

VERMONT STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS: AN INTEGRAL PART OF A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL PREVENTION PROGRAM 2007

The Student Assistance Program (SAP) is an evidence-based wellness program that provides substance abuse prevention and intervention services to all students in the school through formal educational presentations and informal SAP interactions with students, staff, teachers, families, and the general school community in order to delay the age of first use of substances. Student assistance programs were modeled after employee assistance programs (EAPs) which were originally created as employers recognized the detrimental effects of substance abuse on their employees and on productivity. Like EAPs, SAP programs provide on-site support for substance use and related problems.

SAPs are designed to address the specific developmental needs of adolescents. Research on children's ability to cope with stress or "resiliency", has found that successful school prevention programs:

- Strengthen the ties between the student or family and the community;
- Teach the students "life" skills such as how to make good decisions; and,
- Set and consistently reinforce expectations, such as school policies.¹

There are 110 Vermont schools that have a substance abuse counselor at least two-days per week (approximately 84% of High Schools, 45% of Middle Schools and 3% of K-6 schools.) About 19% of those schools have full time counselors. SAP counselors and teams identify students with substance use problems, intervene, and when necessary, refer them to community agencies for more specialized or intensive services. Since SAP counselors and teams are continually interacting with students, they can often identify students having problems through direct observation. Students may also be referred to counselors by teachers, parents, peers, or may seek help themselves. The counselors then screen the students and may refer them to local human service agencies for formal assessment and treatment. SAP teams and counselors follow-up with students to ensure they obtain the treatment they need. In summary, SAP counselors and teams provide a broad range of services including but not limited to:

- educational presentations to students and community groups
- work with community resources to develop services for students
- trainings for school staff on how to work with troubled students
- meetings with concerned families
- educational support groups

¹ Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller's

STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ARE REACHING THE RIGHT KIDS IN THE RIGHT PLACES

The SAP program is successfully identifying and targeting high risk youth in our schools.

- Comparison data from the Vermont Statewide Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicates that high school SAP students use tobacco and marijuana at higher rates than the general student population, suggesting that these youth at risk are taking advantage of these services.
- 64% of 12th grade boys and 38% of 12th grade girls had substance use/abuse as an issue when they entered the program.
- 33.2% of high school boys and 22.5% of high school girls had a GPA less than 2.0 ("C") when they entered the program.
- Behavioral problems of students entering the program included high rates of absences, detention, and suspensions with high school boys in the program having higher rates of detention and suspensions than high school girls in the program.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ARE DELIVERING THE NECESSARY SERVICES TO MAINTAIN HEALTHY BEHAVIORS OR TO INTERVENE EARLY

The SAP program provides significant student support services, interventions and when necessary, referrals to community agencies for more specialized and intensive services for those high risk youth.

- The majority of students self-refer into the program. 23.1% of high school boys and 12.5% of high school girls are referred to the program for behavioral issues.
- In the 2005–2006 school year 4,912 students were served by SAP counselors one-on-one or in groups.
- Over the past five years, the program has served 20,602 students grades 6-12 with 114,707 hours of services either one-on-one or in groups.
- SAPs can identify and refer students, as needed, for additional services:
 - For high school boys:
 - 29.2% are referred outside the program for substance abuse
 - 12.8% are referred outside the program for mental health
 - 23% are referred outside the program for other school resources
 - 3.6% are referred outside the program for a physician
 - For high school girls:
 - 19.9% are referred outside the program for substance abuse
 - 18.1% are referred outside the program for mental health
 - 26.2% are referred outside the program for other school resources
 - 6.7% are referred outside the program for a physician

STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ARE CHANGING THE LIVES OF YOUTH

The SAP focus on prevention and early intervention provides students with the necessary supports and tools to make good decisions while setting and reinforcing expectations such as school policies.

- 29% of participating students who used alcohol stopped by the end of the school year.
- 23% of participating students who used tobacco stopped by the end of the school year.
- 28% of participating students who used marijuana stopped by the end of the school year.
- 54% of participating students with a D average improved their grades.
- 52% of participating students with an F average improved their grades.
- Rates of absences, detentions and suspensions all decreased.