**Middle School Student Assistance Program Training Assessment**

by

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Schools have been tasked not only to support students academically but also to provide behavioral and social-emotional support. This study assessed the training component of the Student Assistance Program (SAP), which is a program to support students' mental wellness needs. The study specifically focused on middle schools. The findings of this study were used to analyze the professional development offered to SAP team members who support students. The findings of this study may be relevant to other middle schools for their intervention models for students who are at risk to ensure the staff professional development component of intervention models follows best practices.

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## Dedication and Acknowledgements

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# 1.0 Introduction

Middle school is a transitional time for students due to increased academic rigor, higher expectations, increased work load, transitions between classes, and more opportunities for critical thinking and complex assignments, all of which lay the foundation for a successful high school experience (Johnson & Smith, 2008). Students' lives are impacted by many factors: home context, friends/peers, environment, school, teachers, faith and community organizations, and extracurricular activities. Farmer et al. (2020) noted that, "The development of youth involves continuous transactions of a dynamic system of factors" (p. 4). Educators must be aware of how all of these factors intertwine and impact the child, and we must ensure that wellness and mental health support and programming are offered to all students.

Middle schools need to ensure that they are not only educating the child academically but that they are also educating the child on behaviors, emotions, appropriate social interactions, and mental wellness in order to help children interact with all of the systems impacting them. The most appropriate way to help students to interact with the cascade of systems in which they live is to teach wellness skills (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2016). Specific wellness skills like, emotional regulation, school connectedness, and self-control are linked to children's ability to succeed in school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

The federal government is one source of support for educators' efforts to support student wellness. The Mental Health Services for Students Act of 2020 was passed with guidelines for schools to follow, including school-based mental health programs, trauma awareness, staff training to identify students who may be at risk, positive interventions for students, and strategies to facilitate community partnerships for students and their families (116th Congress, 2019).

One way that Pennsylvania schools support students' mental wellness is with the Student Assistance Program (SAP). SAP is a team approach to help remove barriers to student learning and success, including drug and alcohol usage and mental health distress (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021c). The Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services serves to support the same goals:

> The mission of the Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services is to provide leadership for developing a safe and drug-free environment and mental wellness in schools and communities across the Commonwealth. Barriers to learning will be removed and student academic achievement will be enhanced through collaborative prevention, intervention, and postvention services. (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2021)

Programs like SAP are essential for supporting students' wellness needs. Mental wellness is among the most essential public health issues today (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018). Good mental health impacts the total quality of one's life. It is not just limited to emotional wellbeing; it can impact one's health socially, physically, and economically (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018). Mental wellness is equally important for children and adolescents.

The number of children who are impacted by mental distress has been growing in recent years (Kutash, Duchnowski, & Lynn, 2006). Moon et al. (2017) reported that one in five youth in the United States experience a mental health problem. It is imperative for schools to address any barriers to support that students may need, as one in five children have a diagnosable mental health disorder (American Psychological Association, 2017). Of the children who do experience a mental health disorder, 50 percent of mental health problems begin by age 14 (American Psychological Association, 2017).

Without proper support, mental health needs grow in adulthood. Globally, mental health is one of the leading causes of disabilities (Wainberg et al., 2017). The National Alliance on Mental Illness (2021) has reported that, in the United States, 13 million adults live with a severe mental illness, 48 million adults live with anxiety disorders, 17 million adults live with major depression, 10 million adults live with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, 9 million adults live with post-traumatic stress disorder, 7 million adults live with bipolar disorder, and over 3 million adults live with borderline personality disorder. In Pennsylvania, 1,814,000 adults have a mental health condition, which is approximately 20 percent of the adult population (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2021; United States Census, 2019). Research has shown that unmet mental health problems can present as behaviors that do not follow general societal rules and laws. When looking at juveniles in the justice system, seven out of 10 have a mental health disorder (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2021).

However, what is most concerning is that there are simply not enough resources, globally or nationally, specifically for adolescents who need them. There is much global evidence that mental health treatment opportunities are lacking and that there is a stigma to receiving the mental health support that is available, all of which impedes treatment (Wainberg et al., 2017). Globally, over 70 percent of those who need mental health support lack access to it (Wainberg et al., 2017). Much like a cyclical process, unmet mental health problems of adolescents then become a public health concern as the youth grow older, when resources and programming continue to be lacking (Gronholm, Nye, & Michelson, 2018). In Pennsylvania, 1,660,053 people live in a mental health professional shortage area (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2021). For adolescents, only half with mental health issues receive the necessary support (Moon et al., 2017). Unfortunately, those

adolescents who live in a lower income household may be more prone to a mental health diagnosis and less likely to have seen a doctor or provider for support (Cree et al., 2016).

In order to disrupt this system, schools have been tasked not only to support students academically, but also to provide behavioral and social-emotional support. Schools are a system where mental health support can be and should be accessed for students (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, & Goel, 2011).

## 1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

Westfield Middle School (WMS) has an SAP system in place to support students who are struggling with mental wellness; however, the program has not been compared to best practices nor has it been modified to support changes to students' mental health needs. Unfortunately, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health problems (Bryant-Genevier, Rao, Lopes-Cardozo, Kone, & Rose, 2021). In a check-in survey sent to all district parents in February 2021, 4 percent (n=28) of WMS students' parents responded. While this is a very small sample size, the results were concerning. (It should be noted that there was no baseline data with which to compare the data.) Parents reported that 36 percent (n=10) of their children are avoiding their friends and 46 percent are avoiding family. Over 60 percent (n=17) of responses indicated that the children are having trouble sleeping. For academics, over 92 percent (n=26) reported that their children have trouble concentrating, over 71 percent (n=20) reported that their children have a reduction in work performance, and 46 percent (n=13) of students will not respond to teachers. After gathering the survey responses, the administrative team at WMS contacted all parents who had voiced a concern and shared the support that WMS currently offers, which include the Student

Assistance Program, School Based Mental Health Program, and the Homework Help Program. However, new programming for students based on mental wellness were limited, and there was limited professional development offered to staff on mental health-related topics. Professional development offered to staff included a Trauma Skilled Schools training by the National Dropout Prevention Center, offered in March of 2021, to any interested staff member, as well as staff wellness workshops offered virtually throughout the year.

Students at WMS are experiencing numerous symptoms of stress that the staff have not seen in such volume or extremity before. These stressors are also impacting their academics. When reviewing academics in 2018-19 and 2019-20 for the first and second nine weeks, only three classes had failure rates over 20 percent in both grading periods combined. In the 2020-21 school year, five classes had a failure rate of over 20 percent in the first nine weeks, and nine classes had a failure rate of over 20 percent in the second nine weeks. To combat students' academic struggles, WMS offered a summer school in the summer of 2020-21 focusing on math and English instruction. However, at this time, there has been limited new programming offered to students on mental wellness, and the SAP program has not been benchmarked against a best practice model to ensure fidelity, nor has it been adapted to address the changing needs of students.

It is evident that the mental distress and mental health problems of middle school students are changing and that current school programs at WMS have not been benchmarked against best practices to identify, support, and intervene.

## 1.2 Purpose of this Study

Middle schools need to continuously assess their programming to support students and to ensure that staff are trained to support student needs. This study will benchmark current intervention models against the PA Model, specifically focusing on the training component of student intervention models. The findings of this study will be used to provide professional development offering that increase the knowledge of SAP team members who support students. The findings of this study may be relevant to other middle schools for their intervention models for students who are at risk to ensure the staff professional development component of intervention models follows best practices.

## 2.0 Literature Review

It is evident that the mental distress and mental health problems of middle school students are changing and that current school programs at WMS have not been benchmarked against best practices to identify, support, and intervene. This study will focus on four guiding topics for the Literature Review.

1. Recent Trends in Adolescent Mental Wellness

2. Research Based Programs and Supports for Schools

3. Pennsylvania Model: Student Assistance Program (SAP) Components

4. SAP Student Teacher Relationships

## 2.1 Recent Trends in Adolescent Mental Wellness

The ever-changing landscape of mental disorders provides data for building mental health supports in schools. The most common mental health diagnoses that are seen in students today are mood disorders, like depression, and anxiety disorders, like separation anxiety, specific phobia, and social phobia (De Lijster et al., 2017; Sapthiang, Van Gordon, & Shonin, 2019). The presenting behaviors in the school setting are academic underachievement, delinquent or at-risk behaviors, emotional regulation problems, absenteeism, and low motivation (De Lijster et al., 2017; Sapthiang et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the recent global climate, including the COVID-19 pandemic, has changed the mental health distress and problems of students even further. The COVID-19 pandemic has

caused disruptions in family daily life in health, job security, access to healthcare, food security, and childcare (Patrick et al., 2020). Students are experiencing isolation, including loss of physical connections to extended family, friends, school teachers, peers, and community networks (Loades et al., 2020). Youth are also concerned about negative future outcomes including fear of getting sick and losing family members (Loades et al., 2020). The behavioral symptoms that youth are displaying include generalized anxiety, social anxiety, clinginess, distraction, fear of asking questions about the pandemic, irritability, lowered grades, and risky health behavior (Loades et al., 2020; Moon et al., 2017).

The feeling of loneliness that youth are experiencing is created when they have a desire to have social contact but cannot due to health and safety protocols (Loades et al., 2020). Loades et al. (2020) reported that over one-third of youth reported loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, loneliness can be associated with future mental health disorders for up to nine years after the experience, with the most common association being depression (Loades et al., 2020). Because peer identity and socialization are so important during the middle school years, the lack of connection is certainly alarming (Loades et al., 2020).

To help combat the mental health issues and disorders exacerbated by the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has created numerous pages of resources for adults, students, and teachers in regards to ensuring wellness, promoting healthy choices, and managing stress (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

In a national survey conducted in June 2020, Patrick et al. (2020) reported that since March 2020, 14 percent of parents reported an increase in their children's negative behaviors. During the pandemic, children were isolated from friends, school, and family members in other households. Children experienced multiple educational models, including learning from home, hybrid

education, and full in-person education. The shifting models caused disruptions in their traditional routines, which can be incredibly damaging to students, especially those who may already have mental health needs (Patrick et al., 2020). Additionally, correlations are noted in one in 10 families; when a child's negative behaviors increased, the parents' mental health decreased (Patrick et al., 2020). Unfortunately, when individuals are in a state of long-term stress, the risk of long-term anxiety and depression increases (Wu et al., 2020). Accompanying these disruptions are strong stress responses and an increase in mental health distress, problems, and disorders (Wu et al., 2020). As the health and safety protocols of quarantine, isolation, and closure of activities and non-essential buildings were enacted to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, these changes created feelings of loneliness, economic distress, and psychological or mental health concerns; this is especially true for families who were already living in poverty and then lost jobs (Patrick et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has also increased food insecurity; almost one in 10 families have reported food insecurity (Patrick et al., 2020).

## 2.2 Research-Based Programs and Supports for Schools

The human capital in the school (staff) is an essential factor for supporting students. In the most productive programs, professional development on mental wellness, behavior management techniques, social skills instruction, and the symptoms and signs of mental health issues and disorders is needed. Additionally, training is needed on possible interventions, a skilled and competent leader is needed to guide the programming, and the infrastructure of the programming must be sustainable (Moon et al., 2017).

