



Advocating for Student Assistance Program (SAP) Policies and Guidelines

The Purpose of a Student Assistance Program

A Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a comprehensive, school-based framework designed to provide a variety of services, including (1) **build awareness**, (2) **prevention**, (3) **early identification**, (4) **evidence-based intervention**, (5) **referral processes**, and (6) **guided support services** across the multi-tiered spectrum for K-12 students, especially those exposed to environments that put them at-risk.

A SAP's focus is on **supporting** students experiencing non-academic barriers to learning including mental health concerns, behavioral health concerns, substance use, and family and relationship concerns.

Why Develop SAP Policies?

- All schools should implement programs, guidelines, and policies that promote a safe and healthy learning environment.
- Policies help define the school's role in creating a safe, supportive, and healthy learning environment; clarify processes and procedures; and outline caregiver and student rights and responsibilities.
- Strong policies promote SAP as a mechanism to reduce barriers to learning.

Keep it Relevant

Know the needs of your students, staff, families, and community. In your school policy, you should maintain the core SAP district policies and add information pertinent to your schools. Make the policies easily accessible to the community and provide clear language and definitions. Check that policies are comprehensive and regularly enforced.



Strong SAP Policies Include:

- A definition of SAP.
- Information about the internal referral process.
- The rules and limitations of confidentiality.
- Caregiver and family rights.
- How to access information and community resources.
- Recommendations for assisting students and families.
- Creating plans for in-school supports.
- Increasing awareness of issues that may affect students' abilities to learn.
- Descriptions of wellness and prevention policies.



Ohio School Wellness Initiative

Use these resources to help facilitate your policy development.



COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE
Center for School-Based
Mental Health Programs



Recommendations for SAP-Related Policy and Guidelines

Internal Referral Process

The SAP identification and referral process for students with non-academic barriers to learning.

- Recommended components include:
 - Who can complete the referral.
 - Who identifies and refers.
 - Define non-academic barriers to learning.
 - Establish a process for completing and documenting the referral.

Caregiver/Student Rights

Caregiver and student rights and responsibilities.

- Recommended components:
 - Involve family as soon as a concern is noticed.
 - The standards of conduct.
 - When and how caregivers will receive notification that their child was referred to the SAP.
 - Indicate that the SAP is voluntary and outline the consent and follow-up process.
 - Clarify that student assistance services are separate from disciplinary processes.

Recommendations for Assisting Students & Families

Provide a clear definition of SAP.

Outline what the SAP may provide assistance in.

Family role/participation in SAP.

Example of a Clear Definition of SAP

Mid Valley School District's board policy, defines a SAP as "a systematic process using effective and accountable professional techniques to mobilize school resources to remove the barriers to learning and, when the problem is beyond the scope of the school, to assist the [caregiver] and student with information so they may access services within the community."

Example of SAP Assistance

Mid Valley School District outlines the following, "Identifying issues that pose a barrier to a student's learning and/or academic achievement, determining whether or not the identified problem lies within the responsibility of the school, informing the [caregiver] of a problem affecting the student's learning and/or academic achievement, making recommendations to assist the student and the [caregiver], providing information on community resources and options to deal with the problem, establishing links with resources to help resolve the problem, collaborating with the [caregiver] and agency when students are involved in treatment through a community agency, and providing a plan for in-school support services for the student during and after treatment."



Recommendations for SAP-Related Policy and Guidance



Rules & Limitations of Confidentiality

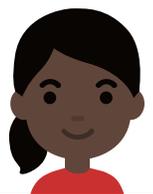
Outlines expectations of confidentiality in relation to the SAP and federal privacy laws and clarifies the limitations of confidentiality. Indicate that the referral source and support services will be kept confidential when possible to the extent authorized by law or who will have access to referral and support details. It is important to check for updates to laws and regularly engage legal counsel to ensure that your process aligns with current guidelines. According to Federal and State law, confidentiality protections do not apply under the following circumstances:

- A caregiver provides written consent to release information to a specific person or agency.
- A court order, with special findings, requires disclosure.
- The disclosure is made in the course of reporting suspected child abuse or neglect as required by state law.
- If a participant is in danger of harming themselves or others. This includes suicidal intent or late stage addiction constituting "imminent harm." Program staff will not disclose that a participant is involved in substance abuse services without written student consent based on Code of Federal Regulations 42.

General Wellness Policies

School policies and procedures should also outline general wellness policies. For instance, policies with supportive discipline practices can facilitate reducing issues of mental, emotional, and behavioral (MEB) health. School policies with punitive measures have shown to increase the risk of MEB health issues. School documents should also outline suicide and threat prevention processes and policies and highlight prevention and early identification initiatives. Consider the following:

- There are varying levels of risk for suicide, therefore, varying types of referrals and interventions.
- All school staff should report students who are believed to be at risk for suicide.
- School environments should support and create goals for nutritious eating, healthy physical activity, and other forms of wellness.



Adapted from these sources:

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What is the Difference Between School Policy and Administrative Guidelines?

School Policy

VS

Administrative Guidelines

A written guideline adopted by the board under which the school district operates. Policy should reflect essential board governance statements, such as broad authorizations of programs and services or outlining the administration's role in implementing these programs.

(School Board Policy Versus Regulation: What's the Difference, 2022)

What

Based on district policies but left to administrative discretion in both design and implementation. Regulations should not be adopted by the board but may be reviewed for compliance with the law and board policy. Examples include school handbooks and procedural guidance.

Regulations are detailed directions developed by the administrations to put policy into practice. They tell how, by whom, where and when things are to be done. Regulations flow from and are supported by policy. *(Board Policies Introduction, 2016)*

School Board Members

- Provide direction for where the district is and where the district hopes to be in the future.
- Build a consensus for the district's educational mission and philosophy.
- Involve appropriate stakeholders in the process.
- Allow district administrators and staff to implement policies through district-level plans and procedures. *(Haycox, 2014)*

Who

Administrators such as:

- **Principals:** establish procedures for conducting activities in their individual schools within the larger framework of district regulations/board policies. *(Board Policy Roles, 2016)*
- **Superintendent:** keep the board informed of needed policy updates, and communicate policies that are in line with board policies. *(Haycox, 2014)*

Policies are principles adopted by the Board to chart courses of action. *(Board Policies Introduction, 2016)*

Policies set goals, resolve issues, define, and align administrative responsibilities, establish oversight and evaluation procedures. *(Haycox, 2014)*

Why

Support and implement the board policy and provides direction for administrative decisions and district procedures. *(Haycox, 2014)*

Adapted from these sources:

Board Policies Introduction. Miamisburg City Schools. (2016, June 28). Retrieved April 19, 2022, <https://miamisburgcityschools.org/schools/kinder/kinder-news/26-district/board-of-education/16-board-policies-introduction>

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