



History of the Student Assistance Program (SAP) in Pennsylvania

1984 First SAP training | Pilot begins

The PA Department of Health Office of Drug and Alcohol Programs, later becoming the Department of Drug & Alcohol Programs (DDAP), provided a grant to pilot SAP at the secondary level. The four school districts selected were Neshaminy, East Penn, DuBois Area and General McLane. The first SAP training was in December 1984, and school district teams included one central office representative, one building administrator, three other team members (e.g., teachers, counselors, nurses, etc.) and one drug and alcohol liaison.

1985 SAP expands | Statewide SAP Advisory Committee

Funding was provided to expand SAP to an additional 21 school districts during the 1984-85 school year.

The Statewide SAP Advisory Committee was established through the provision of statewide staff from DDAP, the Department of Public Welfare, later becoming the Department of Human Services Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DHS-OMHSAS), and the Department of Education (PDE), with a goal of providing input on maintaining quality programming and efficient use of funding.

A partnership began with the PA Masonic Youth Foundation to host meetings and training at their facility and begin discussion of a SAP Post-Secondary Scholarship for students who successfully completed the SAP process. These scholarships were later implemented in 1993.

1986 SAP trainer system established | Suicide prevention strategies added to SAP | Data collection begins

The Commonwealth established and began implementing the SAP training system, later becoming the PA Approved SAP Training Providers (PASTPs), to provide consistent and quality training to SAP teams statewide. The training system expanded again in 1996, 1999, and 2004.

During the 1986-87 school year in response to the increasing adolescent suicide rate, DHS-OMHSAS provided for the expansion of the SAP model to include intervention strategies for students at risk of suicide.

SAP liaison services began with DDAP and DHS-OMHSAS funding liaisons in counties with active SAP teams.

Statewide data collection began with the current districts implementing SAP.

1987 Statewide SAP infrastructure established | Training standards established

The PA Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS) was established as the statewide SAP infrastructure, incorporating statewide SAP staff from DDAP, DHS, and PDE, as well as regional coordinators.

Standards for SAP training were developed to ensure quality and consistent training to all SAP teams.

1988 SAP Interagency formed | Elementary SAP implemented

PNSAS formed the SAP Interagency Committee to lead the efforts of PNSAS in overseeing and guiding SAP statewide, collaborating to seek funding, improving SAP training, and meeting the programming needs in Pennsylvania.

The SAP training model was expanded through a pilot involving training for Elementary Student Assistance Program (ESAP). Five school districts that developed secondary SAP teams were selected to pilot ESAP. The five districts selected were Neshaminy, Bensalem Township, Lancaster, Pittsburgh and Oswayo Valley.

1990 Act 211 | SAP and the Instructional Support Team (IST) process

Act 211 of 1990 was enacted, requiring school districts to establish and maintain a K-12 program to provide appropriate counseling and support services to students who experience problems related to the use of drugs, alcohol, and dangerous controlled substances.

PDE instituted the Instructional Support Team (IST) process with ESAP becoming one of the five components of the process. All school districts were required to implement the IST process by 1995.

DDAP and DHS-OMHSAS expand funding for SAP liaison services to include all counties.

SAP in Pennsylvania received the American Medical Association (AMA) National Congress on Adolescent Health's Award for Excellence in Intervention for Coordination of Adolescent Health Services in a State.

A partnership began between SAP and juvenile probation, requiring school-based probation officers to be SAP trained and participate as a member of the SAP team. This partnership expanded in the following decade to include fifty counties.

1991 SAP guidelines | Act 211 | SAP County Coordination

PNSAS issued guidelines on implementation and team operation for SAP teams. The guidelines addressed team composition, common meeting time, in-service/faculty meeting time, school policies, support groups, team maintenance, and the conflict resolution process.

In April 1991, the Secretary of Education named SAP (K-12) to fulfill the requirement of Act 211 to "...identify high risk students who are having problems due to alcohol and drug use, depression, or other mental health problems, and intervene and refer these students to appropriate community services."

PNSAS issued guidelines for the coordination of SAP services through local SAP County Coordination teams. These teams brought together community agencies and local schools to address issues that affected students in their county. The mission of SAP County Coordination teams was to promote quality services to all school districts and communities. Local county coordination teams were responsible for providing leadership, planning, management and implementation of SAP services at the county or county joinder level.