Early systems for identification and interventions for high-risk students are imperative to support students in both a traditional year and in a year with more complexity, like that experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic (American Academy of Pediatrics & American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2020; Johnson & Smith, 2008). While studies have shown that teaching youth positive coping skills before an emergency can enable someone to react differently in mental distress or a mental health problem during an emergency, the school system must now look forward to how to support students who have already experienced the trauma (Liang et al., 2020).

When schools were re-opening after COVID-19 closures, the American Academy of Pediatrics & American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2020) recommended optimizing social interactions when in-person education is not possible; to adapt and provide additional resources for students with special needs; to assess and address mental wellness of students, staff, and families at home; to ensure equity in equipment and services for students; and to offer financial support to families and schools.

Loades et al. (2020) reported that schools should provide one focused and targeted program as opposed to having many small pockets of non-connected programs when combating symptoms of isolation by maintaining social networks, providing experiences for social rewards, and creating opportunities for a sense of belonging in the family, the school, and the community.

There is not much research about effective student mental health supports, specifically at the middle school level, that do not rely on research that takes place in clinical settings (Gronholm et al., 2018). Thus, there is a disconnect between practices that are successful in the clinical setting and practices that are effective in another context, like a school (Reinke et al., 2011). Consequently, middle schools have modeled much of their support on elementary programming. However, when

creating support, middle schools need to be aware of the social dynamics of students at this age level, and the potential impact that stigma of a mental health issue or mental health support could have on the child and the interventions provided (Gronholm et al., 2018). Three programs that middle schools may use are Multi-Tiered Intervention Framework, Student StudyTeams, and Tiered Systems of Support.

**2.2.1 Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Intervention Framework**

Fabiano and Evans (2019) argued that a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) intervention framework could be a starting point for schools to address behavioral, emotional, and social concerns. A well created MTSS program supports wellness and prevention, universal screenings for academics, and deploying and monitoring interventions (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollitt, 2013).

In an MTSS System, there are traditionally three tiers. Tier 1 includes universal supports that all students receive; an example would be traditional instruction in which 80 percent of students can find success when explicitly taught the behavioral expectations (August, Piehler, & Miller, 2018; Fabiano & Evans, 2019). Tier 2 supports are targeted for at-risk students who need remediation on a skill and usually occur in a small group setting. Examples of Tier 2 supports could be social skills instruction, behavior contacts, or check in/check out processes (August et al., 2018; Fabiano & Evans, 2019). Tier 3 supports are targeted for students with identified behavioral risks or concerns (Fabiano & Evans, 2019). Examples of Tier 3 support could be functional behavior assessments, behavioral intervention plans, wrap-around services, one-on-one support, or special education referrals (August et al., 2018; Lane et al., 2014). In a traditional MTSS program, there are four stages: identify the need, analyze the need, intervene, and evaluate the

intervention (August et al., 2018). Fabiano and Evans (2019) recommended that schools identify the needs of students, create and implement interventions, and allocate resources appropriately across the tiers.

In MTSS, there are requirements for both students and staff. Students should have access to counselors, school resources, and community resources. Staff should have appropriate professional development, time for planning and problem solving, and access to appropriate data. School and district leaders should recognize the importance of school culture and promote community partnerships, including with agencies, children and youth, school-based mental health programs, and local law enforcement (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollitt, 2013).

### 2.2.2 Student Study Teams

Johnson and Smith (2008) noted that interventions should be connected. While their research focuses primarily on academic supports, the concept is that it should coordinate across classrooms and be evidence-based as appropriate and effective. They recommended an alternative approach to interventions to include a problem-solving model, also called student study teams, through which teams collect and analyze data and then develop plans based on the individual needs of the student. In this model, there should be a bank of possible interventions from which to choose (Johnson & Smith, 2008).

### 2.2.3 Tiered System of Adaptive Supports (TSAS)

Farmer et al. (2020) agreed with the need to ensure that all interventions are individualized; however, they also noted that students benefit from concurrent and coordinated interventions that

extend beyond the school. Additionally, because behaviors and social interactions occur in dynamic contexts, a school must take into account broader ecological (or contextual) systems when creating the interventions (Farmer et al., 2020).

## 2.3 Pennsylvania Model: Student Assistance Program (SAP)

One TSAS that schools in Pennsylvania utilize is the Student Assistance Program (SAP). The Pennsylvania Student Assistance Program provides a set of best practice guidelines. Annually, the SAP team is required to evaluate their current system with a fidelity survey. Three categories inform the best practices: the creation of effective policies for the program, an effective referral/communication process, and effective support for students. The SAP team at WMS has not reviewed the SAP system's fidelity to best practices as a team in the past five years.

Each member of the SAP Team must be trained. Team members can include teachers, administrators, guidance office staff, school nurses, and local prevention agency employees. Meetings should occur for 80 minutes a week (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019b). The SAP Program should mobilize in-school and community resources to meet the needs of the students, and parents should be included as an integral part of the programming (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019a).

### 2.3.1 Policies for SAP

The SAP program should be part of every school's policy manual. School board policies should be updated to include SAP in the areas of drug/alcohol support and behavior support (PA

Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019b). However, the creation of a policy is only the start. After the policy has been created, the intent of the program needs to be communicated to students, families, and staff.

The SAP team follows four phases when supporting students: referrals, team planning, intervention and recommendations, and follow-up (Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance & Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support, 2017).

### 2.3.2 Communication and Referral Process

The SAP program should be communicated to all stakeholders, including staff, students, parents, school board, and the community (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019b). Staff should be trained on the SAP referral process yearly so that they understand how they can utilize the program to best meet the needs of students and what supports the program can offer (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019b). Students and parents also need to be informed of what SAP is and how it can help students be successful in the classroom by helping to remove educational barriers (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019b). If parents or students do not understand the program, they may not see the value in it. Additionally, the school board is a key stakeholder who should be advised yearly on SAP activities (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019b). Once a child has been referred to SAP, the team, which includes the school, family, and student, needs to work together to create effective support for the child.

### 2.3.3 Team Planning

Once a child is referred, the SAP team collects data on the student from school records, such as discipline reports, attendance, and student performance/growth data. In addition, data can be gathered from the family and the student directly (Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance & Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support, 2017).

### 2.3.4 Support/Interventions

Student support can occur in a variety of ways. One-on-one or small-group support sessions should be provided during school and by school personnel to ensure that students are taught appropriate behaviors and gain improved self-awareness (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019b). These supports are usually provided by a guidance counselor, school psychologist, or a teacher.

However, students may also require support that is not appropriate or available in the school setting. If this occurs, SAP teams should work with outside agencies and serve as liaisons between the family and the services that are not available in the school setting (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019a). Support will be determined either as in-school or out-of-school based on concerns with health, safety, or welfare of students, and whether the appropriate educational support can be provided in the school setting (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019a). Additionally, some schools work with local agencies so that the school campus is a satellite site for counseling. In this School Based Mental Health platform, certified/licensed counselors employed by an outside agency are given space in the school building to meet and support students (Freeman & Stephan, 2019). While not every SAP Program has this component,

there is growing research on the effectiveness of School Based Mental Health and how partnerships among the school, community, and family can support student growth (Freeman & Stephan, 2019).

### 2.3.5 Follow-Up

The SAP team monitors the student and adjusts the plan as needed. There should be clear entry and exit data points for each student in SAP so the team knows when the child has reached success and can be exited from the SAP program (Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance & Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support, 2017).

### 2.3.6 Program Fidelity

### 2.3.6.1 Student Assistance Program Best Practice Guidelines for Fidelity

In order for an SAP to run appropriately, each year the SAP team members should evaluate the program. Multiple measures are used in order to complete this evaluation; many measures were created by the Pennsylvania-approved SAP Training Provider, the PA Network for Student Assistance Services. The PA Network for Student Assistance Services has two evaluation surveys. The first is the Student Assistance Best Practice Guidelines for Fidelity. A three-point Likert-scale (0 = not currently in place, 1 = we currently have this in place but it needs some work, 2 = we currently have this in place and feel it is working well, 3 = this is an exemplary element in our program) is used for SAP team members to evaluate their implementation of critical elements of an SAP system (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019b). (See Appendix F.) There are 34 questions based on the themes. Most of the 34 questions correspond with the following

themes: collaboration with colleagues, parents, and agencies; continual training and professional development for SAP team members; referral process for students; policies and implementation procedures of SAP; and interventions offered to students.

**2.3.6.2 SAP Members Survey for Improvement of Team Functioning**

The PA Network for Student Assistance Services (2019b) also created an SAP members survey for Improvement of Team Functioning. A six-point Likert-scale is used to assess the functioning of the SAP team (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree somewhat, 5 = strongly agree, 6 = not applicable). The themes of the 23 questions include intervention/prevention; collaboration with colleagues, parents, and agencies; training; policies and implementation procedures of SAP; follow-up; and the referral process for students. These themes are similar to those on the Best Practice for Fidelity Survey. (See Appendix G.)

**2.3.6.3 SAP Team Readiness Checklist**

Since 2017, there has been a lack of guidance on how to incorporate an SAP into a school setting. As a result, the Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance & Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support (2017) created a manual on how to incorporate the traditional SAP program, focusing on mental health and drug and alcohol prevention, with positive behavior support for students. The underlying premise for the manual was that many academic and/or discipline related issues can cause barriers to student learning, and positive behavior support may help to stop the behaviors from escalating (Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance & Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support, 2017).

Once an SAP team is functioning, the team should assess if they are ready to align Positive Behavior Supports with the SAP program. The SAP Team Readiness Checklist is a tool that teams

can utilize to assess readiness of the SAP Team to align with introducing Positive Behavior Supports (Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance & Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support, 2017). (See Appendix H.) The checklist asks the team to answer "yes" or "no" to 22 questions. The survey items note that if the team answers "no" to any of the questions, they should review and discuss the responses before adding any new components to the SAP system currently in place.

### 2.3.6.4 Pennsylvania Student Assistance Program Effectiveness Checklist

The Pennsylvania Student Assistance Program Effectiveness Checklist assesses nine themes in an SAP system: policies/procedures, communications, referrals, parent participation, team planning, intervention, follow-up, training, and evaluation (Fertman et al., 2000). The 46 questions are written with responses on a three-point Likert-scale (1 = never present, 2 = sometimes present, 3 = present all of the time). (See Appendix I.) The Effectiveness Checklist can be used for all stakeholders in the SAP system, not just the SAP team members. However, the rationale for the checklist is the same as that previously mentioned: it is a way to assess the SAP program and fidelity to the essential components of a high functioning SAP program.

### 2.4 SAP Student Teacher Relationships

One of the components of a high-functioning SAP program is the ability for the SAP team members to connect to students or provide connections for students with staff and resources. At WMS, an extra hour a week was added to SAP Team members' weekly schedules in order to provide time to meet with students. However, in order for students to feel comfortable utilizing

the SAP team members, a positive relationship between each student and SAP Team member is essential. Research has proven that student-teacher relationships can positively impact students. Students with these relationships experience greater academic interest, engagement, and motivation than students who do not feel they have these relationships (Prewett, Bergin, & Huang, 2019). Conversely, students who experience conflict, or a negative teacher relationship, tend to continue to have negative teacher relationships and conflicts in the classroom into middle school (Prewett et al., 2019). Students who have mental health problems may externalize their need through negative behaviors. Because it can be challenging for classroom teachers to develop the skill sets to create positive relationships with all students, the members of the SAP team should look to increase opportunities for students to cultivate positive relationships with staff members. Providing additional positive interactions with staff in a school would lead to students feeling supported and their emotional needs being met (Prewett et al., 2019).

