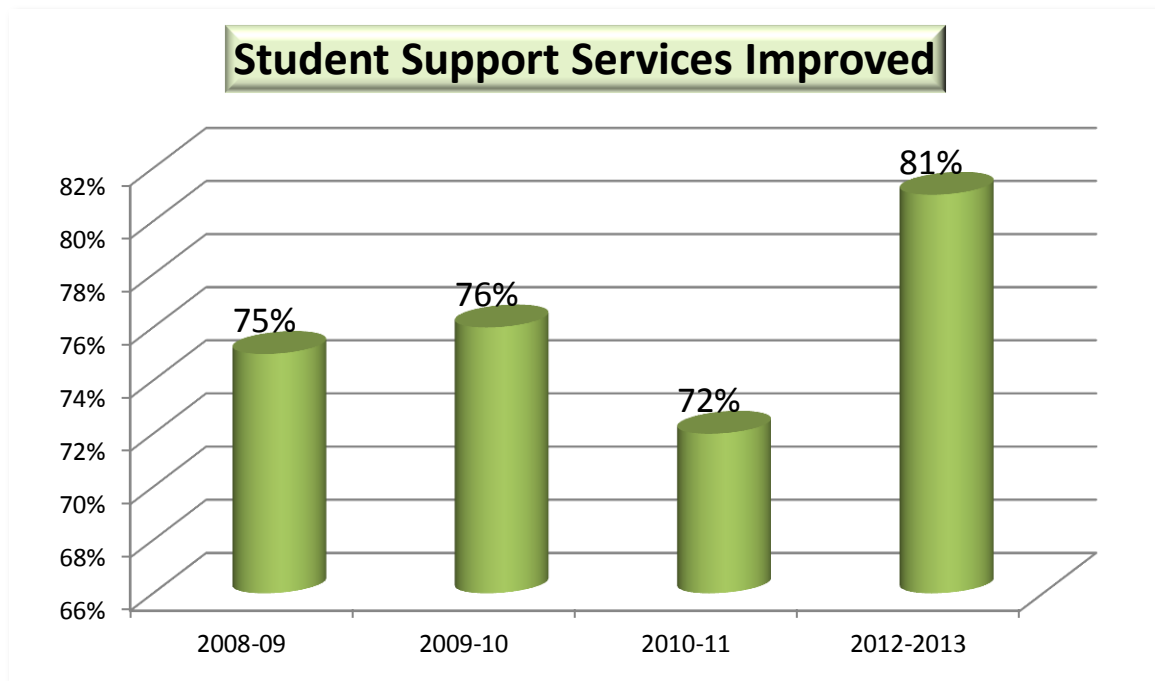
## Student Support Services Improved

A critical component of Student Assistance services is the availability of multiple types of supports that address a wide variety of student and family needs. Effective Student Assistance implementation increases awareness of student and family needs and available support services through the school and community. Students are consistently linked through SAP to the behavioral health care system, and at a higher rate than is reported nationally (U.S. Surgeon General).<sup>iii</sup> System level work conducted by the SAP often includes identifying services in the building and in the community, developing new programs and resources in the building, strengthening relationships with community resources, and bringing more community services into the building.

The category of 'student support services improved' includes the SAPs response to needs through several different strategies. Improvement may include creating new services, increasing integration and access to existing school programs and services, increasing availability of services – both school and community, and increasing communication and coordination with services.

Report respondents were asked to check a response if student support services improved. Respondents were not asked to explain what improved. Data was reported from 2008 through

2011, and again for the 2012-2013 school year. For each year, over 72% of reporting schools checked on the report form that ‘student support services improved’.



The categories of resource access and utilization were also measured. Resource access was measured from the 2000-01 school year through the 2003-04 school year. The report category was entitled “increased access to community resources”. “Increased access” typically includes the SAP having connections with community resources, and students and families being able to get to the point of services. Families often encounter problems accessing services because of issues involving transportation, funding, language barriers and meeting service qualifying criteria. In communities where resources are more plentiful and transportation is readily available, improved access involves more strategies to connect students and families with the most appropriate resources, along with helping students and families understand how to connect to the services. In these areas, SAPs may work to collaborate with agencies to place services within the school setting.

