

What is a Student Assistance Program?



The National Student Assistance Association along with the New Jersey Association of Student Assistance Professionals define Student Assistance programs as a comprehensive framework for the delivery of K- 12 universal, targeted and selected prevention/intervention strategies and programs. Student Assistance services are designed to reduce risk factors, promote protective factors and increase asset development.

History has long documented the negative impact of individual and community stressors on youth. Young people impacted by individual, family, and community stressors are at greater risk for socio-emotional and behavioral health concerns as well as lowered academic achievement. Student Assistance works toward addressing these factors in the school setting to improve the educational opportunities of all students.

Student Assistance Programs address barriers to learning that impact both the individual student and the school in order to increase student success while improving school climate. SAP staff utilize effective practices, principles, and strategies along with a systems approach to respond to student problems. SAPs partner with parents, students, school resource officers, other school faculty, community coalitions, agencies and services in seeking to remove barriers that impede student success.

A Student Assistance Program utilizes both individual strategies for identified students and environmental approaches to improve the educational opportunity for all students and educators. In an era focusing on educational accountability, schools must think more strategically to assist students in reaching their greatest potential. Student Assistance Programs provide greater opportunities for improvement in student achievement and academic success.

Student Assistance Programs emerged in the 1970's as a way to assist secondary schools in dealing with alcohol and other drug problems. The design was patterned on the successful approach of Employee Assistance Programs. Over the next 30 years, changes evolved to focus Student Assistance Program services on all barriers to learning that impact student success including substance use, mental health issues, violence, as well as a host of other individual and environmental problems that interfere with student achievement. Elementary and middle schools began offering Student Assistance services in the late 1980's.

The Student Assistance process promotes healthy, safe and drug-free life-styles along with strength-based approaches in working with youth. Student Assistance Programs do not provide treatment to students, but rather utilize existing resources within the school to address school-based concerns, and link students and their families with community resources to provide for needs requiring specialized services.¹

¹ Student Assistance Programs - Focusing on Today's Students in Reaching Potential and Achieving Dreams. The National Student Assistance Association, 2005.