Additionally, the benefits of positive student-teacher interactions and relationships can span multiple grade levels, creating positive changes in motivation and behavior in older grade levels as well (Prewett et al., 2019). Students benefit from interactions with teachers who are sensitive and responsive to student needs (Braun, Roeser, Mashburn, & Skinner, 2019). Especially during middle school, when students face so many challenges including increased rigor, academic expectations, social pressures, and mental health distress, positive teacher-student relationships are essential (Duong et al., 2019).

Positive teacher-student relationships (TSR) are imperative for students to adjust at school, function socially, follow behavior expectations, engage in the curriculum, and achieve academically (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). A positive relationship with a teacher can help a child find success managing school demands. The Academic Risk Perspective supports that

minority students, students with learning difficulties, and students with low socioeconomic status who are at risk of failure in school are greatly impacted by a positive TSR in terms of school engagement, more so than students who do not have meet any of the above criteria (Roorda et al., 2011). In secondary schools, students are more impacted by positive TSR helping their engagement, while in the primary level, students are more impacted by negative TSR, or conflict with a teacher, diminishing their engagement (Roorda et al., 2011). When students feel cared for and connected to the school, they are less likely to engage in oppositional and disruptive behaviors, less likely to have unstable emotional well-being, and more likely to demonstrate higher academic achievement (Volungis & Goodman, 2017). Additionally, when students feel connected to school personnel, they are more likely to ask for help with conflict. One approach to ensuring students have positive TSR is to ensure that adults are genuine, empathetic, and nonjudgmental in their interactions. In these interactions, teachers must be aware of their own biases, assumptions, and stereotypes about students (Volungis & Goodman, 2017).

### 2.4.1 COVID-19 Specific Connections with Students

The importance of connecting with students is evident in educational best practices, and the need for it has only heightened with the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2020), when preparing students to return to school after the COVID-19, middle schools should create opportunities for students to reconnect with peers and teachers. Schools should intentionally promote supportive adult-student relationships and a sense of belonging, provide students opportunities to reflect on their own social competencies, and identify students who are struggling (CASEL, 2020).

The importance of relationships after COVID-19 is echoed by Asby et al. (2020), who

argued that schools need to re-establish connection with students and support student mental wellness. School personnel need to build relationships with students so that every student has at least one adult to go to; this is especially important for the already at-risk youth who are part of the SAP program (Asby et al., 2020). The recommendation from the American Academy of Pediatrics (2021) is to start small with a large commitment, with just a few teachers or students at a time focused on relationship building. In order to make this approach sustainable for a larger population of students, schools need to commit to better mental health supports and promotion for students and commit the time and resources required (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021).

Any form of social support for students can impact them positively against negative physical or psychological interactions and can help students with academics, leadership, and adaptability (Demaray & Malecki, 2002). Social support has been found to have an even stronger impact on students at-risk due to learning disabilities and/or divorce (Demaray & Malecki, 2002).

Based on the review of literature, it is apparent that program modification is needed to support students who are at risk, especially those who are experiencing mental health distress. For this study, the school-wide model of the SAP system, which was created and implemented based on the needs of the district, will be compared to best practices of the PA Model of SAP. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the current SAP program using questions focusing on SAP Team member training.

### 2.5 Conclusion

It is evident that the mental distress and mental health problems of middle school students are changing and that current school programs at WMS have not been benchmarked against best

practices to identify, support, and intervene. For this study, the SAP Program will be benchmarked against the PA Model in the area of team member training to ensure that SAP team members have the knowledge to best support students' mental wellness.

## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Research Aims

Based on the review of literature, it is apparent that a program is needed to support students who are at risk, especially those who are experiencing mental health distress, problems, or disorders. At WMS, an SAP system supports students' mental wellness as well as supporting them in making better decisions in regards to drug and alcohol. However, the SAP system is one of the only building-wide programs to support students' mental wellness; there is no MTSS system or PBIS system in place at the middle school. Additionally, the SAP system has not been assessed based on best practices. For this study, the Pennsylvania Model SAP was used as the benchmark for evaluating the SAP program at WMS. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the training component of the current SAP program based on best practices. Based on the evaluation, the researcher provided professional development to the SAP team.

### 3.2 Inquiry Questions

### 3.2.1 Inquiry Questions

The goal of this research was, first, evaluate the teacher professional development/training component of the current SAP program. The participating SAP team members chose the

appropriate training, which was offered to SAP team members. The following inquiry questions guided the study:

1. How well does the SAP team think it is doing in the team planning category of best practices?

2. How will additional training benefit SAP team members' practice in supporting students?

The participants were invited to complete an SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey to assess their current training. They were then invited to participate in reviewing the results and choosing a training on which to focus. A professional development opportunity was provided, and an SAP Training Evaluation Post-Survey was given to participants. At the culmination of the data collection, participants were invited to participate in a focus group session.

**Table 1. Timetable**

| Session | Researcher Activity | Participant Activity | Purpose of Activity |
|---------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Offer the SAP Training Evaluation Survey | Complete the SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey | To collect data on the needed training |
| 2 | Share survey results with SAP team | Review results and choose a training area on which to focus | To share the training data with the SAP Team and choose professional development topics |
| 3 | Offer professional development sessions aligned to SAP team member needs | Participate in professional development | To participate in the professional development session and understand how it relates to the SAP Team members' practice |
| 4 | Offer the SAP Training Evaluation Post-Survey | Complete the SAP Training Evaluation Post-Survey | To collect post data to see if the team responds that the training helped them align to best practices and was helpful for their practice |
| 5 | Focus Group | Respond to Focus Group Questions | To collect data on the professional development session and how it relates to the SAP Team members' practice |

## 3.3 Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in a rural public school district and included 11 members of the Student Assistance Program team, including teachers (n=7), nurse (n=1), guidance counselor (n=1), principal (n=1), and assistant principal (n=1). Of the seven teachers on the SAP team, there was representation of at least one staff member per grade level: grade 5 (n=1), grade 6 (n=1), grade 7 (n=2), grade 8 (n=2), and a related arts teacher who serves multiple grades (n=1).

Prior to joining the SAP team, all members had completed the three-day SAP team training via The Prevention Network. Nine of the 11 current SAP team members have been on the team for longer than five years. Two of the current SAP team members were trained in the 2019-20 school year. All current SAP team members were invited to participate. In the 2021-22 school year, there were three additional teachers (two special education and one emotional support) being trained via the Prevention Network. Based on the timeline of this study, they were invited to participate if their training was complete by the beginning of the research project. The total number of SAP Team members who were invited to participate was 13. Of the 13 SAP Team members, 10 (77 percent) volunteered to participate. Of the ten volunteers, seven (70 percent) participated in the pre-survey and 5 (50 percent) participated in the post-survey and focus group.

It should be noted that the Pennsylvania Department of Education does not identify grade-level specific data in their yearly report after reporting on the students enrolled by grade level. All other data reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Education used in this study represents grades PreK-12 while the specific data provided for WMS represents students in grades 5-8.

The average student enrollment in SAP over the past five years has been 31, which is about 4 percent of the student population (n=750) at Westfield Middle School. In the 2020-21 school year, 35 students were enrolled in the program at WMS, about 5 percent of the student population.

Each year, each district submits an SAP survey to the PA Network for Student Assistance Services Reporting System, which is directed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The state average over the past five years of students in the same grade levels participating in SAP, grades 5-8, is 35 percent; WMS has over 5 percent more student participants in SAP (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021a). WMS percentages of students participating in SAP is the same in grades 5 and 6 as the state average, but slightly higher in grades 7 and 8.

**Table 2. Average Percentage of Grades PreK-12 Students 2015-16 Through 2019-20 (PDE, 2021a)**

|  | WMS Grades PreK-12 (n=75) | County Grades PreK-12 (n=1769) | State Grades PreK-12 (n=78677) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 5 | 5% (n=4) | 5% (n=87) | 5% (3751) |
| Grade 6 | 8% (n=6) | 9% (n=160) | 8% (n=5950) |
| Grade 7 | 12% (n=9) | 12% (n=220) | 11% (n=8649) |
| Grade 8 | 15% (n=12) | 14% (n=240) | 11% (n=8961) |

Of the student enrollment, WMS has over 5 percent more students who receive special education services enrolled in the program than the state average. Compared to the state average, WMS has over 5 percent more students enrolled in the program. Because of the higher numbers, the school decided for 2022 to add three special education teachers to the SAP Team.

**Table 3. Average Percentage of Regular Education and Special Education Students in Grades 5-8 2015-16 Through 2019-20 (PDE, 2021a)**

|  | WMS Grades PreK-12 (n=75) | County Grades PreK-12 (n=1769) | State Grades PreK-12 (n=78677) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Regular Education | 65% (n=49) | 73% (n=1299) | 71% (n=56001) |
| Special Education | 35% (n=26) | 27% (n=470) | 29% (n=22676) |

Once students are referred, the SAP program has different interventions in place, which range from small group meetings to school-based mental health and outside placements for students who have significant struggles. When analyzing the data against what other schools in the

state offer as interventions to SAP participants, it is apparent that WMS offers less support to students in a small group or one-on-one settings (Table 4). The number of in-school support groups over the last five years for WMS students is 8 percent lower than the in-school support groups offered across the state (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021a). The percentage of students who receive one-on-one support with the guidance counselor is almost two times less than what WMS offers compared to the state average over the last five years (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021b). WMS offers 4 percent less than other schools for one-on-one meetings with an SAP team member (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021a). Due to the data showing that the students participating in SAP at WMS participate in fewer one-on-one and small group meetings with SAP Team members, additional SAP meeting time was added to the SAP Team Members' schedules at the start of the 2021-22 school year.

**Table 4. Support Offered for Students 2015-16 Through 2019-20 (PDE, 2021a)**

|  | WMS Grades PreK-12) (n=75) | County Grades PreK-12 (n=1769) | State Grades PreK-12 (n=78676) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Small group meetings for students with school personnel | 1% (n=1) | 1% (n=22) | 9% (n=7293) |
| One-on-one with guidance counselor | 7% (n=5) | 11% (n=193) | 12% (n=9252) |
| One-on-one with SAP Team Member | 6% (n=5) | 17% (n=294) | 10% (n=8143) |

Not only does WMS offer fewer small-group and one-on-one interventions than the state, more WMS students are referred to a crisis clinic for an immediate safety evaluation. The five-year average for SAP students who are sent to a crisis clinic to be assessed for self-harm or harm to others is 4 percent higher for students at WMS than students across the state. These numbers could be higher for many reasons, such as individual school variations for making such referrals. However, it is important to note that WMS does have a higher percentage of students who are referred to a crisis clinic for a safety assessment.

