Family Engagement in the Student Assistance Program (SAP) Process

This year's SAP articles will focus on the four phases of SAP. The PA Network for Student Assistance Services has updated SAP training. These articles will review essential tasks in each phase and highlight any changes in the new training model. The four phases of SAP are: referral, data collection, action planning, and follow-up.

Family engagement is a cornerstone of the Student Assistance Program (SAP) process, but it becomes especially vital during the data collection phase. This stage lays the groundwork for understanding a student's needs, so incorporating the family's voice ensures a more accurate and comprehensive picture of the student's experiences and challenges.

Remember that families are the experts on their children. They provide insights that are not always visible to educators, such as behaviors at home, previous interventions, and cultural or contextual factors that influence their child. Including families in this phase honors their expertise and reinforces their role as partners in their child's success.

Family engagement starts during data collection by building trust through conversations with the parent/guardian. The initial discussion should focus on building rapport, explaining the SAP process, and gathering information about the child. Remember to use plain language free of jargon. Also, clearly explain why their child was referred, focusing on observable behaviors rather than judgments. Make sure to actively listen to the family's concerns, insights, and potential barriers.

Family input is essential when collecting data, such as input on their perception of academic and behavioral experiences at school. Also, gather their thoughts about data from the behavioral checklists. Ask for additional things such as, health concerns, significant life changes, or cultural factors. Engaging families in these discussions provides a more holistic view of the student's circumstances.

Written consent is required before proceeding with SAP. Think of the parent/guardian conversation as an opportunity to ensure consent and transparency by explaining the importance of their role in shaping recommendations, reinforcing the voluntary and confidential nature of SAP, and clarifying how their input will be used to guide decisions. Demonstrate that the family's input is valued by summarizing key points at the end of the conversation. Highlight strengths and actionable insights they provided. This reinforces the family's role as active contributors to the process and strengthens trust.

While families may initially participate by simply providing requested data, SAP teams should strive for deeper engagement. This means collaborating with families to interpret data, identify root causes of challenges. Work to create solutions by continuing to involve families in the action planning and follow-up processes, inviting families to share their perspective on behavior trends and progress, discussing how school and home strategies can align to support the student.

During the data collection phase, the family's voice can transform the SAP process into a true partnership. By prioritizing trust, transparency, and collaboration, SAP teams can lay a strong foundation for the action planning phase and ensure families feel empowered to support their child's success throughout follow-up.

For additional resources and guidance on family engagement, see the Collaborating with Parents section of the SAP Teams page on the PNSAS website or reach out to your PNSAS Regional Coordinator for assistance.

Announcements

PASAP Conference Registration is Open!

The Pennsylvania Association of Student Assistance Professionals is hosting their annual conference on February 23-25, 2025 in State College. Registration is now open and more information can be found by clicking here.

SAP Retraining & Refresher

PNSAS is pleased to announce that over 1,300 individuals have participated in SAP Retraining & Refresher sessions!

Trainings have been held both statewide and locally. PNSAS staff will be presenting the SAP Retraining & Refresher at the 2025 PASAP Conference on Sunday afternoon (2/23).

If you are interested and were unable to register before sessions closed, please reach out to your Regional Coordinator to inquire about availability of additional sessions.

2025 PSA Contest for Youth Suicide Prevention

Prevent Suicide PA is excited to announce the 13th annual PSA contest for high school students. This is a great opportunity to engage students in a dialogue around suicide prevention, the importance of positive messaging, and communicating effectively.

The 2025 contest ended Friday, December 20th, 2024. School-wide voting will begin on 1/20/25 and runs through 1/27/25. Public voting will then be open from 1/27/25 - 2/17/25. Winners will be announced in early March 2025.

All the winning and honorable mention PSAs from previous years are available for free public use including 2024 winners here. These are great resources to use during Suicide Prevention Month (September) and throughout the year.

New 2023-2024 SAP Infographics Now Available!