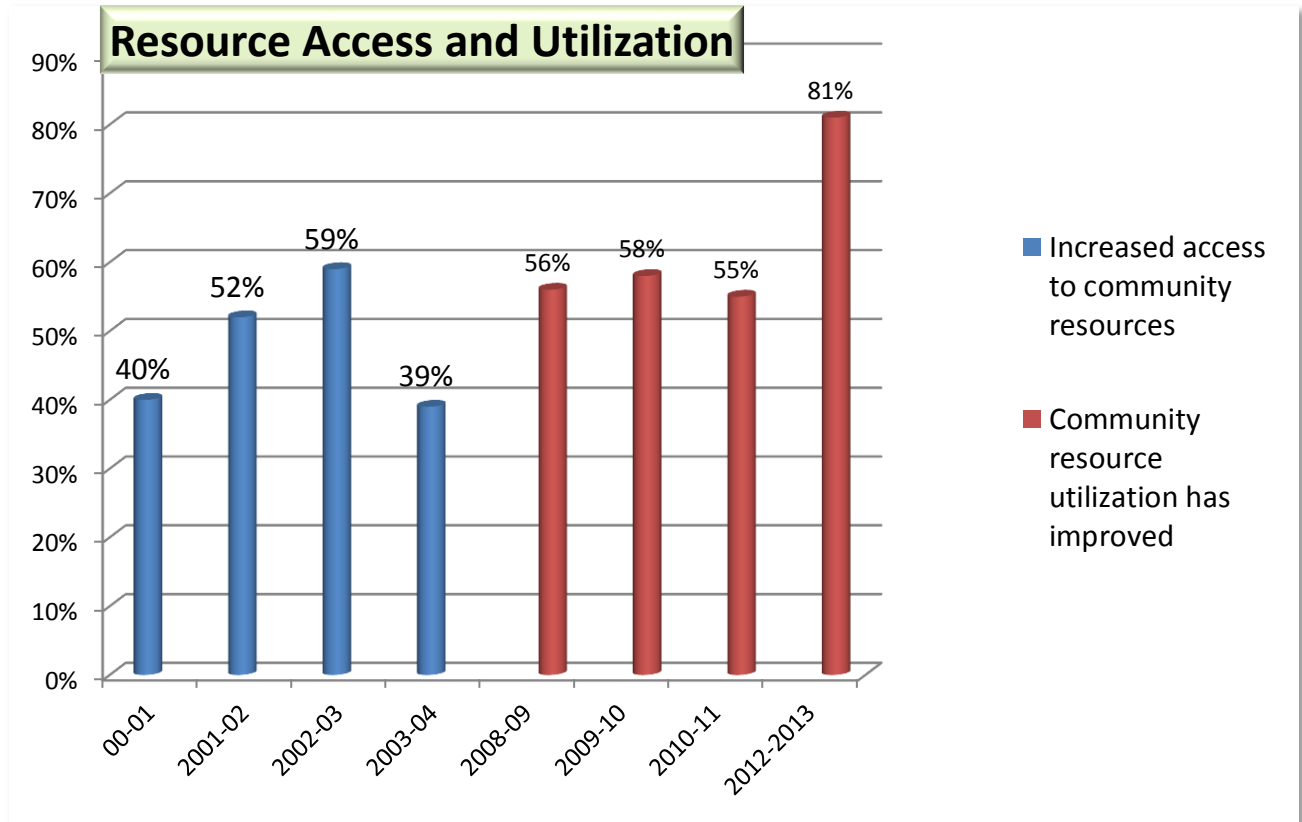
In less resource and transportation rich areas, access strategies must focus more on locating where services do exist, and identifying methods of transportation to get to the services. Because agencies often serve multiple communities, the possibility of placing service representatives within schools is significantly reduced.

The data shows that between 39% and 59% of reporting schools saw improvement in access to community resources as a result of having Student Assistance in their building.

“Community resource utilization improved” was measured from the 2008-09 school year through the 2010-11 school year, and again in the 2012-13 school year. Community resource utilization differs from access in that the measure is about whether the service was actually used as opposed to whether the resource was simply accessed. Community resource utilization may involve youth using resources in the community or using resources in the school offered by a community service provider.