**Table 5. Mental Health and Crisis Needs of Students 2015-16 Through 2019-20 (PDE, 2021a)**

| | WMS Grades PreK-12 (n=75) | County Grades PreK-12 (n=1769) | State Grades PreK-12 (n=78676) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Students Referred to Crisis | 6% (n=5) | 4% (n=67) | 2% (n=1475) |
| Students Who Need Continued Mental Health Support | 13% (n=10) | 12% (n=218) | 9% (n=7021) |
| Students Who Are Recommended to Get an Additional Mental Health Screening | 8% (n=6) | 7% (n=119) | 14% (n=11155) |

While there are supports in the school setting, SAP can refer students to outside support as well. The number of SAP students at WMS who are recommended for additional mental health services, post SAP, has more than doubled over the course of four years (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021a). One of the additional services for WMS students is the school-based mental health program.

WMS is classified as a rural school in Pennsylvania; unfortunately, the mental health supports available to children in rural areas may not be as accessible as those in other areas (Moon et al., 2017). Consequently, Westfield School District has created a partnership with a school-based mental health program. Westfield School District provides a satellite campus for counseling through this program. The school-based mental health program was started in 2017, and there was a provider change in 2020. For the past five years, approximately 15 students were supported by the program each year. In the 2020-21 school year, WMS had 19 students participating, which put the counselors at capacity. Counselors are certified to work with students, and their services can be tied to a child's insurance carrier. In the 2020-21 school year, there were nine additional students who could not be served by the program due to the type of insurance they had and or because the counselors were at capacity. For the students who could not be seen by the school-based program,

the provider offered for students to be seen at their office outside of school; they also provided a list of additional agencies to the families. Due to the gap in service, the provider and the district worked together to find alternate means to support students. In 2021, a grant was received so that students who previously could not be seen via the school based mental health program, could be seen by the counselors at WMS. In the 2021-22 school year, 22 students were supported by the school-based mental health program and an additional 17 students were supported via the grant.

In the 2021-22 school year, an additional counselor was added via the grant; consequently, WMS has two counselors who work with students, in addition to the students who see the counselors in the school based mental health program. In the 2021-22 school year, 26 students worked with the school-based mental health counselors and 37 students worked with counselors via the grant funding. Students who worked with the grant-funded counselors received "brief therapy," help with insurance, and resources for families. However, due to the four- to six- month wait time for appointments with local counselors, 25 of the 37 students received weekly support from the counselors in the grant-funded program.

For our most at-risk students, other agencies can support students in a residential program for anywhere from three to 30 days. In previous years, annually, 1 percent (n=5) or fewer students may have needed these specialized services. In the 2020-21 school year, that percentage almost doubled. Additionally, symptoms related to anxiety disorders increased this year as well. In a school setting where one or two students have presented with vocal or physical tics over the last five years, in 2021, three students' anxiety disorders are presenting as vocal tics.

While WMS offers multiple modes and levels of support for students, the changing needs are creating a gap in what we currently offer versus what students may need. The need for mental health support is seen in the classroom as well. In the 2020-21 school year, approximately 30

percent (n=18) of the WMS staff was surveyed on mental health needs, many of whom were active participants on the SAP team. All of the respondents indicated that mental health distress creates a barrier to student learning to some extent. Eighty-nine percent (n=16) of those surveyed felt that the frequency or intensity of mental health distress in students has increased. Sixty-one percent (n=11) of those surveyed did not feel the mental health supports the school currently offers are very effective for the changing needs we are seeing in students.

At WMS, an extra hour of SAP team time has been added to each SAP team member's weekly schedule to account for student meetings, professional development, and team planning. However, at the time of this study, it was unknown what kind of professional development teachers needed in order to feel more comfortable supporting students in that additional time. The researcher utilized questions modeled after the fidelity questions from the PA Network for Student Assistant Services to identify necessary training for SAP team members. After the survey was completed, the researcher identified and offered professional development opportunities for the participants.

## 3.4 Study Design

During a weekly SAP meeting, the details of the study were presented to participants. A letter was provided to the SAP team members asking them to participate in the study. (See Appendix A for the letter to SAP team members.)

### 3.4.1 SAP Training Evaluation Pre- and Post-Survey

After the SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey was completed, the results of the survey were shared with SAP team members, and team members chose area(s) of training needed. The identified training was then offered to the SAP Team members as a professional development session. At the culmination of the study, the program evaluation survey was completed again. The survey questions were based on the Best Practice Guidelines for Fidelity, Improvement of Team Functioning, and the SAP Team Readiness Checklist. All questions focused on the training of SAP team members and were answered on a five-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree). (See Appendix B and Appendix C for the survey questions.)

Four evaluation sources are frequently discussed in the literature, three of which were used to develop the survey for this study. The Student Assistance Program Best Practice Guidelines for Fidelity addresses SAP team structure, policies, and processes; it is designed to be completed each year by the SAP team. To the researcher's knowledge, a survey has not been completed or reviewed by the team in the past five years. The SAP Members Survey for Improvement of Team Functioning contains four questions related to SAP team training. The Pennsylvania Student Assistance Program Effectiveness Checklist includes a section on assessing the training of the current SAP team. Questions for this study were modeled after all three of these surveys and can be viewed in Table 6.

In addition to questions being modeled after the SAP surveys frequently cited in the literature, the researcher also added five additional questions to the survey, focusing on team members' work with students. (See Appendix D).

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**3.4.2 Focus Groups**

At the start of the second semester, the conclusion of the study, participants engaged in a focus group. The focus group questions focused on how the professional development impacted practice. (See Appendix E for the Focus Group Questions.)

**3.5 Data Analysis**

The SAP Training Evaluation Pre- and Post-Surveys were administered via Qualtrics. The data obtained from the SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey was compiled and shared with staff on a PowerPoint. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages and mean. Once the SAP team reviewed the data, a professional development topic was identified by the SAP team members. The open-ended questions utilized an inductive coding method to categorize the qualitative data into themes as they emerged in the data. The results of the coding process are seen in the 4.6 section of Chapter 4.

The focus groups occurred in person and were transcribed. Each question was pre-coded with a theme: practice, fidelity, and continued needs. The researcher reviewed the narratives from the focus groups to see if the study had impacted SAP Team members' practice, reflected fidelity to the PA SAP Model, and showed continued needs that SAP team members may have. However, as the transcription was analyzed, an inductive coding method was used as new themes emerged in the responses.

## 3.6 Conclusion

This study aided MWS by benchmarking the current SAP system against the PA Model, specifically focusing on the training component of an intervention program. Data were then analyzed in order to address the two inquiry questions: what areas of training do SAP team members need, and how will the identified training benefit SAP team members' practice when supporting students? It is the goal of the researcher to utilize the data to see if additional trainings should be offered to SAP Team members.

## 4.0 Results

The purpose of this study was to complete a needs assessment of the current SAP system against the PA Model, provide professional development based on that needs assessment, and then evaluate the professional development offered. The study used mixed methods to collect and analyze the data. To set the foundation of the study, the quantitative data included WMS, county, and state data from the SAP survey via the PA Network for Student Assistance Services Reporting System. Additional quantitative data included surveys to WMS families and staff members. The final set of data came from transcribed focus group discussions.

## 4.1 SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey

### 4.1.1 Quantitative Data from The SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey

The study used quantitative data on the SAP Training Evaluation Pre- and Post-surveys. The SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey utilized questions based on the surveys below as well as researcher-created questions:

- Improvement of Team Functioning
- Effectiveness Checklist
- Best Practices for Fidelity

The surveys were sent to 76 percent (n=10/13) of SAP Team Members who volunteered to participate. The Pre-Survey was completed by 70 percent (n=7/10) of the volunteers. The Post-

Survey was completed by 50 percent (n=5/10) of the volunteers. The focus group had 50 percent (n=5/10) of volunteers present.

The SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey gathered general information on how the SAP Program was run at WMS and then posed specific questions about training of SAP Team members. The post-survey contained the same questions, with two additional questions, to gauge the influence of the professional development offered to staff. Following the Pre-Survey, the researcher met with the participants, went over the data collected on the Pre-Survey, and, as a team, chose the professional development that was to be offered to the participants.

Below are the responses, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, on a 5-point Likert Scale t. The responses are organized by three categories: Fidelity to PA Model, perceptions/practice of SAP Team Members, and training needs.

### 4.1.1.1 Fidelity to PA Model

Of the SAP Team members who participated in the survey, 100 percent (n=7) agreed to some extent that the SAP Team works closely with other initiatives in the building. Eighty-six percent (n=6) agreed or strongly agreed that there are enough SAP team members on the team and that they use prevention strategies to target groups of at-risk students.

Table 6. Fidelity to PA Model Pre-Survey Questions

| Question | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I work closely with other initiatives/programs in the building | | | | 4 | 3 |
| I feel we have enough team members to manage all of the student referrals | | | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| I use prevention strategies to target subgroups of at-risk students | | | 1 | 5 | 1 |

## 4.1.1.2 Practice/Perceptions

For questions that specifically asked about the perceptions of SAP Team Members, the survey indicated that 75 percent (n=5) of SAP Team members follow up with students on their caseload and feel that their work on the SAP team helps students. Eighty-six percent (n=6) feel that the additional SAP meeting time has been helpful, and 75 percent (n=5) feel that students are engaged during that SAP meeting time. Seventy-five percent (n=5) agreed or strongly agreed that SAP time is used productively.

**Table 7. Practice/Perceptions Pre-Survey Questions**

| Question | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I follow up with students on my caseload to best support them | | | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| I feel the additional SAP time provided this year is beneficial | | | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| I feel my work on the SAP Team helps students | | | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Students seem engaged during our | | | 2 | 5 | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SAP Meeting time | | | | | |
| I feel the SAP Time is used productively | | | 2 | 1 | 4 |

### 4.1.1.3 Training Needs

The training questions on the SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey focused on current training and additional training needed in order to align with SAP best practices. Fifty-seven percent (n=4) of participants did not agree that training is offered, while 100 percent (n=7) of participants agreed that additional training would be beneficial for their practice. For the type of training participants would most like to see, 57 percent (n=4) agreed to some extent that training on building relationships with at-risk students would be beneficial, and 100 percent (n=7) agreed to some extent that training on mental health, the impact of COVID-19, and school-wide interventions would be beneficial.

**Table 8. Training Needs Pre-Survey Questions**

| Question | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am offered training to stay up to date on current issues pertaining to SAP | | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| I think additional training would be beneficial | | | | 2 | 5 |
| I would like additional support on building relationships with at-risk students | | | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| I would like additional training on the mental health needs of students | | | | 2 | 5 |
| I would like additional raining on the impact of COVID-19 on | | | | 4 | 3 |

**Table 8** continued

| students | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would like additional training on school-wide interventions that can be offered to all students. | | | | 3 | 4 |

Also on the SAP Training Evaluation Survey were questions on a 5-point Likert Scale with responses ranging from extremely uncomfortable to extremely comfortable. Fifty-seven percent (n=4) of participants do not feel comfortable helping students and families access services in the community. However, 100 percent (n=7) of participants are comfortable identifying issues that pose a barrier to student learning and addressing issues that impact the safety, health, and welfare of students. For the questions that specifically focused on SAP team members' perceptions, 86 percent (n=6) of participants feel somewhat or extremely comfortable meeting with students on their caseload.

