

PNSAS

PENNSYLVANIA NETWORK for
STUDENT ASSISTANCE SERVICES

Best Practice Guidelines for Drug & Alcohol & Mental Health SAP Liaisons



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Introduction

The Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS) recognizes Student Assistance Program (SAP) liaisons as community-based staff trained to identify barriers to learning and success and to make recommendations to address those barriers. As representatives of the county drug and alcohol and mental health systems, SAP liaisons provide consultation to SAP teams and families. They may conduct screenings/assessments for referred students with potential drug and alcohol and/or mental health related needs. Liaisons may provide a variety of services and supports including linkages to recommended community resources.

These best practice guidelines are applicable to Single County Authorities (SCAs), county mental health (MH) administrators, and providers of liaison services for effective delivery of SAP liaison services. While this document outlines best practices, agencies should reference and follow their respective agency guidelines for the provision of SAP liaison services.

Guidelines for SCAs and County MH Programs

1. Provide or contract with local providers to provide liaison services to SAP teams as outlined in these guidelines.
2. Be knowledgeable about current SAP best practices as provided by PNSAS.
3. Ensure letters of agreement pertaining to the provision of SAP services are executed and in effect.
4. Monitor liaison services funded or provided by the county annually for adherence to SAP best practices and to determine the need for quality improvement.
5. Work in partnership with PNSAS Regional Coordinator for technical assistance, ongoing SAP updates, and SAP maintenance.
6. Utilize state, county, SAP, and other relevant data available for annual planning and program improvement purposes.
7. Submit the [SAP Liaison Annual Report \(SLAR\)](#) by July 31st and all other required reports.

Letters of Agreement

1. Letters of Agreement (LOA) should be negotiated annually and need to be signed by the liaison provider(s), school district representative, and when applicable the SCA and/or MH administrators. A copy of this LOA should be on file with the SCA, county MH office, and shared with the PNSAS Regional Coordinator. Department of Drug & Alcohol Program (DDAP) requirements for SCAs regarding letters of agreement can be found in the [DDAP Prevention Manual](#).
2. The letter of agreement reflects the role and scope of both the agency and school district/LEA related to what each will do over the course of the school year.
3. At a minimum, the letter of agreement should include the following:
 - a. Designated contact person for the school and agency
 - b. Frequency of attendance for liaisons at SAP team meetings
 - c. Role of liaisons in the school SAP process
 - d. Referral procedures including procedures to obtain parent/guardian consent

- e. District/LEA responsibilities and expectations
 - i. Sharing of necessary student information (including summarized behavior checklists, discipline records, nurse, and other relevant data)
 - ii. Provision of a quiet, confidential space free of safety concerns for screening/assessment
 - iii. Access to internet in a private area
 - iv. Participation in County Coordination and/or District Council meetings
- f. List of services to be provided and their accompanying cost, if any, to the school
- g. Record-keeping and file storage requirements
- h. Procedure for conflict resolution
- i. Applicable confidentiality requirements for information gathered by the liaison agency

Guidelines for SAP Liaison Services

Liaison Agency Staffing Requirements

1. The agency/provider shall assign properly credentialed staff to serve as SAP liaison(s) to student assistance teams. When one person functions as a liaison for both the drug and alcohol and mental health service systems, that person should have knowledge, skills, and appropriate supervision in each discipline.
2. Regularly scheduled supervision of the liaisons will be provided by agency/provider staff knowledgeable about SAP in schools and the local service system.
3. Liaisons must complete SAP Training from a PA Approved SAP Training Provider (PASTP) prior to providing SAP Liaison Services and working with SAP teams.

