

## **Student Assistance Program (SAP) in California**

**What is SAP?** Student Assistance Programs (SAPs) evolved from the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) model of the 1960s-1970s. Recognition of the importance of removing all barriers to work performance translated to school policy in the 1980s when SAPs developed in the vein of EAPs. SAPs at first only addressed substance abuse in students, but soon expanded to help address a wide range of issues that impede adolescent academic achievement.

“A Student Assistance Program is a comprehensive school-based program for students (K-12) designed to identify issues, which prevent students from learning and being successful in school. Student Assistance Programs provide education, prevention, early identification, intervention, referral, and support groups for students. They foster risk reduction and positive asset development and work to provide a safe, alcohol and drug-free environment. SAPs provide a safe place in which students are free to express their feelings and concerns as they develop positive relationships with peers and adults and acquire knowledge, skills and attitude development leading to student success in the school setting.” (Source: Help is Down the Hall: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration). Refer to CDE for more details <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/at/sap.asp>.

**SAP Partnerships:** SAP is a prevention strategy with the student/family as the first partner. With fidelity to the model, SAP can help the student/family navigate their education safely and successfully. This is why multiple departments like Justice, Education, Mental and Behavioral Health have all funded SAP. Risk focused funding like tobacco, drug, violence, truancy, attendance and drop out funding uses SAP. SAP is the portal community resources need to be effective in schools.

### **Why implement SAP?**

In 2017-18 school year, California Department of Education DataQuest reports that there were 50,547 Illicit Drug Related suspensions; this represents 14% of all suspensions. There were 1,545 Illicit Drug Related expulsions; this represents 29% of all expulsions. School is the youth’s workplace, yet when this barrier to performance is identified, there is no systematic response to assist the family, to offer a concerned staff or friend a way to help, and to prevent a second suspension. While treatment is funded, SAP prevention is not; the message is clear - you have to get worse to get help. The state tracks violations, but doesn’t collect each district’s required “means of support” so there is no accountability for the prevention services.

### **SAP PREVENTION Potential is Untapped!**

SAP bridges the gap between the prevention for youth at higher risk and the expansion of treatment. When SAP reaches every student who received an alcohol and other drug suspension, CA turns a crisis into an opportunity. Each SAP conversation uncovers youth strengths and aspirations, risks and protective factors, family priorities and needs, and engages their willingness to create their own and access available school/community resources. SAP message is clear: every student/family matters.

### **When SAP is Implemented:**

- Families feel supported; they are not alone.
- Students learn their schools, peers, and community care about more than grades.
- Staff use the referral process to identify students early and team up with SAP to support them.
- Administrators use policy to insure equal access for students as SAP holds them accountable.
- Communities know the prevention provided prepares the employees they want.
- Government does its duty to help youth get through school safely and successfully by preventing and reducing substance use, and improve school retention and performance.