**Table 9. Pre-Survey Additional Questions**

| Question | Extremely Uncomfortable | Somewhat Uncomfortable | Neither Comfortable nor Uncomfortable | Somewhat Comfortable | Extremely Comfortable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel comfortable helping students/families access services in the community | | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| I feel comfortable in identifying issues that pose a barrier to student learning. | | | | 6 | 1 |
| I feel comfortable addressing issues | | | | 5 | 2 |

**Table 9** continued

| affecting the health, safety, and welfare of students. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel comfortable meeting with students on my caseload. | | | 1 | 4 | 2 |

## 4.1.2 Qualitative Data from SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey

The qualitative data was gathered from two questions on the SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey. For the qualitative questions on the Pre-Survey, there were three responses to a question asking with which type of professional development the participants would like to engage. Sixty-seven percent (n=2) of responses asked for mental health, and 33 percent (n=1) of participants requested training on community resources.

### 4.1.2.1 Meeting with SAP Team Participants

After the data was collected from the SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey, the researcher shared the results with the participants via a PowerPoint. The researcher then asked the participants, based on the responses, in which area of professional development the team would like to engage. While there was 100 percent (n=7) agreement at some level to having professional development on training on mental wellness/distress, the impact of COVID-19, and school-wide interventions, the team chose to focus on mental wellness/distress training. The team's rationale was that participants had a higher percentage of responses falling into the category of "strongly agree" on the mental wellness question than the other two training questions. Additionally, 66

percent (n=2) of the responses on the open-ended question about training focused on mental wellness and mental disorders.

## 4.2 Mental Health Literacy Program

Based on the recommendations from a mental health expert, the Learn Mental Health Literacy Program from the University of British Columbia was chosen as the professional development to be offered to participants. The Mental Health Literacy Course was designed for educators in the field to create a foundation of mental health literacy including strategies for use in the educational setting. This particular course stemmed from a national survey which reported that 70% of Canadian teachers recognized a need for additional knowledge surrounding mental health and mental illness (Kutcher et al., 2021). Due to this gap, a team of educators, researchers, and mental health care professionals worked together to develop this resource for educators (Kutcher et al., 2021).

The course consists of seven modules. Each module contains self-assessments, which is to be completed prior to moving on to the next module, and supplementary learning resources, which can be used as an extension of learning (Kutcher et al., 2021). Each module takes approximately 75 minutes to complete, totaling between 8 and 10 hours for the total coursework.

- Module 1: Introduction and Background provides participants the definition of mental health literacy including understanding how to obtain and maintain good mental health, understand and identify mental illness and their treatments, decreasing the stigma of mental illness, and enhancing help-seeking efficacy.

- Module 2: Human Brain Development enhances participants knowledge of the stigma surrounding mental illness and provides strategies that can be used to reduce that stigma.

- Module 3: Human Brain Development helps participants understand the relationship between the brain and how it functions in health and illness.

- Module 4: Understanding Mental Health, Mental Illness and Related Issues in Young People provides information on how mental illness is diagnoses, the common mental illness that affects youth, and provides classroom strategies.

- Module 5: What is Treatment provides information on the purpose of treatment and commonly used treatments for students who have a mental illness.

- Module 6: Seeking Help and Providing Support provides classroom teachers with mental health resources for young people and provides direction on what to do if they feel a student is having a mental health problem or illness.

- Module 7: Caring for Students and Ourselves provides information on types of stress, contextual factors that impact stress responses, and how to apply this information in the classroom setting (The University of British Columbia, 2021).

Module 4: Understanding Mental Health, Mental Illness & Related Issues in Young People, was chosen for the professional development. The selection was made based on the pre survey findings indicating a need for training on mental wellness, mental distress, and mental disorders.

## 4.3 SAP Training Evaluation Post-Survey

The SAP Training Evaluation Post-Survey was given to participants after they completed the professional development module from the University of British Columbia. The Post-Survey

included all of the questions from the pre-survey, plus two additional questions (See Appendix D). Below are the 5-point Likert Scale responses, which range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The responses are organized by three categories: fidelity to best practices, SAP team member perceptions/practice, and training needs.

### 4.3.1 Fidelity to PA Model

Of the SAP Team members who participated in the post-survey, 80 percent (n=4) agreed to some extent that the SAP Team works closely with other initiatives in the building; this was a 20 percent decrease in agreement from the pre-survey. On the post-survey, 80 percent (n=4) indicated that they use prevention strategies to target groups of at-risk students. this was a five percent decrease in agreement from the pre-survey.

**Table 10. Fidelity to PA Model Post-Survey Questions**

| Question | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I work closely with other initiatives/programs in the building | | | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| I feel we have enough team members to manage all of the student referrals | | | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| I use prevention strategies to target subgroups of at-risk students | | | 1 | 4 | |

### 4.3.2 Perceptions/Practice

For questions that asked about the perceptions of SAP Team Members and their practice,

three of the four yielded a pre to post increase. Eighty percent (n=4) on the post-survey agreed that their work on the SAP team helps students, which was a 5 percent increase in agreement from the pre-survey. Similarly, the percentage of participants who feel that additional SAP meeting time effective in the 2021-22 school year has been helpful was 100 percent (n=5) on the post-survey, which was a 15 percent increase in agreement from the pre-survey. The percentage of participants who felt SAP time is used productively was 80 percent (n=4) on the post-survey, which increase 5 percent in agreement from the pre-survey. On the other hand, the perception of engagement of students decreased from pre to post going from 75 percent on the pre-survey to 60 percent (n=3) in the post.

**Table 11. Perceptions/Practice Post-Survey Questions**

| Question | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I follow up with students on my caseload to best support them | | | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| I feel the additional SAP time provided this year is beneficial | | | | 3 | 2 |
| I feel my work on the SAP Team helps students | | | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Students seem engaged during our SAP Meeting time | | | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| I feel the SAP Time is used productively | | | | 2 | 3 |

### 4.3.3 Training Needs

The training questions on the SAP Training Evaluation Post-Survey focused on current training and additional training needed in order to align with SAP best practices. Even after the professional development offered via this study, all SAP Team members who participated in the

pre- and post-surveys continued to agree that additional training would be beneficial for their practice. For the type of training participants would most like to see, the percentage dropped from 57 percent (n=4) in the pre-survey to 40 percent (n=2) in the post-survey on building relationships with at-risk students. Before the professional development offered for this study, 100 percent (n=7) felt to some extent that training on mental health would be beneficial; after the study, only 60 percent (n=3) felt that additional training on mental wellness would be beneficial. The percentage of staff who felt that training on the impact of COVID-19 fell from 100 percent (n=7) in the pre-survey to 80 percent (n=4) in the post-survey. The percentage of participants who felt that training on school-wide interventions that can be offered to all stayed at 100 percent in both the pre- and post-surveys (n=7 [pre] and n=5 [post]). One hundred percent (n=5) of participants felt that the professional development chosen was aligned to the groups' needs, and 80 percent (n=4) felt to some extent the training was beneficial for them as SAP Team members.

**Table 12. Training Needs Post-Survey Questions**

| Question | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am offered training to stay up to date on current issues pertaining to SAP | | | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| I think additional training would be beneficial | | | | 3 | 2 |
| I would like additional support on building relationships with at-risk students | | | 3 | 2 | |
| I would like additional training on the mental health needs of students | | | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| I would like additional training on the impact of COVID-19 on students | | | 1 | 2 | 2 |

**Table 12** continued

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would like additional training on school-wide interventions that can be offered to all students. | | | | 2 | 3 |
| I feel the professional development provided was helpful for me as a SAP Team Member. | | | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| I feel the professional development provided was aligned to the groups' needs on the pre-survey | | | | 2 | 3 |

Below are the 5-point Likert Scale responses, ranging from extremely uncomfortable to extremely comfortable on multiple survey questions. The percentage of participants who do not feel comfortable helping students and families access services in the community was 57 percent (n=4) in the pre-survey and 60 percent (n=3) on the post-survey. The number of participants who are comfortable identifying issues that pose a barrier to student learning and addressing issues that impact the safety, health, and welfare of students stayed at 100 percent in both the pre- and post-surveys (n=7 [pre] and n=5 [post]). However, in the pre survey, 100 percent (n=7) of participants felt comfortable identifying an issue that pose a barrier to student learning, while in the post-survey only 60 percent (n=3) felt comfortable doing so.

For the questions that specifically focused on SAP team member interactions, 86 percent (n=6) of participants in the pre-survey felt somewhat or extremely comfortable meeting with students on their caseload, while in the post-survey 80 percent (n=4) of respondents selected these responses.

**Table 13. Additional Question Post-Survey**

| Question | Extremely Uncomfortable | Somewhat Uncomfortable | Neither Comfortable nor Uncomfortable | Somewhat Comfortable | Extremely Comfortable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel comfortable helping students/families access services in the community | | | 2 | 3 | |
| I feel comfortable in identifying issues that pose a barrier to student learning. | | | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| I feel comfortable addressing issues affecting the health, safety, and welfare of students. | | | | 3 | 2 |
| I feel comfortable meeting with students on my caseload. | | | 1 | 2 | 2 |

## 4.4 Qualitative Data

## 4.4.1 Qualitative Questions on SAP Training Evaluation Post-Survey

On the SAP Training Evaluation Post-Survey, participants were asked to provide a

reflection on their learning from the University of British Columbia's module and how the training would help them support students in SAP. This open-ended question was designed to gain insight on what resonated the most with each participant from the professional development training offered. Each response focused on a different theme. The three themes that emerged were: appropriate language usage, mental disorder is an illness, and including multiple stakeholders. Below are quotes from the participants on the Post-Survey.

**Table 14. Participant Reflection on Learning on Post-Survey**

| Theme | Evidence |
|---|---|
| Using Appropriate Language | There was also an emphasis about encouraging staff and students to not misuse words like depressed in order to better identify their emotion/feelings and why they are feeling that way.<br><br>To be aware of the use of terminology both for the SAP team member and the student. For example, students can overuse the word/feeling depressed. When, in reality, the feeling or emotion being experienced is sad, unhappy, disappointment, etc. |
| Mental Health Diagnosis is a Medical Illness | The diving deeper pages that sum up all the different diagnoses with tabs about symptoms, causes, and treatments I found very informative.<br><br>Through this session I have learned that mental illness is a medical illness. This has allowed me to look at mental illness in a new light. This provides me with a new perspective on how mental illness can affect daily functioning on a student's brain. This understanding will allow me to implement more targeted and effective interventions. |
| Including multiple Stakeholders | I think we need more input from other teachers' observations not just what we see as SAP members. We do a great job watching out for indicators but why not have the entire staff notify a SAP member in their peer group of a concern. I think this could be more specifically addressed at team meetings and a report made for SAP members or the guidance counselor to visit a class and observe the issue. |

Also on the post-survey was a question about additional professional development training that may be needed. Two participants responded to this question focusing on community resources and strategies to use when supporting students who are under mental distress.