Liaison Responsibilities and Skills

1. Liaison responsibilities should be outlined in the LOA with schools and may include the following:
 - a. Attend SAP team meetings
 - b. Provide screenings and/or conduct level of care assessments for students referred to SAP when appropriately credentialed and trained to do so
 - c. Provide consultation services to SAP teams as requested (e.g., attend meetings with parents/guardians and school staff)
 - d. Maintain an understanding of SAP best practices
 - e. Maintain knowledge of local child-serving systems and community resources available to students and families
 - f. Participate in SAP team maintenance
 - i. A liaison should not facilitate their own team's maintenance and should reach out to their PNSAS Regional Coordinator for assistance identifying a facilitator.
 - g. Maintain data for SAP Liaison Annual Report and other reports as determined by the local SCA, county MH administrator, and/or liaison provider agency
 - h. Assist the schools in the promotion and marketing of SAP
 - i. Assist students referred to SAP and their parents/guardians in the referral to and access of appropriate services
 - j. Plan or participate in County Coordination/District Council meetings

- i. Each SAP County Coordination/District Council may have different expectations for liaisons. It is helpful for liaisons to participate in these meetings. Please follow your agency guidelines for meeting attendance. For more information about County Coordination, visit <https://pnsas.org/About-SAP/SAP-County-Coordination>.
- k. Other prevention, intervention, and response supports that may be implemented in accordance with district/LEA and agency policies and protocols:
 - i. Assist with school in-services (e.g., school board, parents/guardians, school staff, community members, etc.)
 - ii. Support the school in developing/implementing a re-entry plan for students who are returning to school from treatment or out of school placement
 - iii. Support the school with crisis response and/or postvention
 - iv. Facilitate or co-facilitate school-based support/psychoeducational/skill-building groups
 - 1. Best practice is to co-facilitate with school staff. However, agency personnel may run groups without a co-facilitator. If a co-facilitator is not available, a procedure should be developed for when assistance is needed during a group session.
- l. Additional duties as outlined in the LOA
- 2. Liaison skill set *should* include:
 - a. Ability to collaborate with families, students, school personnel, and agency personnel
 - b. Knowledge of local child-serving systems and procedures for accessing local resources including evidence-based programs
 - c. Ability to provide screenings or assessments to identify a student's needs
 - d. Ability to respond appropriately to immediate safety concerns and crisis situations, including risk of suicide, and make connections to appropriate school teams and agency supports
 - e. Training and knowledge of district and agency protocols, including the liaison role in prevention, crisis intervention, and postvention policies
 - f. Training in cultural awareness to enhance work with students and families
 - g. Skills in conflict resolution and problem solving
 - h. Knowledge of current trends (i.e., Drug & Alcohol/MH)
 - i. Knowledge of typical/atypical child/adolescent behavior and risk and protective factors
 - j. Up-to-date knowledge of federal and state laws and regulations, school policies and procedures
 - k. Ability to demonstrate ethical behavior
- 3. The Liaison skill set should align with the services outlined in the LOA and *may* also include:
 - a. Knowledge of mental health disorders and available community services and supports
 - b. Knowledge of substance use disorders and available community services and supports
 - c. Postvention response strategies
 - d. Ability to facilitate school-based support/psychoeducational/skill-building groups
- 4. When there are concerns about adherence to the LOA, team functioning, or SAP best practices, refer to the LOA and conflict resolution process outlined. PNSAS Regional Coordinators can provide technical assistance for best practices and improving team functioning.

Liaison Screening and Assessment

1. Screening is a preliminary process intended to identify potential risk factors and areas of concern. A screening does NOT determine if treatment is needed nor what level of care might be needed. Screening tools are used to detect possible problem areas. The presence of risk factors can indicate the need for more comprehensive assessment or other recommendations.
 - a. Liaison screenings should ask questions about a student's mental health symptoms (e.g., if they have felt depressed, sad or hopeless) and/or substance use. Screening is generally a brief process, and best practice is to use standardized, validated screening tools when possible.
 - b. A screening should only ask enough questions to ascertain that there are indications of a concern with substance use, mental health, or other issues. In-depth questions that will assist with identifying the level of care needed should be limited to assessments. This should be developed in consultation with the county SCA and MH offices.
2. A more comprehensive or in-depth evaluation is an assessment. Assessment determines if treatment is needed and if so, the level of care. Best practice is for assessment tools to be standardized and validated. Drug and alcohol assessment involves the application of the ASAM criteria in making level of care determinations.
3. The county contract determines whether the SAP liaison will complete a screening, assessment, both or neither. Depending on this contract, the liaison may conduct the screening only and refer the student for assessment to another agency.
4. Prior to a screening and/or assessment, the liaison must ensure the student's parent/legal guardian has signed a school SAP consent, as well as a consent for screening and/or assessment (depending on services offered by liaison). A liaison should not meet with a student without written parent/guardian consent for screening and/or assessment. However, the following circumstances may apply:
 - a. Non-custodial caregivers (who do not have legal guardianship, but care for the child) may have educational rights, allowing them to make educational decisions, but not medical decisions. Liaisons should follow their agency policy on parent/guardian permission to determine if the signature by the non-custodial caregiver is acceptable.
 - b. If a student is over age 18, refer to the district policy on obtaining consent for the student. Unless legally emancipated, most districts continue to require parent/guardian consent for students over age 18. If legally emancipated, then a copy of the document should be obtained by the school. Liaisons should follow their agency policy on parent/guardian permission.
5. It is important the school and agency both be aware of how parent/guardian permission for screenings or assessments will be obtained. Liaisons need to discuss this with the participating school and outline the procedures in the LOA. It is best practice for parent/guardian consent for screening and/or assessment to be on agency letterhead. In some schools the SAP team case manager is responsible for acquiring the consent and in other schools the liaison may obtain the consent.
 - a. Liaisons can share recommendations from screenings and assessments as follows:
Liaisons can share their recommendations for a student as long as there is an informed, written release signed by parent/guardian (or student in applicable areas below).

