Illinois Student Assistance Program Data 1999 – 2013

Prepared by the Student Assistance Center at Prevention First. Collected by the Illinois Association of Student Assistance Professionals and the Student Assistance Center at Prevention First.

Primary Reasons for Referral (PRR)

In an environment with ever increasing pressure to increase achievement levels for all students, educators sometimes forget that not all students come to school from supportive environments. Some students come with the baggage of life issues, bullying, economic hardship, domestic violence and other social ills which make it difficult for these students to be fully focused and engaged in the evidence-based curriculums with which they are provided. Leaving No Child Behind is a noble goal; not every student begins the Race to The Top from the same starting line.
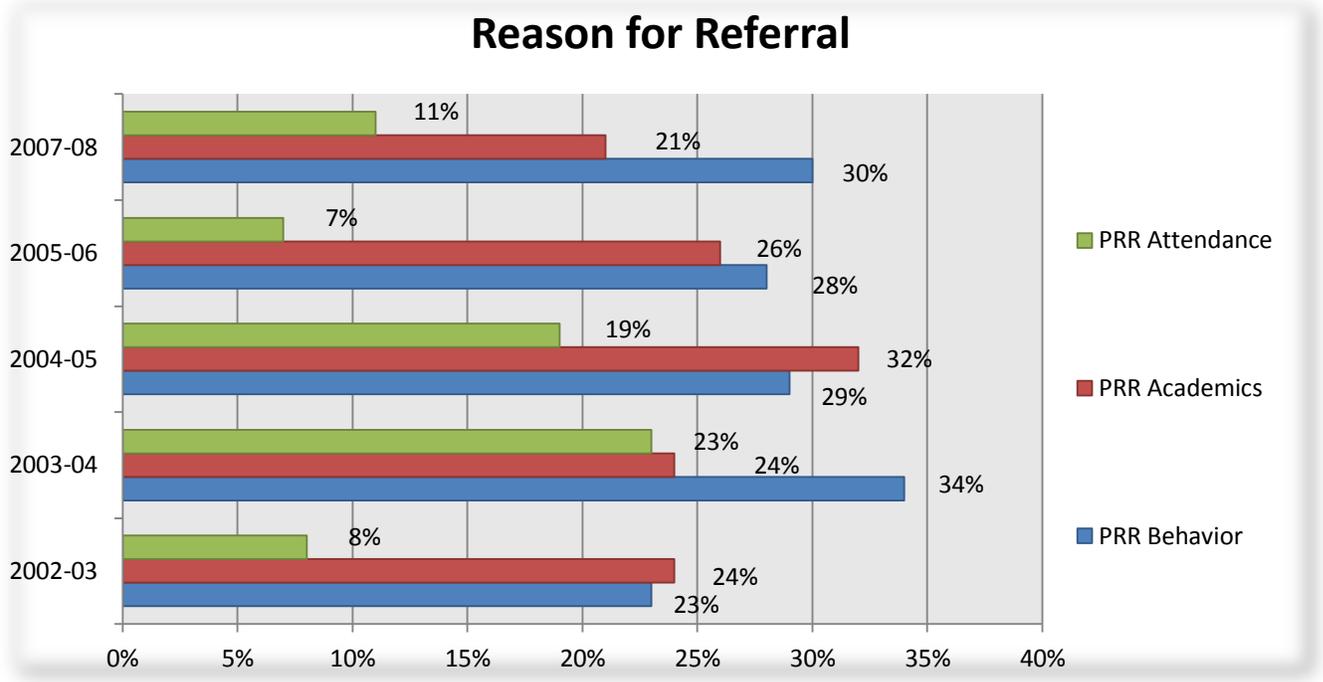
During school years 2001-2002 through 2007-2008, SAPs were asked to note reasons students were identified (referred), and to document the numbers of referrals by category (those most frequently noted by SAPs across the country). It is important to note that behavior, attendance, and academic issues are often indicators of some other issue in a student's life.

Research shows that home and community factors play a significant role in a student's ability to achieve academically, and without addressing these factors a student may continue to struggle to perform their primary tasks in the educational environment. In addition, research on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs by Norwood (1999), Brazelton and others confirm that individuals at the lowest levels of the Hierarchy seek coping information to meet their levels of need. Information that is not connected to helping a person meet his or her needs in a very short time span is simply left unattended. When physical security and safety, including sleep, are challenged, students will use most of their time, energy, and creativity simply trying to survive. This struggle interferes with learning impacting attention in class, declining achievement in curriculum applications, and behaviors not conducive to learning. These indicators are identified by staff and administration who refer the student to the Student Assistance Program.