**Table 15. Participant Reflection on Additional Professional Development Needed**

| Theme | Evidence |
|---|---|
| Community Resources | Accessing community resources |
| Strategies for Teachers | Mental illness interventions/questioning tactics. In other words, useful and meaningful tactics to use when meeting with students of mental illness concern. |

## 4.4.2 Focus Group Data

Five survey respondents agreed to participate in the focus group. In the responses collected from the questions, three themes emerged: including multiple stakeholders, SAP meeting time, and using appropriate language. Responses that addressed communication between staff members, communication between the school and other agencies, and communication between students/families and staff supported the theme of including multiple stakeholders. One example would be using the SAP Team members as liaisons to communicate with and receive information from non-SAP Team staff members during structured meeting time. Another theme that was prevalent in the responses was the use of the additional SAP Meeting time that was scheduled in the 2021-22 school year. While the responses supported this additional time, critiques were shared as ways to improve the usage of the scheduled time. The last theme the researcher found support for was using appropriate language when referring to mental wellness, mental distress, and mental health disorders. Participants noted the difference between emotions and disorders, and the importance of staff not only using appropriate language, but also supporting and educating students in their use of appropriate language.

**4.4.2.1 Question 1: In what ways, if any, has the Professional Development impacted your**

       **practice on the SAP Team?**

This question was to gain insight on how Module 4: Understanding Mental Health, Mental Illness and Related Issues in Young People impacted the volunteers practice as SAP Team members. Responses varied from looking at how the SAP team currently operates to exploring the language that practitioners use when speaking about emotions and mental illness. However, one theme that seemed to span the questions in the Focus Groups was to ensure to include multiple stakeholders in SAP. A participant expressed an interest in including the building staff more in the SAP Team operations.

> It made me look at how we operate as an SAP team. I think we should expand and talk to the staff and faculty and every teacher. See what they see, you know what I mean? It's like we have our eyes on students, but there's so many times all eyes could be on the students.

Another participant shared a critique of using emails to share or learn information about students who participate in SAP. "The way to do though is not through email. Not everyone reads their emails. I send one the other day about a kid and the teacher had to ask me to point the child out to them."

As an alternate suggestion to using email to gather or disseminate information about SAP, a participant shared to potentially use the SAP Team members as liaisons between the SAP team members and the rest of the faculty during scheduled grade level or department meeting time. "A SAP liaison, someone to go back to each grade level. We have all these eyes on the kids. You have a concern about a kid, tell an SAP team member."

Additionally, one participant felt if the SAP team members were liaisons during the grade level and department meeting time, the building staff who are not on the SAP Team would be able to share student observations they see in the classroom or hallway with them to bring back to SAP. "On my end, that's where most of my SAP things come from. I see things in the hallway and then I bring up kids."

One participant shared a possible negative of utilizing SAP team members as liaisons during team and department meeting time, including SAP Team liaisons potentially being asked to share confidential information or other staff not wanting to know any information from SAP. "There seems to be a great divide of people who want to know everything and then people who don't want to know anything. And what you are allowed to share back to the teacher group as a whole."

Another participant shared an idea to include a "why" statement for students, staff, and family members, so that all stakeholders were aware of who the SAP Team members are in the building. This would not only benefit staff, but also students so they know who the members are in case they need to talk to someone.

> Maybe we need a why statement. Why, we're doing what we're doing. Maybe a list of who the SAP people are, because certain people aren't going to come and tell me [as a SAP Team Member], but they may tell another [SAP Team member].

Another theme that seemed to span multiple questions in the focus groups was the accurate use of terminology and language surrounding mental wellness and mental illness. The participants expressed a need to ensure the staff are using appropriate language with students and ensuring they have students use appropriate language to identify their feelings versus the terminology of a mental disorder. "Diagnosis says that depression is different than emotions, like sadness or I'm having a

bad day. And for me, as far as connecting it to the conversation with the kid about the language they use is important."

**4.4.2.2 Question 2: How has the professional development helped you better support students in the SAP Program? (Think about your newly scheduled meeting time and our SAP Team meeting time.)**

This question was created to gain insight on whether the participants felt that the Mental Health Literacy Module 4 helped them to better support the students they work with via SAP. When responding, participants shared both positive comments and critiques about the additional SAP meeting time provided in the 2021-22 school year. Participants shared the time is useful, but only if the students are present at school. The currently scheduled time is during the students' arrival to the building, which includes multiple bus waves, parent drop off, and breakfast from 8:00-8:30. "I find that the one kid I have doesn't come early, so that time is good that we have it, but I can't use it with him."

Another participant responded that even though the student is traditionally unavailable to meet during this time because the student is eating breakfast, the SAP Team member walks the child to breakfast and conducts the check in informally as they walk.

> I use that time and if I don't need it for the day, I will send the coverage away. I'll walk to breakfast with them and sometimes they don't want to talk in the halls, but I'll walk them to breakfast and we can talk on the way.

Another participant shared that the time is useful, especially if the student(s) on their caseload are not in their classes. "I think it's nice if we have time built in because I don't know if, like I haven't had them or I don't teach them - I have a hard time getting to them so the time is

helpful." Participant responses to this question solely focused on the benefits and critiques of the newly implemented SAP meeting time.

**4.4.2.3 Question 3: In what ways do you think the professional development helped us better align the team and your work to SAP best practices?**

This question was created to gain insight if the participants felt the Mental Health Literacy Module helped the team better align to best practices of SAP. Participant responses referred back to the theme of the use of terminology and language surrounding mental wellness and mental illness. One participant specifically addressed the use of the word trauma and the differences in the definition of trauma that students may be using to share about their experiences during COVID-19 versus the clinical definition of trauma. "The use of the word trauma - like - it's just brought around like everybody has trauma now because of COVID. But everyone doesn't have the true definition of trauma."

Other participant responses highlighted not only the importance of using appropriate language, but also correcting the misuse of language when speaking with students. Specifically mentioned were feelings of nervousness and sadness and the connection between those emotions and anxiety and depression. As one respondent explained:

> One of the things I think that impacts my work with students is, [the Mental Health Literacy course] uses specific terminology and we need to be thoughtful of the words that are being used, and point that out to the students when they're using the correct or incorrect words. You don't have anxiety just because you're feeling anxious. When you're feeling nervous that doesn't mean you have anxiety. Are you feeling anxious, or is it a different feeling? Let's connect it back to the what you feel and connect that emotion, instead of a diagnosis.

Another respondent offered a similar perspective: "Diagnosis says that depression is different than emotions, like sadness or I'm having a bad day. And for me as far as connecting it to the conversation with the kid about the language they use is important."

Lastly, a participant made a connection between the potential misuse of language by citing a diagnosis instead of an emotion, as a possible hinderance for students who do have a diagnosis to have access to school based mental health opportunities, which are limited. "Maybe too many kids are being referred to positive steps that maybe don't need it, based on their definition of trauma." The prevalent theme for question 3 was the appropriate use of terminology surrounding mental wellness, mental distress, and mental health diagnoses.

**4.4.2.4 Question 4: What do you feel should be our next steps to aligning to best practices?**

This question was created to gain insight on what the participants felt would be an appropriate next step for the SAP Team members to ensure the practices of the team are aligned to the best practices referenced in the Guidelines for Fidelity. One participant who instructs class that follows a block schedule shared that teachers who participate in block scheduling may have an advantage of seeing students for longer periods of time, thus they are able to cultivate relationships differently than teachers who only see students for 40 minutes a day. This participant shared that block scheduling may create more opportunity to cultivate relationships with students and parents.

> It's different for me. [Students] don't travel so much so we see them for a bigger portion of the day. We take it on ourselves to figure out what they need and I think it's easier to figure out what a student needs when there's just 2 teachers [as opposed to 7]. Instead of seeing kids for 40 min, you have them for 2 hours. So you may be able to help with behaviors, and maybe connect more with parents.

Responses to question 4 were limited to the discussion surrounding block scheduling.

**4.4.2.5 Question 5: Continued Needs - What additional training do you feel you would benefit from to support students on the SAP Team?**

This question was created to gain insight on additional training that members of the SAP team felt were needed to ensure all students are supported. One participant shared that a whole staff training may help all staff understand what SAP is and what SAP can do for students. "I like the idea of doing something for the whole staff. Because every teacher interacts with all students who have SAP needs or not. Some type of training school wide would be helpful."

Another participant shared the need for SAP team members to know what resources are available for families. "And one thing I always go back to is just accessing the resources in the community and knowing what's available."

The responses for question 5 were limited to the above two responses.

## 5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter interprets the findings that are associated with the problem of practice, as well as suggestions for improvements if the SAP Program that is currently in place at WMS.

## 5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The purpose of this study was to engage in a program evaluation of the current SAP system against the PA Model, specifically focusing on the training component of an intervention program. The study used mixed methods for data collection and analysis. Qualitative data was collected through a focus group and through open-ended questions on a survey. Quantitative data was collected through a survey using 5-point Likert scale responses.

### 5.1.1 Key Finding 1: Communication with All Stakeholders

The percentage of SAP Team members who felt to some extent that the SAP Team works with other initiatives in the building changed from the pre- to post-survey. In the pre-survey, 100 percent (n=7/7) of participants felt that the team works with other initiatives in the building. In the post-survey, 80 percent (n=4/5) felt that the team works with other initiatives in the building. In total, from the pre- to post-survey data, the participants' agreement to some extent that they work with other initiatives fell 20 percent from the pre- to post-survey.
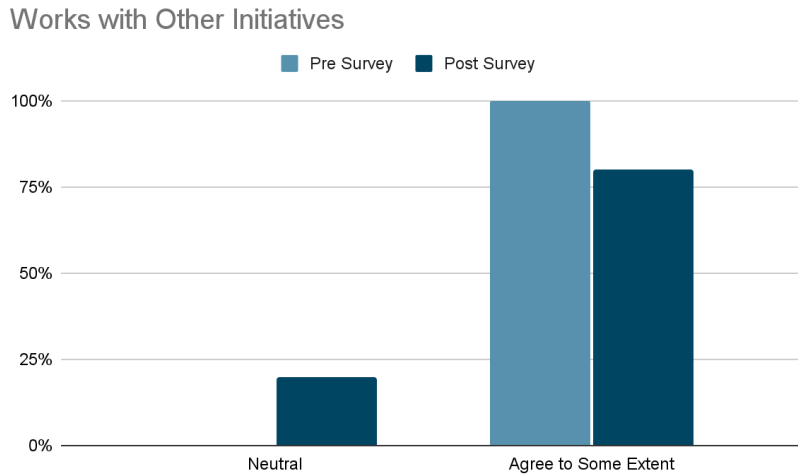
**Figure 1. Pre- and Post-Survey: Works With Other Initiatives**

Additionally, in the pre-survey, the percentage of participants who were comfortable to some extent helping students and families access services in the community was around 42 percent (n=3/7). In the post-survey, the percentage increased to 60 percent (n=3/5). Additionally, on the open-ended questions on the pre-survey, participants noted a need to ensure the SAP Team has access to and knowledge of these agencies and their support for both students and families.

