

[Presented to the Members of the House of Representatives on
April 19, 1991 in response to Act 211 of 1990]

**PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PLAN FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

Student Assistance Program

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENT:

Act 211 of 1990 (Section 4 (2) (g)) requires that: "By June 1, 1991, the Secretary of Education shall recommend to the General Assembly a plan to require and assist each school district to establish and maintain a program to provide appropriate counseling and support services to students who experience problems related to the use of drugs, alcohol, and dangerous controlled substances."

PROGRAM PROPOSED TO FULFILL THE REQUIREMENT:

Student Assistance Program

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM:

A student assistance program is designed to: 1) identify high risk students who are having school problems due to alcohol or drug use, depression, or other mental health problems; and 2) intervene and refer these students to appropriate community services.

The program utilizes a systematic process by which school personnel can determine which students are having problems and refer them for help. The heart of the program is the Student Assistance Program Core Team, which is a group of school personnel who are specially trained to work with these students.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Student assistance programs are similar in concept to employee assistance programs which have operated for years in business and industry. During the 1984-85 school year, the Department of Education piloted the program in four school districts through a grant from the Department of Health.

During 1986-87, in an attempt to respond to the growing number of adolescent suicides in Pennsylvania, the Office of Mental Health, Department of Welfare, funded the addition of a component on teen suicide prevention and identification of students at risk for suicide or other mental health problems.

State and federal funds were devoted to the program through county providers of mental health and drug and alcohol services. These funds are specifically earmarked for the provision of consultation, assessment, and treatment services to school districts. Community services are the link to resources outside the school setting and are an integral part of successful student assistance programs in the Commonwealth.

TEAM MEMBERSHIP:

A core team is the heart of the student assistance program. The team is typically composed of a central office administrator, a building administrator, a counselor, two teachers, and another staff person such as a nurse, psychologist, social worker, or in-school suspension coordinator. In addition, staff designated by the county mental health and drug/alcohol agencies are assigned to each team to act as liaison between the team and the respective systems.

Members of the team need to have a common base of knowledge regarding student assistance programs in relation to adolescent chemical dependency, suicide, and other mental health concerns. The initial training should deal with at least the following areas: team and program development, chemical dependency and the disease concept, suicide prevention/intervention, symptoms of mental illness, functional and dysfunctional adolescent development, treatment, recovery, continuity of care, action planning and practical simulations. This training is an in-depth five day design requiring that participants attend at least 37 hours of instruction.

SCOPE OF THE PROGRAM:

All students kindergarten through twelfth grades shall have access to the services of a core team trained to offer developmentally appropriate services within the student assistance program.

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION IN ALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

All elementary grades shall implement the student assistance program by integrating the elementary based teams with the instructional support program. Each team shall be composed of at least the building administrator, instructional support teacher, the counselor, and two teachers. Additional members may be added as necessary.

Each team shall attend at-risk strategies training as part of the instructional support training as well as develop a plan for implementation to identify and intervene with those students considered to be at risk of becoming harmfully involved with drugs. Compliance for this program will be included in the validation document completed by the Department of Education within one year of training.

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION IN ALL SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

All secondary buildings must be served by a core team who has been trained by either the Commonwealth or an approved private trainer. The program must be consistent with Commonwealth standards for training and implementation. A formal written agreement must be established between each district and their local mental health and drug/alcohol agency outlining how consultation, assessment, and treatment services will be delivered. A plan must be submitted to the Department of Education indicating full compliance by December, 1991.

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION STAFF COMMITMENTS TO THE PROJECT:

All counties within the Commonwealth are served by the Department of Education Drug and Alcohol Education Specialists. These regional offices provide the following services to school districts:

- 1) Assistance in locating secondary level approved private providers of training.
- 2) Assistance and support in developing county level coordination teams to conduct needs assessments and provide training and technical assistance.
- 3) Provide update training for secondary level approved trainers.
- 4) Establish a peer review system for which districts may volunteer to become involved.
- 5) Provide telephone consultation on an as needed basis.
- 6) Distribute a statewide newsletter to facilitate networking and provide additional resources to all districts and agency providers.

- 7) Publications will be made available on relevant topics to support team initiatives.
- 8) Design and oversee the implementation of the elementary student assistance component of Instructional Support.
- 9) Offer training to the Instructional Support regional consultants to build their capacity to understand and train in this component.
- 10) Assistance will be given to local drug/alcohol and mental health providers to offer effective and efficient services to schools and ultimately their students.
- 11) A liaison function will exist between Education and the Pennsylvania Association for Student Assistance Professionals to facilitate statewide conferences. Currently, the association has some 650 members.

IMPLEMENTING REGULATIONS:

The State Board of Education will revise its regulations for pupil services (22 PA Code, Chapter 7) to include the mandate for training and implementation in all grades.

PROVISION OF SERVICES TO NON-PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

Drug-Free Schools funds are available to all non-public schools. These funds may be used to provide training and follow-up support. Each Intermediate Unit has resources available to provide services to these schools.