

**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE  
Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services**

**STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM  
Minimum Guidelines  
for  
County Mental Health Programs and Liaison Services**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Commonwealth Student Assistance Program (SAP) utilizes a systematic process involving a team composed of professionals from various disciplines within the school and liaisons from community agencies. These selected professionals are trained to identify non-academic barriers to learning, and, in collaboration with families, to strategize for and/or refer identified students for assistance that will enhance their school success. As representatives of the community mental health system, professionally trained liaisons provide consultation to teams and families regarding the need for referral to community-based assessment for mental health problems.

The Guidelines for County Mental Health Programs and Liaison Services were originally developed in 1990 and revised in 1997 and 2002. The guidelines identify roles and responsibilities for schools and the local mental health system involved in the operation of a successful Student Assistance Program to promote effective practices at the local level.

Technical assistance for the implementation of these guidelines is available to individual counties/county-joiners and liaison service providers through PA Network for Student Assistance Program (PNSAS) regional coordinators and the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) field offices listed in the attachment to these guidelines.

**Guidelines for County Mental Health/Mental Retardation (MH/MR) Program  
Administrators for the Implementation of Student Assistance Program Services**

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1. Contract with and monitor one or more local providers for effective delivery of SAP services to Student Assistance Program core teams in the county/ county-joinder as outlined in the guidelines for SAP liaison services.
2. The contract with the providers includes on-site consultation services to SAP teams within the individual county/county-joinder area. Schools without the essential elements of an effective SAP core team may be omitted from liaison services and reported to your PNSAS Regional Coordinator for possible monitoring. (See the

“Student Assistance Program Guidelines for Schools and School Districts”, available on the SAP website [www.sap.state.pa.us](http://www.sap.state.pa.us))

3. The contract will ensure that direction and supervision for the SAP liaison staff is provided by an individual who has training and is knowledgeable of SAP and is capable of providing a local system-wide focus supporting SAP.
4. In addition the contract will ensure that the SAP liaison service provider develops and adheres to the Letters of Agreement they have established between the agency and the school district that they serve.
5. County MH/MR Administrators will ensure a system for regular communication with all stakeholders for Student Assistance Programs at County SAP Coordination Team meetings and/or District Councils. Stakeholders include schools, community child-serving systems, parents, students, and locally based SAP Commonwealth Approved Training Providers (CATS).
6. County MH/MR Administrators will provide information in the areas of local child-serving system resources, how to access resources, and local treatment and continuity of care issues to CAT’s from SAP training occurring for schools in the county/county-joinder area.
7. County MH/MR Administrators will utilize state and county SAP and other relevant data to annually evaluate the efficacy of the local child-serving system with schools, contracted providers, and other stakeholders.
8. County MH/MR Administrators will work collaboratively and participate in a local conflict resolution plan for student assistance services. (See attached Conflict Resolution Process)
9. County MH/MR Administrators will submit reports as required by OMHSAS.

**Guidelines for SAP Liaison Services from the County/Joinder  
MH/MR System to SAP Core Teams**

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1. The contracted provider(s) will ensure appropriate agency personnel that supervise SAP liaisons is knowledgeable about SAP has training in the Student Assistance Program and is capable of providing a local system-wide focus and representation supporting SAP.
2. The contracted provider(s) staff whose role is to function as a liaison for more than one community service system, must have knowledge, skills, and appropriate supervision in each system.
3. Letter of Agreement should be negotiated and signed annually by administrators from the SAP Liaison provider and the school building or school district(s). The letter of Agreement to be implemented outlines the provision of services that will be provided to

the school building/school district and what the agency can expect from the school building/district. A copy of these letters will be forwarded to the county/county joinder MH/MR Administrator.

Note: Where mandatory Medicaid Behavioral Health Managed Care program exists, Letters of Agreement with school districts will include the MA Managed Care program expectations for the county/county joinder.

4. Letters of Agreement will outline the following as applicable:
  - designated contact persons for the school and agency
  - the name of the liaison assigned to each core team
  - the frequency of attendance for liaisons at core team meetings
  - the role of the liaison in the school SAP process
  - referral for assessment procedures
  - consultation/education services
  - school and agency responsibilities and expectations
  - a list of services to be provided and their accompanying cost, if any, to the school
  - emergency crisis assistance/postvention procedures
  - the relationship of all services provided by the agency to the SAP
  - record-keeping requirements
  - a procedure for conflict resolution
  - confidentiality procedures
  
5. Liaisons will receive and maintain student assistance program certification through training provided by a CAT. When schools develop new or additional teams, the liaisons assigned to the new or additional SAP team are encouraged to attend training with the school personnel as determined by the CAT.
  
6. Liaisons will have knowledge of:
  - the local child-serving systems
  - child and adolescent mental health
  - procedures for accessing local resources for students and families
  - the school culture and the SAP-related school policies and procedures for the teams to which they are assigned
  - up-to-date information on Commonwealth school-based student assistance program policies, procedures, and related issues
  - their area of expertise for identification of intervention and treatment needs
  - crisis intervention/postvention procedures  
  - suicide prevention and intervention
  - assessment procedures
  
7. Liaisons will have skills in:

- working with parents, students and school personnel
  - serving as advocates for parents/caregivers and students in the health care system
  - accessing local resources
  - consulting with school and community child-serving professionals
8. Responsibilities for liaisons assigned to SAP core teams include:
- attending core team meetings at least twice per month per team. (Attendance at additional core team meetings is desirable, as schedules permit.)
  - making provisions for consultation between site visits for teams to which they are assigned
  - serving as a member of the school core team as a consultant from their area of expertise
  - consulting with teams for interventions and assisting parents in accessing the appropriate services for assessment of treatment needs
  - participating in team maintenance and program evaluation activities with core team members
  - providing in-service and program updates to teams on emerging SAP issues
  - facilitating and supporting the school-based aftercare plan for students who are returning to school from treatment
  - facilitating and/or assisting when requested with “postvention” efforts in the event of any tragic death including suicide of a student, teacher, or community member that would adversely affect the school community
  - maintaining appropriate data as determined by the county/joinder to assist schools and county/joinder MH/MR Administrators in completing reports as required by funding sources
9. If resources are available and additional services are requested by schools, other appropriate roles for liaisons could include:
- liaison services to Elementary Student Assistance Teams
  - assisting the school with stakeholder in-service (i.e., school board, parents, school staff, community members, etc.)
  - facilitating team maintenance for teams for whom they are not members
  - co-facilitating student education and intervention groups in school
  - participating in interventions with students and parents
  - helping to identify appropriate interventions and actions for students and families
  - linking schools and/or families with community services for emergency crisis assistance when needed
  - consulting with schools around strategies for engaging parents in the SAP process
  - providing follow-up with parents and students through assessment and treatment
  - providing technical assistance for policy development in areas related to their field of expertise for providers, the local child-serving systems, and school
  - consulting with elementary school personnel regarding the needs of students and families for community-based services

- providing site-based student assessments for treatment and/or short-term treatment under the following conditions:
  - a. if liaison is professionally qualified,
  - b. if parental permission has been given,
  - c. if provided in the context of any existing requirements for prior authorization.