

# SAP GUIDANCE DOCUMENT FOR SCHOOLS

## 1. WHAT IS SAP?

The Student Assistance Program, or SAP, is mandated by the state of Pennsylvania to be in every school. It is a team of school personnel (school counselors, teachers, school nurse, etc.) and a behavioral health community liaison (SAP counselor) working together to identify and address concerns that may be interfering with a student's ability to be successful in school. The SAP team have all received specialized training in providing Student Assistance Program services from the PA Department of Education and are trained to understand issues of mental health and chemical use, abuse, and dependency. The SAP program is a systematic process to identify issues and mobilize resources where the problems are beyond the scope of the school. The goal is for the school to work collaboratively with the student, family and community.

### What is ESAP?

The Elementary Student Assistance Program, or ESAP, is the SAP program provided within elementary schools. It follows the same processes and guidelines as the original SAP program that was implemented at the secondary level. At the elementary level, there is a strong focus on social emotional skills, behavioral concerns and mental health.

### What SAP is **NOT**.

SAP is not a first intervention. It should be utilized after all other school-based interventions have failed.

SAP is not ongoing therapy.

SAP is not a punishment for policy violations.

SAP is not mandatory. (Some exceptions exist in the case of policy violations per district policy).

SAP is not a referral service.

SAP does not replace other school programs (i.e. PBIS, CST, MTSS, Safe to Say, etc.)

SAP is not a crisis service.

### What services does SAP offer?

Short-term problem-solving individual counseling (typically approximately 6 sessions) This is a support service to students including, but not limited to, increasing motivation, goal setting, techniques for managing emotions, and general strategies for school success. These services can be delivered either during the school day, or after, and can be either in-person or virtual. Refer to CSEPA SAP Service Delivery Document for more details.

Psychoeducational group counseling

Behavioral Health Assessments with follow-up recommendations and link to community services

Short classroom instruction for social emotional learning lessons

Technical assistance to schools on various behavioral health topics

Behavioral health awareness and engagement activities

### What does a SAP counselor do?

SAP counselors have four main functions:

- To improve students' engagement in the classroom
- Collaborate with school SAP team
- Provide psychoeducation to students
- Act as a bridge to community resources.

What is the difference between SAP and other programs in the school (PBIS, Child study team etc)?

According to the [June 2017 SAP and PBIS Integration practical Guidance Document](#), both SAP and PBIS

- \* Prevent and address student needs that interfere with learning
- \* Utilize a multi-tiered approach
- \* Engage problem-solving teams
- \* Promote monitoring and mentoring of students
- \* Promote student skill development groups
- \* Use data for decision-making purposes
- \* Monitor student progress and response to intervention(s)
- \* Involve and engage students, families, and communities

The difference between SAP and PBIS is that SAP focuses on community supports integration with schools and identifying student interventions. SAP builds community relationships to help provide a continuum of services for students in schools, including school based mental health as well as drug and alcohol services that are designed to connect all child and family systems. PBIS focuses on positive behavioral interventions that support and foster policies and organizational culture to promote desired student behaviors.

The **IDEAL** is that these two systems are fully integrated. When that is the case, the result is that PBIS is strengthened by the policies and procedures of SAP, and appropriate students receive the additional supports SAP provides. More information on how to integrate can be found within the [integration document](#).

What is the difference between a SAP counselor and the School Counselor?

School counselors are the school's primary resource and intervention for a student. They are employed by the district and utilize and facilitate all school related interventions, including academic supports, and are responsible for all college related processes. A SAP recommendation is made for those students who continue to struggle, and have not responded positively to school interventions. SAP works to mobilize resources beyond the scope of the school.

## **2. HOW TO MAKE A REFERRAL TO SAP**

Who can make a referral? Are they anonymous?

Anyone can make a referral to SAP when they are concerned about a student's behavior, including school staff, classmates, friends, family, community members, or the students themselves. Referrals to SAP may be anonymous. Contact a school counselor or a member of the SAP team to make a referral.

## **3. REASONS TO REFER TO SAP**

Why would I refer?

There are a variety of reasons why a student would be referred to the SAP program. Students can be referred due to a drop in grades, change in appearance, loss of interest in activities, disciplinary issues, talk of drug and alcohol use, depressed mood, uncontrolled anger, and other concerns that someone may have about a student.