Utilization information is often restricted which may be a ‘constraint’ factor in reporting this category. School services utilization information is typically not considered federally protected information, and can be accessed more readily by the SAP. When that information is covered under federal confidentiality regulations, the information is not accessible without an information sharing agreement. Community resource utilization information sharing is more limited by federal regulations. A service agency is prohibited from sharing confidential information without signed information sharing agreements. Knowledge and documentation about resource utilization changed with the implementation of HIPPA regulations. SAPs will have knowledge of when community resource utilization occurs if a student or family member reveals that to the SAP or a confidentiality agreement allows information to be shared with the SAP.

Response rates for this category ranged consistently between 55 and 58% for school years 2008-09 through 2010-11. The response rate jumped to 81% for the 2012-2013 school year. Respondents were not asked to explain why rates were reported as they were.



## School Policies Reviewed and Revised

School policies and procedures are fundamental principles that guide functioning in the school, and are determined through a change process typically involving various levels of administration within a district. Student Assistance teams and coordinators wishing to make changes to school policy must follow the district’s protocol for review and revision. This reporting category includes both the review and revision of policies connected to Student Assistance work. SAPs may understand the need for revision in a particular policy area in order for students to have access to additional supports.

Policies and procedures around attendance, behavior, substance use, violence, etc. are policies around student conduct that may be connected to the Student Assistance Program. Policies and procedures around how support services may be provided and around how parents are involved are also part of the school’s policies related to Student Assistance work.

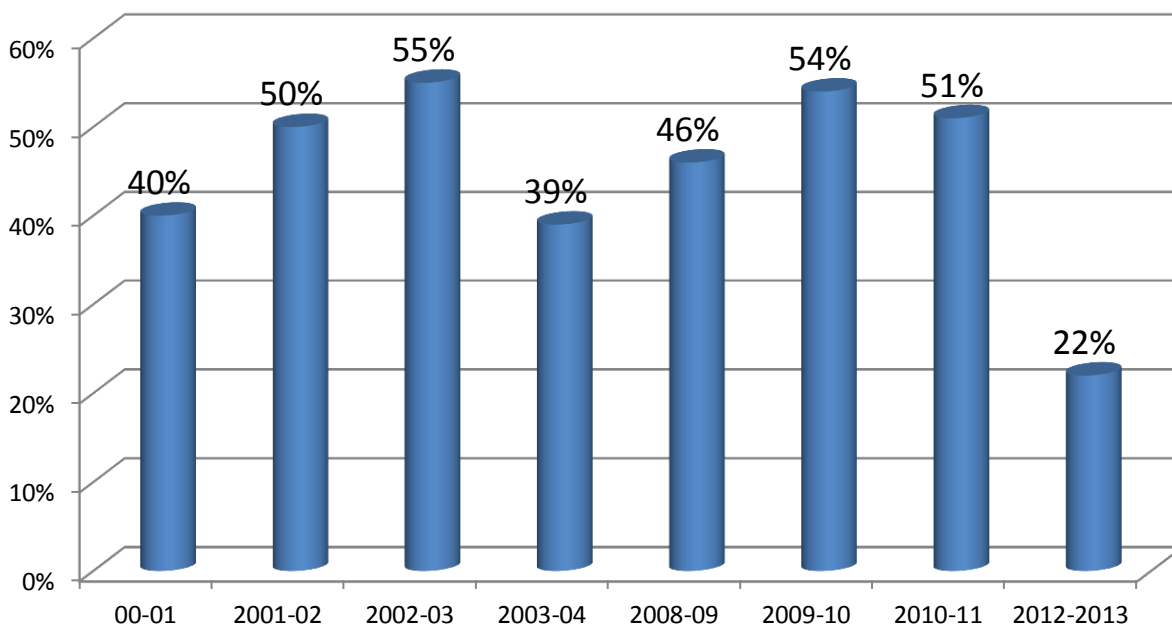


The relationship between SAP and school policies and procedures typically becomes apparent over time to staff directly involved with SAP functioning. The SAP may begin to look at specific policy and procedure aspects to determine how revisions can especially create better connections between violations and support services.