1993 Training of Trainers (TOT) for ESAP teams

A TOT system was established, and all Intermediate Units (IUs) became ESAP trainers.

1997 Basic Education Circular (BEC) | Minimum guidelines for county implementation

PDE issued a Basic Education Circular (BEC) naming the Commonwealth Student Assistance Program (K-12) to fulfill the requirement to identify high risk students, intervene and refer them to appropriate community services. Act 211 of 1990 is covered in BEC 24 P.S. §15-1547.

DHS-OMHSAS issued county Mental Health Administrators guidelines for the implementation of SAP at the county/county joinder level. The guidelines identified roles and responsibilities for schools and the local mental health system.

1998 SAP certificates | Need for K-12 training

PNSAS issued Training Standards and Core Competencies for the Commonwealth SAP Training System. This required training participants to demonstrate site-based competencies before they were issued a training certificate.

A survey was conducted with all the IU ESAP trainers. In response to the survey results, PNSAS determined the need for a seamless K-12 training system.

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), through the Governor's portion of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities state grant, funded an initiative to evaluate SAP in Pennsylvania. This evaluation investigated six areas of SAP and developed a framework to guide future evaluations. The six areas were SAP referral processes, parent consent practices, intervention services, contract provider assessments, school-based probation officers' SAP involvement, SAP improvement and satisfaction.

PNSAS and the PASTPs developed parent involvement training. The training was then offered by PASTPs to IUs to then train their local SAP teams.

1999 Elementary SAP (ESAP)

IUs worked with a secondary SAP training provider to incorporate the secondary SAP Training Standards and Competencies into their ESAP training models. Twenty-three IUs participated in this pilot.

2000 SAP Components Handbook | Updated County Coordination Guidelines

Evaluators funded by PCCD issued the Pennsylvania SAP Components and Indicators Handbook, highlighting the results of the SAP evaluation project. The Handbook included nine essential components for effective SAP Teams: Policy and Procedures, Communications, Referral Mechanisms, Parent Participation, Team Planning, Intervention and Recommendations, Follow-Up and Support, Training, and Outcome Indicators and Evaluation.

Risk and Protective Factors' (resiliency) Training was developed and offered to local SAP teams through the Commonwealth SAP Training Providers and IU contracts. This information was then incorporated into the SAP training model.

PNSAS issued an updated version of the County Coordination Guidelines based on local feedback for county coordination teams to consider as they continued to develop and strengthen their mechanisms for coordinating SAP.

2003 K-12 SAP Training development began | SAP Advisory Council

PNSAS formed the ESAP Task Force to develop a seamless K-12 SAP training model for Pennsylvania.

The SAP Advisory Committee was restructured and reconvened as the SAP Advisory Council. Consisting of twenty-six members, the Advisory Council represented schools, educational associations, districts, parents, agencies, and state departments. The Advisory Council's mission

was to assist the PNSAS in linking and promoting quality mental health and substance use services within the school and community to promote student achievement.

2005 PA School Code

[Chapter 12 of the PA School Code](#) was amended to include planning and provision of Student Assistance Programs for all school entities.

2007 SAP Joint Quarterly Reporting

DHS-OMHSAS developed the SAP Joint Quarterly Reporting System (JQRS). This platform collected the aggregated SAP liaison data from providers and counties.

2012 K-12 SAP training implemented

The K-12 SAP training model was finalized and rolled out statewide with all SAP trainers.

2014 PNSAS website

The PNSAS website was developed and launched to provide resources for SAP teams, liaisons and trainers.

2018-2022 SAP and recent legislation | Training standards | SAP Liaison Annual Reporting

SAP was incorporated into school safety and security legislation including [Act 44 \(2018\)](#), [Act 18 \(2019\)](#), and [Act 55 \(2022\)](#).

PNSAS began efforts to standardize SAP training statewide.

In 2022, the SAP Liaison JQRS was updated and revised to an annual reporting system, referred to as the SAP Liaison Annual Reporting (SLAR).

2024 Standardized SAP training

The standardized SAP K-12 training curriculum was finalized and launched statewide among all PA Approved SAP Training Providers (PASTPs).

2025 Training of Trainers (TOT)

A parallel TOT curriculum was developed and launched for onboarding new SAP trainers to support fidelity to the recently finalized K-12 SAP training.