Examples of behavioral concerns that may result in a SAP referral:

General Classroom Behaviors

- Overly negative of self or others
- Frequent perfectionism
- Low self-esteem

- Frequent attention seeking (class clown)
- Withdrawn or overbearing with peers
- Absenteeism
- Refusal to attempt the schoolwork
- Anxiety regarding school or COVID
- Sudden unexplained change in academic performance

#### Behaviors suggesting potential substance use/abuse

- Not accepted by peers in classroom
- Evidence of bullying (victim or aggressor)
- Difficulty controlling emotions
- Poor conflict resolution skills
- Frequently disorganized
- Inattentiveness
- Compulsive blaming
- Frequent trips to the nurse
- Antisocial behaviors
- Frequently tired in class
- Evidence of depression
- Requires frequent redirection
- Deterioration of relationships with family members
- Change in friends
- Change in eating habits
- Change in sleeping habits
- Excessive need for privacy
- Significant change in personal grooming or attire
- Poor school attendance
- Declining grades
- Loss of interest in hobbies, sports and other favorite activities
- Unexplained moodiness or anger
- Unusual fatigue or bursts of energy
- Unusual spending habits or having unexplained money
- Possessing drug paraphernalia
- Glassy bloodshot eyes
- Frequent cold like symptoms

#### Virtual Instruction behaviors of concern

- Does not regularly participate in flex/asynchronous time
- Does not seek additional help during flex/asynchronous time (and should)
- Does not reply when called upon
- Does not appear to be engaged in the lesson
- Is frequently late to class or attendance throughout the class is sporadic
- Seems distracted by home environment during class
- Makes inappropriate use of the chat room
- Expresses excessive frustration with distance-learning
- Does not participate in breakout room group activities
- Is frequently unprepared for class

#### **4. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A STUDENT IS REFERRED TO SAP?**

The following outlines the best practice guidelines for following the SAP process, as developed by the Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services:

*Step 1-* Concerns are observed by referral source.

*Step 2-* Referral is made to the team.

*Step 2a* – Team decides whether to offer additional interventions, or proceed with formal SAP process.

*Step 3-* Assign a Case Manager.

*Step 4* – Send out Student Assistance Behavior Checklist or Elementary Student Assistance Student Information/Behavior Observation forms to school staff (teachers, administration, nurse, counselor, school-based probation). Compile results of data collection.

*Step 5-* Review data at team meeting. Determine if the data supports proceeding with SAP process (where substance use/abuse or mental health concerns are posing a barrier to a student's education). If so, contact parent(s). Explain SAP, obtain permission to proceed with SAP, including permission to conduct the Student Assessment/Interview, and send Student Assistance Program Parent/Guardian Consent form and SAP brochure. Also send parent checklist for parent(s) to complete. Schedule a date/time for an intervention (either virtual or in-person).

*Step 6-* If parent(s) have consented and an intervention is scheduled, develop a plan for the intervention (who will attend, sharing of collected data, including Student Assessment, and recommendations).

*Step 7-* If parent(s) or guardian are unable to attend a meeting, send Student Assistance Program Screening Consent form for signature (if an assessment is recommended).

*Step 8* – Following intervention, team reviews the intervention, monitors the student, and provides on-going support to the student and family.

*Step 9* –If parental consent is **NOT** obtained, Respect parent(s)' decision. Leave the door open. Send refusal letter.

Continue to monitor the student.

Provide agency contact with information.

Continue to update parent(s) as needed.

Follow school policy for D/A violations or terroristic threats.

SAP Flow [Chart](#)

#### Are referrals confidential?

The entire SAP process is confidential, with the exceptions noted below. It is completely voluntary -- it may be stopped at any time. The process is designed to support students and families, and is not disciplinary in any way.

A parent may be requested to sign a release to allow school staff to communicate with a SAP counselor about a student who has been referred for services.

Exceptions to confidentiality:

\*If the student is thinking about harming themselves (suicidal ideation)

\*If the student is thinking about harming someone else (homicidal ideation)

\*If someone else is harming the student (abuse)

#### Is there a limit to number of referrals?

No, there is no limit to the number of referrals. Each time a referral is made, the SAP team will discuss the student and potential appropriate interventions.

