History of
Elementary Student Assistance Programs
in Pennsylvania

In 1988, after implementing secondary SAP for four years, the Pennsylvania Department of Education provided a pilot training for the Elementary Student Assistance Program (ESAP). Five school districts that had developed secondary Student Assistance Programs were selected as pilot districts. Those districts were Neshaminy School District, Bensalem Township School District, Lancaster School District, Pittsburgh School District, and Oswayo Valley School District. The first elementary SAP training sponsored by the Commonwealth was held in October and December 1988. Each of the five districts sent a core team to the training session consisting of one central office representative, one building administrator, three other team members (teachers, counselors, nurses), and county drug and alcohol ad hoc member/consultant. At the conclusion of the training, the four core teams returned to their districts and began to implement ESAP in their schools.

Initial evaluative data (Monteith and Manning, 1990) suggested that the ESAP concept was worthy of expanding throughout the state. Data consisted of anecdotal information from school staff and year-end statistics on the number of students that received services through ESAP.

Concurrently, the Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education was working on a project that identified students that needed additional services but were not appropriate for Special Education. This program was called the Instructional Support Team (IST) Program. Because both ESAP and IST identified many of the same students in need of additional services and the identification process using a core team model was identical, the Commonwealth determined that these two initiatives would be combined and implemented as one program.

Therefore, in 1990, the Department of Education instituted the Instructional Support Team (IST) process with Elementary SAP becoming one of the five components of the program. The core team model consisted of the school administrator, guidance counselor, Instructional Support Team teacher, the classroom teacher, and the student's parent(s). All school districts were required to implement the IST process by 1995.

Department of Education staff conducted trainings in the five components of IST: collaborative consultation, curriculum-based assessment, instructional adaptation, behavior management, and elementary student assistance. The IST process consisted of assessment, goal setting, strategy selection, implementation, and evaluation. Assessment of the referred child's observable behaviors, academic performance, and life skills would be made. Since the parent(s) took an active role as part of the team, they could also help the team understand any stressors that might be affecting the child. The Department developed a Training of Trainers (TOT) system so that by 1993, all intermediate units became the Elementary SAP trainers.

Since the implementation of IST was completed in 1995-96, PDE became less involved with the direct technical assistance to intermediate units after 1996. Early in 1998, the Department of Education conducted a survey of all Elementary Student Assistance Program intermediate unit trainers. Interview visits were scheduled with all lead trainers during the late winter and early spring of 1998. Interviews were conducted with all twenty-nine intermediate units. Lead trainers and training team members were interviewed about the 1996-97 and 1997-98 trainings including information on numbers of participants, agendas, and materials utilized. In addition, the trainers were asked about their current technical assistance needs. In response to the survey results, the Department determined the need for a seamless training system K-12.

In 1999, the Department of Education offered grants to intermediate units to work with a secondary SAP training provider to incorporate the secondary SAP Training Standards and Competencies into their elementary training models. Twenty-three intermediate units participated in the pilots.

In 2003, the Commonwealth SAP Interagency Committee formed the Elementary SAP Task Force. The directive from the SAP Interagency Committee to the Task Force was to develop an Elementary Student Assistance Program that would produce a seamless K-12 model for the Commonwealth. The Task Force identified the following goals:

• review the documentation from the 1999 pilots
• revise the SAP Basic Education Circular to reflect SAP K-12
• develop an elementary model/process
• develop a program evaluation
• identify the training system and address training issues
• develop a system for providing technical assistance to teams and training providers
• explore funding issues

In Spring 2004, the Task Force administered an Elementary SAP needs assessment to identify the behavioral health needs and barriers that exist at the elementary school level.