## Accessing Community Resources
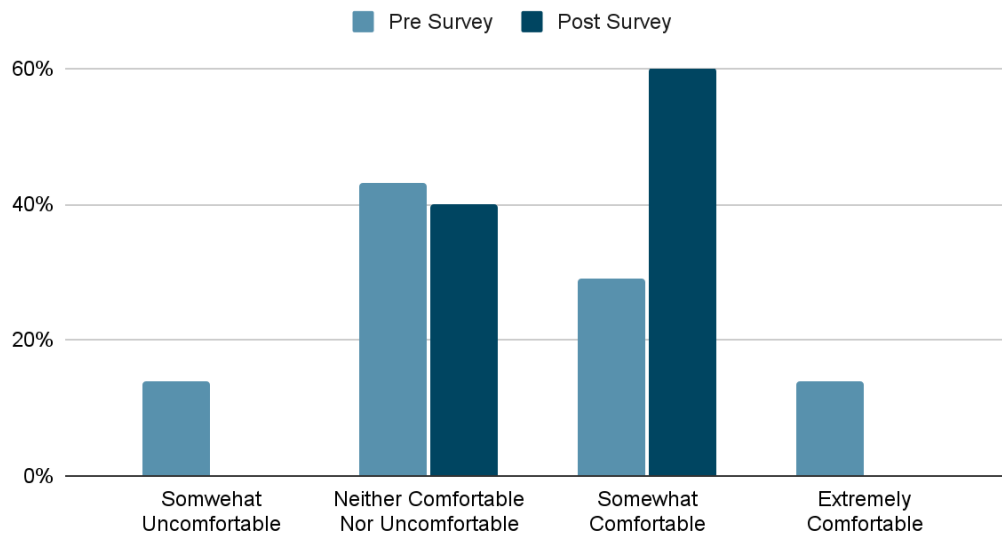


**Figure 2. Pre- and Post-Survey: Accessing Community Resources**

Additionally, in both the focus group and the SAP Training Evaluation Survey, participants noted that communication needs to occur with all stakeholders in the building.

**5.1.2 Key Finding 2: Language Choice**

A key finding in the focus group was the need to use appropriate language surrounding mental wellness, mental diagnosis, mental health problems, and mental distress. The themes included in the responses were not to misuse terms like depression, anxiety, or trauma with not only each other, but also when working with students; not only within the faculty, but also when working with students. Additionally, it was noted that the term diagnosis is different from a current state of emotions a student may be experiencing.

### 5.1.3 Key Finding 3: Training Needs

The training questions on the SAP Training Evaluation Post-Survey focused on current training and additional training needed in order to align with SAP best practices. In order to align with best practices via the PA SAP Model and also to align with the data from the pre- and post-survey, 100 percent of SAP Team participants on the pre-survey (n=7/7) and 100 percent of participants on the post-survey (n=5/5) agreed to some extent that additional training would benefit their practice as a SAP Team member.
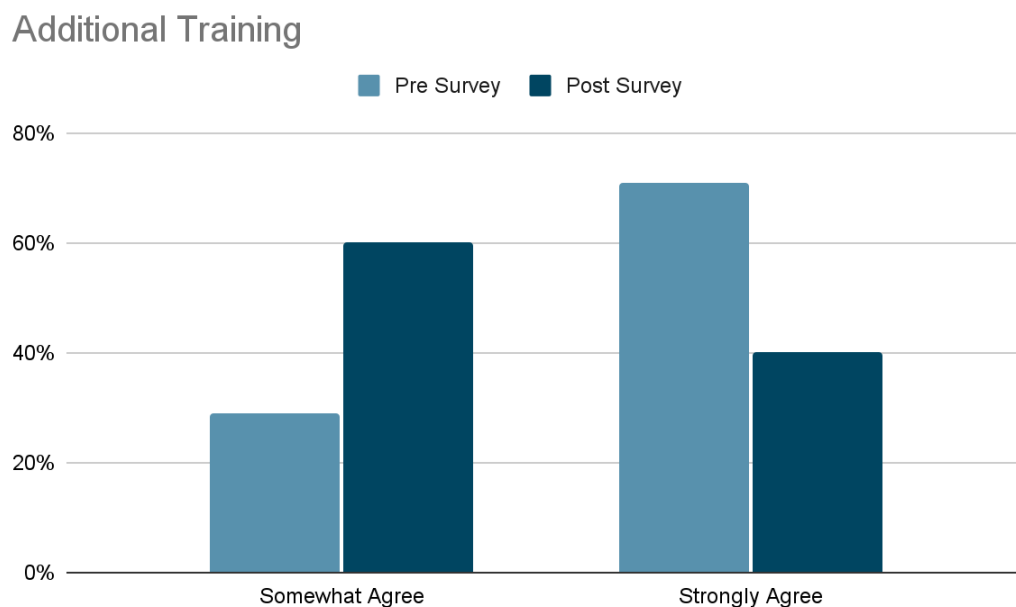


**Figure 3. Pre- and Post-Survey: Additional Training**

Another key finding is the type of training that participants recognized as needed for the SAP Team. On both the pre- (n=7/7) and post- (n=5/5) surveys, 100 percent of participants agreed to some extent that training on school-wide interventions that can be offered to all students would be beneficial.

School-Wide Interventions
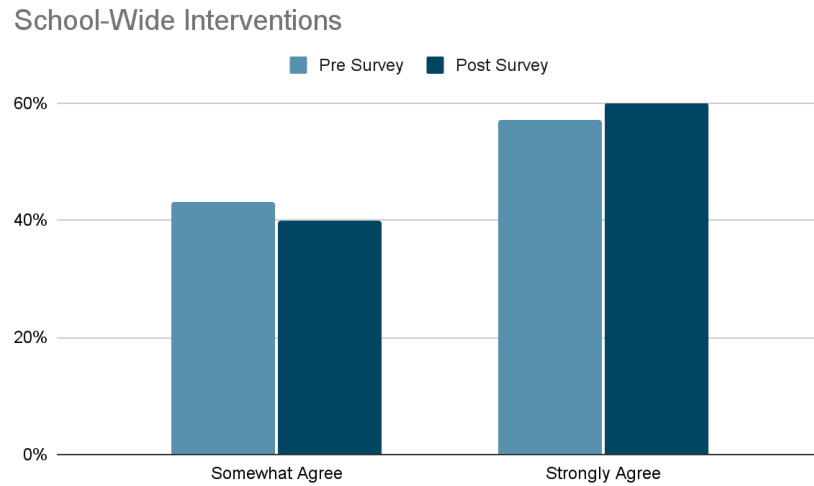


**Figure 4. Pre- and Post-Survey: School-Wide Interventions**


Another training that the participants agreed to some extent would benefit students is training on the specific impact of COVID-19 on middle school students. In the pre-survey, 100 percent (n=7/7) agreed to some extent, and on the post-survey 80 percent (n=4) agreed to some extent that training on the impact of COVID-19 on students would benefit their practice and students.
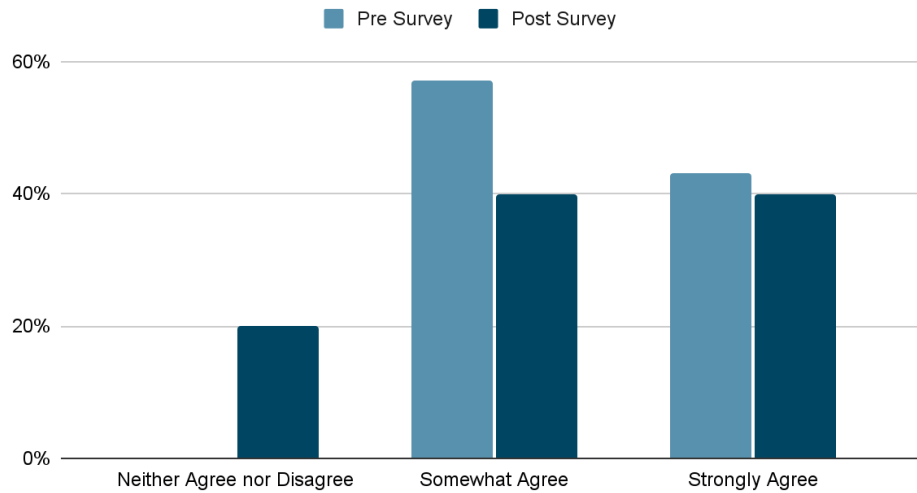
**Figure 5. Pre- and Post-Survey: Impact of COVID-19**

In the pre-survey, 57 percent (n=4/7) of participants agreed to some extent that training in cultivating relationships with at-risk students would be beneficial, while on the post-survey only 40 percent (n=2/5) agreed to some extent that this type of training would be helpful.
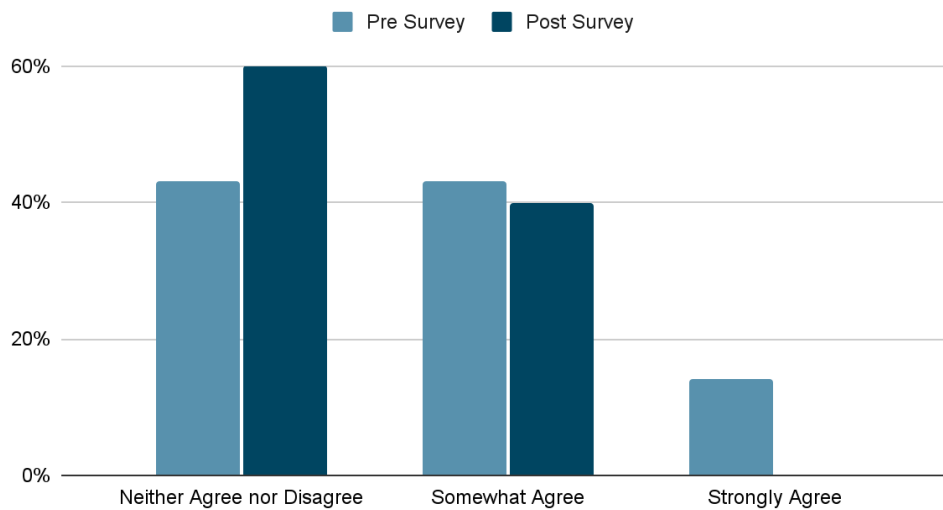


**Figure 6. Pre- and Post-Survey: Building Relationships with At-Risk Students**

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The perception of SAP Team members that students are engaged during the scheduled time decreased from the pre- to pos- survey. On the pre-survey, 71 percent of participants (n=5/7) agreed to some extent that students were engaged, but on the post-survey, only 60 percent (n=3/5) agreed to some extent.
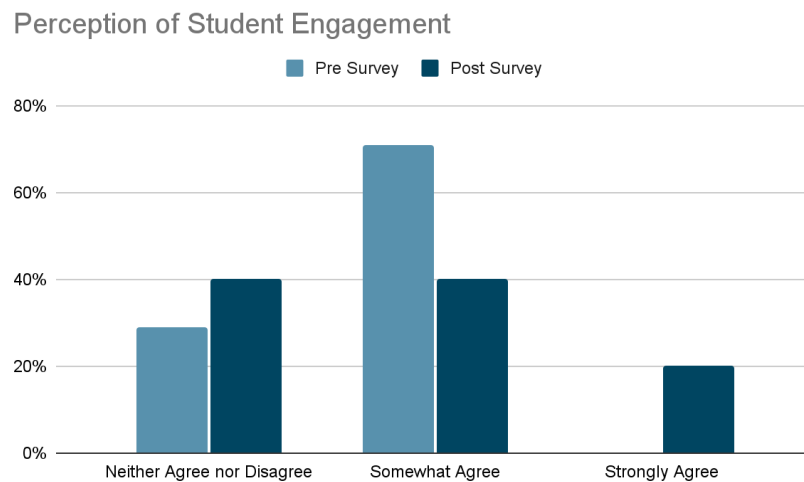


**Figure 7. Pre- and Post-Survey: Perception of Student Engagement**

In the post-survey, only 60 percent of participants (n=3/5) felt somewhat or extremely comfortable identifying an issue that poses a barrier to student learning, while 100 percent (n=7/7) of the participants in the pre-survey felt comfortable at some level.

