

# **Student Assistance Program**

An Interagency Initiative Administered by the Pennsylvania Departments of Education, Health, and Public Welfare

## **WHAT IS THE STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM?**

Student Assistance Programs (SAP) in Pennsylvania help schools identify students who are experiencing behavior and/or academic difficulties, which pose a barrier to learning and success in school. SAP offers support to those students and their families. This program is a process - not a curriculum or treatment center - that connects programs and services within and across school and community systems to create a network of supports to help students. As a process, SAP identifies students in need of intervention, assesses these students' specific needs and provides them with support and referral to appropriate resources. The overarching goal of this program is to remove barriers to education so that a student may achieve academically. SAP offers support to those students and their families.

The core of the student assistance program is a team of school employees who have received specialized training from a Commonwealth of Pennsylvania approved SAP training provider. This team may include teachers, nurses, counselors, and administrators, and is often called the "core team" or the "SAP team."

One of the most important tasks of a student assistance team is to build a working partnership with families, focusing on students' success as their common goal. In addition, the team may offer student-centered services such as educational support groups, in-school mentoring and aftercare resources. The team may also assist families in identifying options for professional support when the problem is beyond the scope of the school.

Participation in the SAP program is voluntary and is offered as a source of help and support for the student and family. When a student needs assistance outside of the school setting, knowing how and where to find that assistance can be overwhelming. In cases where the problem lies beyond the limits of the school, it is the team's responsibility to inform the parent of the problem affecting the child's performance in school and help the student and his or her family access services and resources within their community.

## **SCHOOLS NEED FAMILIES - FAMILIES NEED SCHOOLS!**

An ideal partnership between the family and SAP team includes:

- A shared goal of helping the student
- Mutual respect
- Appreciation of strengths, ideas, feelings and culture

- Open communication
- Identification of student strengths
- Shared responsibility for follow-through

### **BARRIERS TO LEARNING:**

Some of the barriers to learning students may experience include:

- The use of, or pressure to use, alcohol, tobacco or other drugs
- Depression or anxiety
- Relationship problems
- Emotional disorders
- Aggression toward or from others
- Grief, due to separation or death
- Disruptive life changes
- Violence or safety concerns
- Attendance
- Low self-esteem
- Low community attachment

### **FAMILIES AND STUDENT ASSISTANCE - HOW DOES IT WORK?**

There are several basic steps a student assistance team takes to build an effective partnership with families. The student assistance team contacts the family as soon as they receive information indicating that school performance is being affected. The first contact is often made by phone, then the family is invited to meet with members of the student assistance team to share information, observations, student strengths and common concerns.

A member of the student assistance team may then meet with the student to gather further information. Or, the team and family may meet with the student to discuss the barrier(s) to learning. Next, the core team helps the family learn about options or resources, both in school and out-of-school that may help the student. The family then decides on a plan of action they find most suitable for their child. This plan may or may not include the student assistance team.

Whatever the decision, the family and student assistance team tries to maintain ongoing communication to monitor student progress and success in school.

If the family does not want their child to work with the student assistance team, they are invited to contact the team at any time in the future should the situation or their wishes change.

### **THE FAMILY AND THE STUDENT ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIP:**

The goal of a family/student assistance partnership is to encourage and support student success in school.

The student assistance team tries at all times to form a respectful family/school partnership in order to best work together. The family and school share the common goal of supporting student success.

As in all good partnerships, both parties have rights and responsibilities. The student assistance team provides the family with concrete information regarding observable student behavior in school. The team also offers help in identifying learning barriers and suggests resources and available options. In turn, the family makes decisions for and with their child, utilizing the information provided by the student assistance team.

Through this unique partnership, schools and families work together to encourage and support student success.

### **‘PARENTAL PRINCIPLES’ OF SAP:**

Parents have the right to know:

- About behaviors that affect the education, health or safety of their child.
- Why we are concerned.
- Our expectations of change.
- What will happen if the behavior doesn’t change.
- Options: what they can do; what rights the student has; what the school can offer.

### **WARNING SIGNS:**

If you are concerned about your child’s academic success and have observed any of these “red flags” contact your SAP team.

- Negative change in school performance.
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities.
- Marked changes in sleeping and/or eating habits.
- Prolonged negative mood and attitude.
- Self-injury or destructive behavior.
- Frequent outbursts of anger, aggression.
- Threats or attempts to run away.
- Opposition to authority.
- Excessive arguing with adults.
- Active defiance and refusal to comply with adult requests and rules.
- Deliberate attempts to annoy or upset people.
- Blaming others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior.
- Problems with friends and/or peers at school.
- Frequent sadness, tearfulness, crying.
- Hopelessness.
- Decreased interest in activities; or inability to enjoy previously favorite activities.
- Persistent boredom; low energy.
- Social isolation, poor communication.

- Increased irritability, anger, or hostility.
- Frequent complaints of physical illnesses such as headaches and stomachaches.
- Frequent unexcused school absences or tardies.
- Poor concentration.
- Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behavior.
- Withdrawal from friends, family, and regular activities.
- Unusual neglect of personal appearance.
- Persistent boredom, difficulty concentrating, or a decline in the quality of schoolwork.
- Problems with the law.
- Acts of vandalism or theft.

**HOW TO REFER:**

**Contact:**

**Mrs. Barbara Martz**  
**724-775-7400**  
**[bmartz@freedom.k12.pa.us](mailto:bmartz@freedom.k12.pa.us)**