

Guidelines and Tips for Starting a Student Assistance Program

The National Student Assistance Association recommends the following nine components as minimum foundation for establishing a SAP on a school campus that helps to “reduce barriers to learning and ensure student success in safe, disciplined and drug-free schools and communities.” (<http://www.nasap.org/sapcomponents.html>) In addition, tips from successful SAP practitioners help orient your SAP development process in the right direction.

- ❶ **School Board Policy.** A school board policy may define the SAP process of referral and confidentiality, the relationship between the SAP and other co-curricular activities, and the involvement of law enforcement, mental health professionals, and other associated community agencies and organizations. [Another resource to help shape a school board policy for your site is “Guidelines for Shaping School Board Policy,” available at <http://www.prevention.org/SAC/Constructs.asp#board>.]

★Practitioner's Tip
When a process is selected and current or new team members are identified and trained, insure their effort is supported by policy and administrative regulations that describe the effort.

★Practitioner's Tip
Although it is called “Student” Assistance, make it clear that supporting classroom teachers, school-site counselors, and site administrators as they identify and refer students is a primary goal, so these staff can focus on their roles more efficiently.

- ❷ **Staff Development** is important to the establishment of a SAP so that all staff and supporting school personnel have program buy-in, and are aligned with the similar goals of improving student’s attendance, academics, and behavior through SAP services.
- ❸ **Program Awareness.** Marketing the SAP’s services and policies to parents, students, and the community will help garner interest, collaboration, and awareness of the resource to help students in need.

- ❹ **Internal Referral Process** is necessary to identify students and refer them to the SAP problem solving and case management team who will link students to the appropriate services and resources they need.

★Practitioner's Tip
Decide which students and/or families are the first to receive SAP support. This could be students suspended for alcohol, tobacco, or other drug offenses, violence-related offences, and other referral processes.

- ❺ **Problem Solving Team and Case Management** to help serve the multifaceted academic, social, and emotional needs of students through “solution-focused strategies.”

★Practitioner's Tip
Keep a history of the process steps taken as you develop and prepare the SAP Team, and track the time spent in trainings, meetings, and with the first students/families served.

- ❻ **SAP Evaluation** will enable program planners to continuously reflect and improve upon existing processes, services, and strategies to ensure the optimum effect of SAP resources for students.

- ❼ **Educational Support Groups** are a unique and important component of the SAP for providing support and problem-solving skills to students who are facing a variety of behavioral issues.

★Practitioner's Tip
Unite a cross-section of administration, staff, parents, and students to start or enhance the current SAP process. Collaborative teams may include, but not be limited to, local county offices for AOD prevention and public/private mental health services for children.

- ❽ **Cooperation and Collaboration with Community Agencies** will enhance the SAP provider network, available resources, funding opportunities and, consequently, services to students.

- ❾ **Integration with Other School-Based Programs** will enhance the SAP’s role in the school community, promote an atmosphere of teamwork among program staff, teachers, administrators, and other affiliated persons, and enhance the network of supports available to students.

★Practitioner's Tip
Be direct, honest, and flexible as different people’s visions emerge and obstacles appear; each is an opportunity to strengthen the team’s resolve to support students, families, and staff.