Primary Reason for Referral data offers insight into why students are identified by school staff, parents, and / or other students. Three of the top four reasons for referral (behavior, academics and attendance) are hardly surprising given the fact that these are the primary tasks for a student in school and are easily identifiable by staff in an educational environment of high accountability for these measures. The mean reason for referral percentage is 28.8% for behavior referrals; 25.4% for academics referrals, and 13.6% for attendance referrals.

For some students, addressing the issue with teaching interventions through response to intervention will effectively mitigate existing problems. For those students mentioned above, or those with mental health issues (mean referral percentage 16%) or substance use issues (mean referral percentage 8%),

interventions may be needed that address underlying life issues and professional community services along with additional school supports.

Reason for Referral

	PRR Attendance	PRR Academics	PRR Behavior
2007-08	11%	21%	30%
2005-06	7%	26%	28%
2004-05	19%	32%	29%
2003-04	23%	24%	34%
2002-03	8%	24%	23%

- Averaging over that five year period, behavior referrals were the most common referral indicator, with academic issues as the second most common reason for referral. Historically, students rarely self-refer to SAP for academic issues. Behavior referrals may include policy violations for fighting, bullying, or other types of problems. Students, again, rarely self-refer for behavior reasons, although behavior is the most frequent referral reason for staff. Data was not collected showing correlations between behavior referrals, parents, and friend referral.

- Mental health concerns rank third in reasons for referral. Mental health issues typically include policy violations for problem behaviors as well as self-referral, friend referral, and parent referral when dealing with stress, anxiety, depression or suicide, or other symptoms.

- Attendance issues rank fourth.

- Alcohol and other drug issues rank fifth in the most common referral issues. It is important to note that the first four indicators are common across all grade levels kindergarten through 12th grade. Alcohol and other drug issues typically do not occur with the same frequency in grades K through 5 as they do in grades 6 through 12. The data is not separated into referral reasons by grade level (data is not available).   Actual percentages for alcohol and other drug referrals may be much higher when only grades 6 through 12 are reported. Additionally, referrals for alcohol and other drug issues are most commonly made through policy violations although referrals may be made by concerned staff, parents, friends, or a self-referral.

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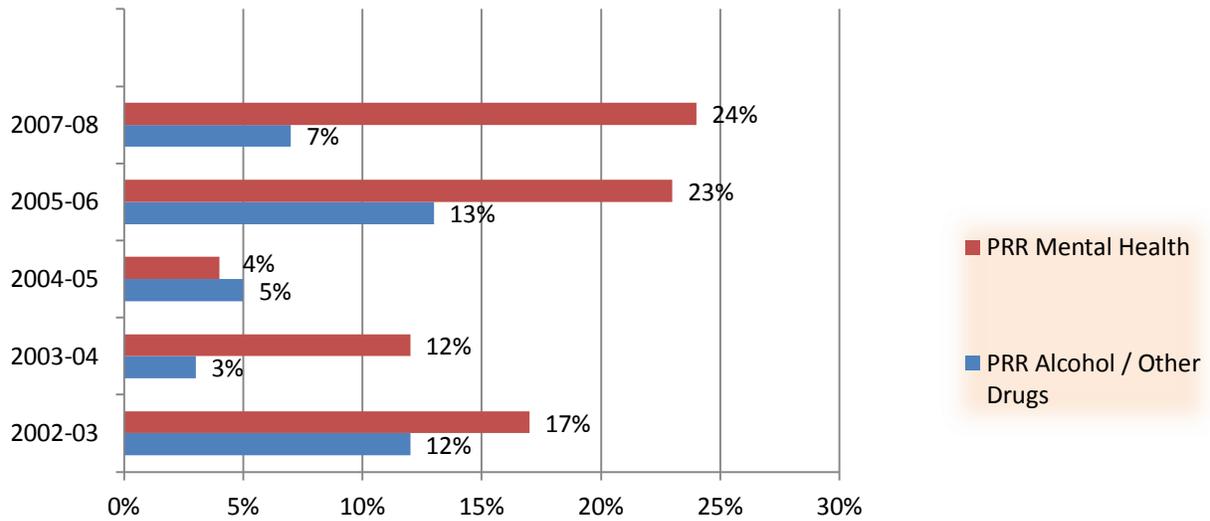
It is important to note that one in four students identified for SAP services is identified because of a mental health issue. It is also helpful to note that the identification of students with alcohol and other drug reasons typically occur as a result of policy violations.