What is the Student Assistance Program (SAP)?

The Student Assistance Program is a statewide, evidence-based team approach that helps students overcome non-academic barriers to learning. The barriers may include certain behaviors, mental health issues or drug and alcohol abuse.

At the core of the program is a specially trained team of professionals who can identify the problems, determine whether or not the issues are the responsibility of the school, and make recommendations to assist the student and parent. SAP team members do not diagnose, treat or refer to treatment. They can, however, refer a student to a liaison who may screen or assess the child for community-based services and support.

At Pittsburgh Public Schools, SAP works within the framework of Positive Based Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to address the prevention of problem behavior.

The Student Assistant Program is overseen by the PA Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS), a joint effort by the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Office of Safe Schools, the Department of Drug and Alcohol Program’s Bureau of Treatment, Prevention and Intervention, and the Department of Human Services’ Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

Are You Worried About Your Child?

Are you concerned about your child’s reaction to a recent death or divorce? Are they experiencing bullying or relationship problems? Or has a traumatic event impacted them in some other way? These events may cause inappropriate behavior, and create a barrier to learning. Contact the SAP team if you notice unusual behavior in your child.
How Does the Student Assistance Program Work?

Participation in SAP is completely voluntary. There are four phases in the process, specifically:

Referral: Anyone, including school staff member, friend or community member can refer a student to SAP when they are concerned about his or her behavior. Students themselves can go directly to the SAP team to ask for help. The SAP team contacts the parent or guardian for permission to enroll the child in SAP. They will not proceed unless they have your permission.

Team Planning: The SAP team gathers objective information about the student’s performance in school from all school personnel who have contact with the student. The team meets with the parent or guardian to discuss the data collected and also meets with the student. They will work with you to develop a plan of action that includes strategies for removing barriers to help your child achieve success in school.

Intervention and Recommendations: The plan is put into action. The team assists in linking the student to in-school and/or community-based services and activities. If necessary, the team will recommend a drug and alcohol or mental health screening or assessment.

Support and Follow-Up: The SAP team continues to work with and support the student and their family. Follow-up includes monitoring, mentoring and motivating for academic success.

Parents Play an Important Role

You have the right to be involved in the SAP process and have full access to all of your child’s school records. Even more importantly, when you collaborate with the SAP team in the decision-making process, you greatly impact your child’s education and the successful elimination of the barriers to learning.