



Effectiveness of Student Assistance Coordinators and Programs

Although SAPs proliferated across the nation in the 1980's and were adopted by individual schools, districts and entire states, few evaluations documenting the results of these programs were ever published. Nevertheless, evaluations of programs that fit a general model of SAP-type programs can be used to provide empirical, if not rigorous, evidence concerning the efficacy of these models in achieving certain outcomes for students served.

Reduction in School Violence and Behavioral Incidents

- According to school personnel, having a SAP counselor was associated with the following:
 - 13 times fewer assaults
 - 7 times fewer threats to staff by students;
 - Half the physical threats to students by other students;
 - Half the violent incidents in schools. (Study 2)
- Nearly 60% of referred students incurred no further disciplinary suspensions after SAP involvement. (Study 1)
- Student Survey results from participating students revealed significant reductions in seven antisocial behaviors including truancy, fighting, and vandalism. (Study 3)

Reduction in Substance Abuse

- Having a SAP team was associated with almost 50% reduction in suspensions for drug use and drug sales by students. (Study 2)
- Based on student response about their own behavior (YRBS data), having a SAP counselor or team was associated with less drinking, use of illicit drugs, and chewing tobacco. (Study 2)

Improvements in School Attendance

- Around two-thirds of the students served by the SAP either improved or stabilized their attendance. (Study 1)
- Nearly half of the student exhibited a decrease in the number of days absent or no change in days absent (Study 4)

Improvements in Academic Performance

- A small sample of middle and high school students who were rated as dependent on alcohol or other drugs and were high level participants in the program achieved a higher grade point average at the end of a second school year. A low participation group with similar use characteristics experienced a decline. (Study 3)
- Four student in five of one school district achieved gains of one year or more in reading. (Study 4)

Increased Access to Services

Across three years, 83 to 90% of students referred to the SAP were linked to a school program and services, with most accessing the recommended service; less than 10% of all students referred to a school program or service refused to participate. (Study 1)

Prevention and Intervention

- First use of substances are approximately grade six or sooner. Prevention and intervention programs are critical at this level. Program services may need to be more intensive and long-term for some students.
- Data underscores need for districts to provide sufficient outreach and educational and support services to parents.
- All districts serving elementary students (k-6) have access to appropriately certified substance awareness coordinators who can develop primary prevention and intervention programs.
- All districts servicing secondary students employ at least one full time, appropriately certified substance awareness coordinator at the district office level. Additionally, other pupil personnel services trained staff capable of providing intervention services should be trained and available in every building serving those secondary students. (Study 4)

The above data, while resulting from varying methodologies portrays a consistent overall picture of apparent positive outcomes for youth in SAP-type programs.

Study 1: Evaluation of Pennsylvania Masonic Model Student Assistance Program

The Masonic Core Team Model SAP began in Pennsylvania in 1984 to address school-based concerns of academics, attendance, health and behaviors of students. A 1999 retrospective study examined three years of SAP services delivered to secondary school students (6th through 12th graders) for process and outcome measures relating to service referral, school attendance and behavioral violations. Overall, the Pennsylvania Retrospective Study findings were positive. Within the limits of this study method, it appears that participation in a SAP contributed to student academic success and achievement.

Study 2: Association of Student Assistance Professionals of Vermont Evaluation

Vermont SAPs are supported through a state program and include Student Assistance Teams or Student Assistance Counselors. This large scale 1995 evaluation involved 103 schools with SAP teams and 26 with both teams and counselors. The evaluation of the Vermont SAPs compared schools with a SAP counselor and/or Student Assistance Team to schools without a counselor and/or team. Data used for the analysis consisted of the Vermont Dept. of Education's Summary report for Act 51 and Comprehensive Health Education for 1994-1995, and the 1995 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey YRBS). While the study design was not optimal, the results of the statewide study suggest positive outcomes for SAP participants.

Study 3: Evaluation of Washington's Prevention and Intervention Services Program

A series of evaluations were conducted for Washington's program, which places intervention specialists into schools to implement comprehensive SAPs that specifically address problems associated with substance use and violence. Statewide studies of the program suggest it has resulted in positive outcomes.

Study 4: The Commissioner's Annual Report to the Governor and Legislature on the Effectiveness of Drug and Alcohol Programs Administered by the Department of Education 1989-1990

As part of the original statute mandating substance awareness programs in New Jersey, a four year survey was conducted on the Substance Awareness Grant Program beginning in 1988. In the 1989-1990 report, recommendations were based on the development and implementation of SAP programs including curriculum, in-service training and the identification and, assessment/referral for services for students and or their families. In their recommendations, the Dept. of Education reported the effectiveness of substance awareness coordinators and the need for substance awareness coordinators to marshal human resources in order to develop districts' capacity to respond to the increasing demand for student services.