The SAP PDE 4092 Infographic data shows SAP teams in PA received 96,518 referrals in 2023-2024. Of those referrals, 33.1% of referrals were at the elementary level, with referrals peaking in 9th grade. The top referral sources reported were Instructional Staff and School Mental Health Professionals. The top referral reasons reported were Externalizing and Internalizing Behaviors.
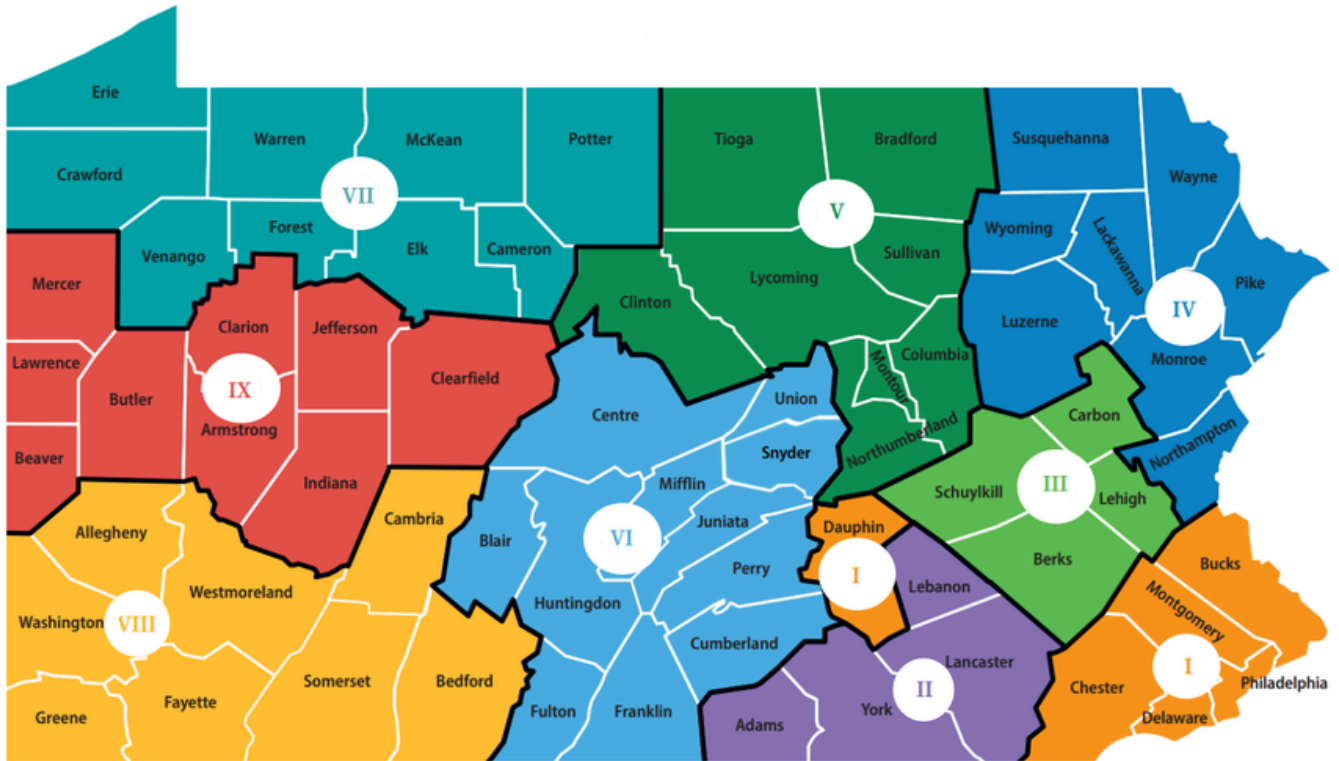
The SAP Liaison Services Infographic data shows liaisons participated in 30,444 SAP team meetings in 2023-2024. A total of 20,462 students were screened or assessed for suicidal ideation. Liaisons completed 15,220 screenings and 17,028 assessments in 2023-2024. Of those completed liaison assessments, 72.5% were Mental Health assessments, 11.5% were Drug & Alcohol assessments, and 16.0% were Co-Occurring Assessments.

Both infographics are located on the PNSAS website at www.pnsas.org/data.

SAP Interagency

Department of Drug & Alcohol Programs (DDAP)

PA Department of Education (PDE)

Department of Human Services (DHS)

Training Opportunities

SAP Training - For upcoming training opportunities, click **here**.

Grants

For open PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) grant opportunities, click **here**.

Region I - **Joseph Loccisano** (717)346-4253, jloccisano@pa.gov
Region II - **Susan Billy** (717)606-1622, susan_billy@iu13.org
Region III - **Christine Joy**(570)544-9131 x1229, joyc@iu29.org
Region IV - **Sue Kuhl** (570)718-4698, skuhl@liu18.org
Region V - **Monica McCarty** (570)323-8561 x1011, mmccarty@iu17.org
Region VI - **Christy Unger** (717)261-7105, c-cunger@pa.gov
Region VII - **Heather Martin-Radock** (814)602-5338, c-hmartinr@pa.gov
Region VIII - **Renee Urick** (412)760-6711, c-reurick@pa.gov
Region IX - **Shannon Mahoney** (724)355-5021, c-shmahone@pa.gov