

Student Assistance Programs and Staff Development

Education is about teaching a child, not about teaching a subject. For this to be the educator's paradigm, staff development in barriers to learning and other relevant topics becomes a priority.

Staff development goals in relation to Student Assistance Programs focus upon an increase in knowledge and skills that support the SAPs' efforts in improving both the learning environment and services to students. Within that goal is the understanding that it is everyone's responsibility to identify students and document needed information appropriately. Strong staff development from the Student Assistance perspective means equipping staff members to do just that.

The National Student Assistance Association offers the following guideline information in examining staff development related to Student Assistance Programs.

- Staff development should be customized for the culture of the local community, based on a thorough needs assessment, and focus on reducing barriers to learning that effect students' social and academic performance.
- Training programs should be practical, experiential and designed to increase the knowledge and skills necessary to provide educational support groups, agency referrals, mediation, mentoring and researched-based prevention curriculum.
- Staff development should include support for faculty wellness and information about community resources for high-risk staff whose work performance is negatively influenced by personal issues.

SAP and the School Improvement Plan

A common theme with Student Assistance Programs (SAP) throughout the country is the connectedness of SAP and the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Common sense tells us there should be a SAP-SIP connection. The SIP is based upon a gap analysis synthesized from collected data that results in reflective questions. The SAP data on universal, selected and indicated populations is a valuable resource for examining whether all students are receiving the services needed to show progress. The reflective questions posed from the gaps in the SIP become the goals for the coming year. When SAP has been included in the data collection process, a natural integration occurs between SA services and the School Improvement Plan. The best way to assure that happens is for those involved with the SAP to become part of the SIP team.

The School Improvement Plan serves as the framework for professional development for the building. Once again, if Student Assistance personnel or team members have been involved with data collection, reflection, and goal setting, topical instruction on areas relevant to socio-emotional development and other topics relevant to SAP staff development will be a natural inclusion.

Guides for SAP Staff Development

The following may serve as guides in considering your SAPs' staff development needs.

Does SAP staff development:

Utilize a thorough and ongoing needs assessment?

Focus on reducing barriers to learning that affect students' socio emotional and academic development?

Offer non-core team members a baseline training of barriers to learning, identification and referral procedures, and awareness of intervention strategies?

Offer introductory and advanced levels of training for all staff?
Include Student Assistance core team / new member training for all new SAP core team members?
Include an annual baseline SAP training for all new staff members?
Include participation of SAP core team members in an annual maintenance /team building training?
Integrate with district and individual teacher professional development plans?
Include advanced topic training for SAP core team members?
Include support for faculty wellness and information about accessing community resources?

Topical issues that may be considered for staff development include:

- personal and/or family alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use including over the counter and prescription substance abuse
- impact of substance use on brain development and achievement
- truancy
- changing family dynamics
- disordered eating
- self-harming behaviors
- pregnancy/parenting
- anxiety disorders
- personality disorders
- depression and suicide
- incarceration
- post traumatic stress disorder
- enabling behaviors
- process addictions
- domestic violence
- bullying
- intervention strategies
- motivating change
- defusing a crisis
- science-based prevention
- brain development in trauma
- treatment and aftercare needs
- system integration of SAP with other school programs and services
- finding community resources
- integration of life skill development into the curriculum
- stress management strategies for staff and students
- test anxiety
- nutrition and exercise
- walking programs for students and staff
- dealing with the resistant student
- leadership development
- multiple and/or emotional intelligences

Staff Development Delivery

Staff development has the greatest impact when methodologies vary. Adult learning principles should be considered in designing any staff development programs.

Brief fact sheets can be effective tools when not used repeatedly. An assortment with copyright permission can be found at http://www.aacap.org/info_families/index.htm. Other well-documented websites can offer information helpful in increasing knowledge.

Linking staff development with state learning standards may increase stronger transfer of training to skills.

Activity-based learning promotes stronger transfer of information to skill.

Skills development is strongest when skills are practiced during the training.

Local agencies, hospitals and colleges may be able to provide specialists to conduct training sessions as no or low cost.

Technology is an important tool in delivering staff development in today's environment.

Long articles are rarely helpful with staff development.

Visual cues can be mental triggers for remembering important details about technical information. Staff members talented with graphic design can be a vital part of creating informational pieces that increase knowledge.

Smaller study groups often yield the greatest transfer of training.