- i. If a screening asks about substance use, liaisons should follow their agency policy regarding whether written student consent is needed to share recommendations.
 - ii. In the case of a liaison that completes drug and alcohol assessments, the student must sign the release of information.
 - iii. In the case of a liaison that completes a mental health screening and/or assessment, the parent/guardian must sign the release of information for recommendations to be shared with the SAP team. It is best practice for the student to also provide assent for recommendations to be shared.
 - b. The agency should not provide the school a copy of the completed screening or assessment. However, they can provide a copy of the blank screening/assessment tool at the beginning of the school year.
 - c. It is best practice to share general impressions and recommendations that are limited to the scope of information necessary to support the student's action plan. Information shared by a liaison with a school SAP team becomes part of the school record and is therefore subject to the requirements of Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Parents or eligible students have the right to inspect records and review the student's education records maintained by the school.
 - d. In the event a student discloses threat to self/others, the liaison should follow established school/agency policy for reporting, documentation, and follow up as documented in the LOA.
 - e. Liaisons should consult their agency policies and protocols, and/or their solicitor with additional questions about the sharing of recommendations.
6. It is best practice for SAP liaisons to follow-up with the school SAP team to provide updates and answer questions about the status of any recommendations they made for the student and family. This includes informing the SAP team if a student does not follow through with participation in a screening/assessment or with recommendations from that screening/assessment. Communicating with the SAP team supports the team's ability to monitor and adjust the student's action plan as needed. It also provides the opportunity for the SAP team (e.g., SAP case manager) to follow-up with the student and family to address potential barriers to participating in screening/assessment and/or other liaison recommendations.

Liaison Record Keeping

1. Follow all agency/funding source record-keeping requirements.
2. Screening and assessment records should be kept at the agency in a secure, locked file and should not be kept in a school. Screening and assessment records generated at the school should be transported to the agency as soon as possible. While in transit, all paper records should be kept in a file box, locked in the trunk or in a locked car. There should be restricted access to files per the funding source regulations. Electronic records should also be secured.
3. SAP assessments are maintained in accordance with established policy and procedures for all assessments conducted by the agency. Records must be maintained for a minimum 6 years according to HIPAA or longer if any state requirement exceeds the HIPAA requirement. Assessments are subject to the same records policies regardless of whether conducted in the school or at the agency.

4. SAP Liaison records should include:
 - a. Copy of the school's signed parent/guardian SAP consent
 - b. Signed parent/guardian consent for SAP liaison screening/assessment
 - c. Dates and notes from SAP meetings in which referred student was discussed (e.g., referral reason, status of services, grades, etc.).
 - d. Dates/notes from all parent/guardian and student contacts/attempts
 - e. Screening/assessment
 - f. Recommendations
 - g. Any applicable releases of information
 - h. Monitoring/progress notes or reports
 - i. Any additional documentation required by the agency
5. SAP liaison records may be subject to monitoring by the county/state/other funding source.