Policy review and revision may be conducted as a periodically scheduled event, or may be conducted as need arises. Although policy and procedure review / revision is common with Student Assistance, SAPs do not typically schedule policy reviews annually which means it is unlikely that a high percentage of SAPs would conduct policy and procedure review in any given year. SAPs reporting policy and procedure review and revision are not necessarily reporting that the school's entire policy and procedures regarding all violations and consequences have been under consideration in that year. The SAP may have worked directly with administration to review and revise one aspect of policy such as attendance during the year. That SAP may work the following year to connect additional supports to behavior policies. The SAP may show on the annual SAP report that policies and procedures were reviewed and revised each of those years

Trend data with policies reviewed / revised shows that over time typically 45 to 55% of SAPs have considered changes to school policy and procedures each year. Five of the eight years show around 50% of responding SAPs were involved in some aspect of policy review and revision. One interpretation of the data indicates that SAPs around the state consider policy review and revision an important aspect of ongoing SAP work. A deviation from this percentage occurred in the 2012-13 school year with only 22% of schools responding to policy review and revision. This was the lowest percentage in the reporting years. The reason for this is unknown.

## School Policies Reviewed / Revised



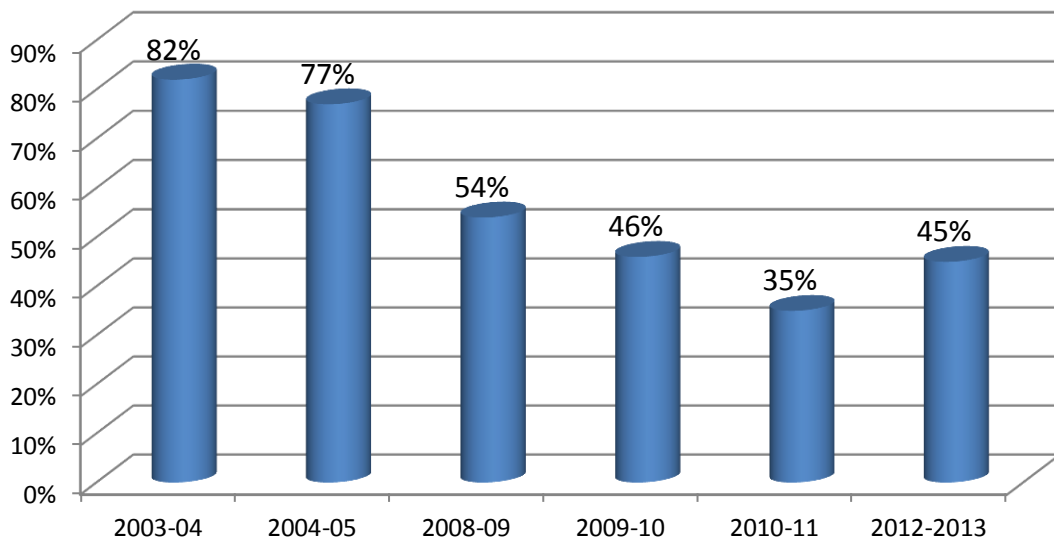
### Improved School Climate

The National School Climate Center states the following about school climate.

“When people work together, a group process emerges that is bigger than any one person's actions. A comprehensive assessment of school climate includes major spheres of school life such as safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the environment as well as larger organizational patterns (e.g. from fragmented to shared; healthy or unhealthy). How we feel about being in school and these larger group trends shape learning and student development. Peer-reviewed educational research has consistently demonstrated that a positive school climate is associated with academic achievement, effective risk prevention efforts and positive youth development.”<sup>iv</sup>

Respondents were asked whether the school's climate improved as a result of having SAP in their building. They were not asked which aspects of school climate improved. Without a common definition of school climate being used in the data measurement tool each year, we are unable to interpret which parts of the definition are being considered when responding to the data. The data was reported for the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years, and again for the 2008-09 through the 2010-2011 and the 2012-2013 school years. The 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years showed high numbers of respondents seeing an improvement in school climate with 82% and 77% respectively. Other report years showed percentages were closer to mid-range with 2010-2011 school year showing the lowest percentage.

## Improved School Climate



<sup>i</sup> <http://www.schooltransformation.com/systems-change/> Retrieved from the internet August 1, 2013.

<sup>ii</sup> The Essential Supports for School Improvement, the Consortium on Chicago School Research, University of Chicago, September 2006.

<sup>iii</sup> ) Retrospective Analysis of the Pennsylvania Student Assistance Program Outcome Data: Implications for Practice and Research Executive Summary 2001, Ringel & Sturm, 2001).

<sup>iv</sup> [www.schoolclimate.org](http://www.schoolclimate.org), retrieved from the internet August 1, 2013.