Identifying Barriers to Student Learning
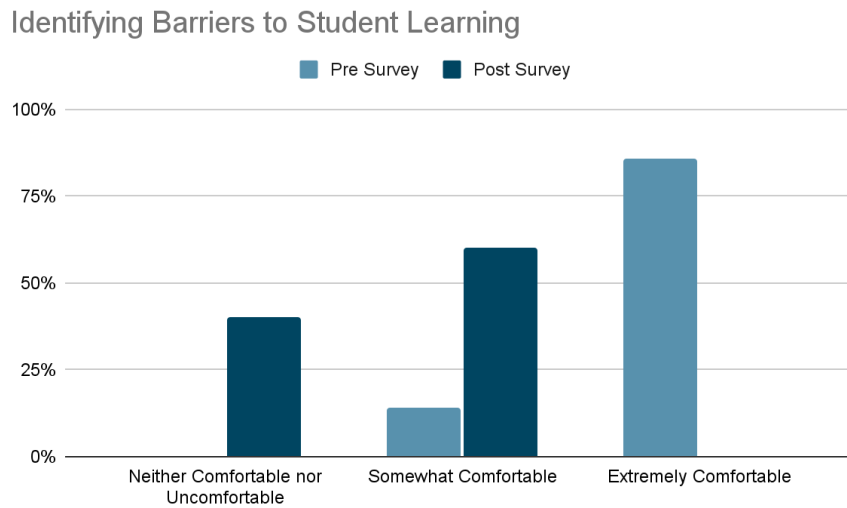
**Figure 8. Pre- and Post-Survey: Identifying Barriers to Student Learning**

## 5.1.4 Key Finding 4: Fidelity to Best Practices and PA Model

On the annual SAP survey reported to the PA Network for Student Assistance Services Reporting System, it was noted in the 2020-21 school year that students in SAP at WMS were not meeting as much in small groups or one-one-one with SAP Team Members compared to students in other schools across the state. Consequently, in order to try to align to best practices, additional SAP Meeting Time was added in the start of the 2021-22 school year to team members' daily schedules to facilitate time to meet with students.

For questions that specifically asked about the additional SAP Meeting time, 86 percent (n=6/7) of the participants on the pre-survey agreed to some extent that the additional SAP meeting time has been helpful to provide time to meet with students on their caseload, and 100 percent (n=5/5) of the participants on the post-survey agreed to some extent.

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**Additional SAP Meeting Time is Beneficial**
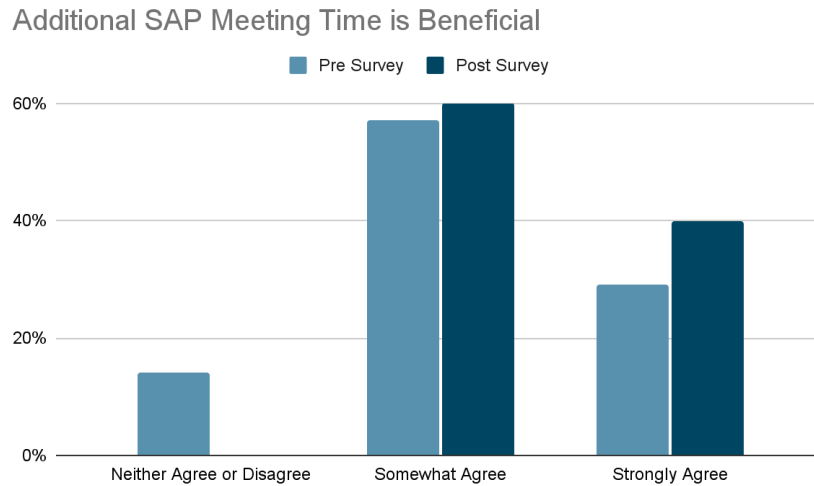
**Figure 9. Pre- and Post-Survey: Additional SAP Meeting Time is Beneficial**

## 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the information in the study, there are three recommendations including ensuring communication with all stakeholders, continued training for the SAP Team, and ensuring the SAP Team continues to align to best practices.

### 5.2.1 Recommendation 1: Communication with All Stakeholders

Communication with all stakeholders needs to occur at multiple levels. The SAP Team members needs to ensure communication with non-SAP Team members, with other initiatives in the building (including the school based-mental health program), with current families of students who are participants of SAP, and with the general student and parent body to ensure they know the role of SAP and how it can be a resource for students/families.

One recommendation from the study is for the SAP Team to continue to build relationships with other initiatives in the building. In total, from the pre- to post-survey data collection, the participants' agreement that they work with other initiatives fell 20 percent. It could be hypothesized that via the professional development course, the group gained information on mental wellness that showed that increased partnerships with other initiatives, including the school-based mental health team and/or the SAP Liaison, would benefit the SAP Team.

While the percentage of participants who are comfortable to some extent helping students and families access services in the community increased from pre to post, this is still an area that may need further review by the SAP Team. The resources that can be provided to students and families both inside and outside of the school are paramount to student success. A recommendation for the SAP Team is to continue to build relationships with outside agencies and to ensure that all SAP Team members have access to community resource information. Once the SAP Team has this knowledge, it may benefit the Team members to share it during the team or department meeting time, as suggested by participants in the Focus Group. "A SAP liaison, someone to go back to each grade level. We have all these eyes on the kids. You have a concern about a kid, tell an SAP team member."

A recommendation for communication enhancement would be to utilize the SAP Team as liaisons during scheduled grade level and department meeting time. The SAP Team members could bring back to the SAP Team essential information concerning current SAP Students. Additionally, the SAP Team Members could share necessary (non-confidential) SAP information with the staff as well as any pertinent training in which the team has engaged.

A final recommendation for communication enhancement that should be incorporated is communication within the SAP Team to ensure all SAP Team members desire to recommit to

participating on the SAP Team the following school year. The administrator on the SAP team should ensure there are funds available, should SAP Team members retire, so that new SAP Team members can be trained.

**5.2.2 Recommendation 2: Continued Training**

Another recommendation would be to include training for the SAP team, and potentially the entire building, on school-wide interventions that can be offered to all students based on the 100 percent interest on both and the pre- and post-survey. A model that may be beneficial for WMS to look into would be a Positive Behavior Support Plan for all students at the middle school level. Currently, WSD is going through the Special Education Audit, and there have been discussions on research into a district-wide Positive Behavior Support Plan. The researcher would recommend these discussions continue.

Additionally, there is a recommendation to include training on the impact of COVID-19 on middle school students, based on the 80 percent (n=4) of participants on the post-survey who recognized this as a need. It is recommended that the training focus not on the mental disorders or diagnoses that have been exacerbated by COVID-19, but on the strategies that can be used with students who are experiencing the mental distress that COVID-19 may have created or enhanced.

For a third recommendation, while only 40 percent of the SAP Team members (n=2/5) on the post-survey noted an interest in professional development focused on building relationships with at-risk students, in combination with the SAP Team member perception of decrease in student engagement, it may be beneficial to offer training on building relationships for those staff members who note an interest in growing professionally in this area. In order for students to feel comfortable utilizing the SAP team members, a positive relationship between each student and SAP Team

member is essential. Research has proven that student-teacher relationships can positively impact students. Students with these relationships experience greater academic interest, engagement, and motivation than students who do not feel they have these relationships (Prewett, Bergin, & Huang, 2019). Because the teacher-student relationship is essential for SAP Team members, it is important that all SAP team members feel confident in this area.

A fourth recommendation is for the SAP Team to continue to provide training to the SAP Team members on barriers to student learning, including additional mental wellness and COVID-19 barriers to student learning. In the pre-survey, 100 percent (n=7/7) of the participants felt comfortable at some level identifying an issue that poses a barrier to student learning. In the post-survey, only 60 percent of participants (n=3/5) felt somewhat or extremely comfortable identifying issues that pose a barrier to student learning. It is hypothesized that during the training, the SAP team members learned information on mental distress, mental disorders, and mental health problems, which caused a change in response. Accordingly, it is recommended for the SAP Team to continue to provide training to the SAP Team members on barriers to student learning, including additional mental wellness and COVID-19 specific barriers to student learning.

A fifth recommendation of this study is to ensure both staff and students are using appropriate language surrounding mental wellness, mental distress, mental health problems, and mental disorders. It is recommended that the SAP Team engage in professional development on the appropriate usage of language surrounding mental wellness either through new training or via the other six modules of the course from the University of British Columbia, utilize the learning in their everyday work, support students in SAP Meeting time with appropriate usage of terms, and train the staff on language usage.

### 5.2.3 Recommendation 3: Fidelity to Best Practices

Because 100 percent (n=5/5) of participants agreed on the post-survey to some extent that the additional SAP meeting time provided this school year was beneficial, a recommendation would be to continue this scheduling tactic in future master schedules to provide the additional time for SAP Team members to meet with students. Focus group participants suggested meeting times that would not be limited to the start of the school day to benefit students who do not arrive to school at the beginning of the day. A participant responded during the Focus Group, "I find that the one kid I have doesn't come early, so that time is good that we have it, but I can't use it with him."

It is recommended that the SAP Team continue to complete the entire SAP Best Practices Guidelines for Fidelity at the end of each school year to identify SAP Team needs for the coming year. It is also a recommendation for the SAP Team to engage in the planning process, as completed in this study, to collectively choose a topic on the SAP Best Practice Guidelines for Fidelity each school year as the focus for the team.

### 5.3 Further Implications/Recommendations

In order for the SAP Program to run efficiently and best support student needs, the researcher will recommend the following be completed in the areas of continual training, communication with all stakeholders, and fidelity to best practices.

### 5.3.1 Fidelity to Best Practices at WMS

It is imperative the SAP Teams continually assess the school program and utilize the SAP Best Practice Guidelines for Fidelity each year to benchmark the current program to the PA Model. WMS SAP Team members will complete this survey during scheduled SAP Meeting time in May, prior to the end of the year. The survey will be offered to SAP Team members to complete as a group or individually via an anonymous online survey. Should the SAP Team choose to complete the anonymous survey, the results will be compiled and shared with the SAP Team. Based on the results, a goal will be chosen for the SAP Team to work on each academic year to ensure fidelity to the PA SAP Model.

At WMS, the additional SAP meeting time will continue to be scheduled for SAP Team members to ensure that they have time to meet with their students. However, based on the comments from the SAP Team members that not all students arrive to school during the scheduled meeting time, the researcher will look to see if any other times of day can be scheduled for the SAP Team time.

### 5.3.2 Fidelity to Best Practices Statewide

The SAP Model is specific to the state of Pennsylvania; however, some states have similar programs that focus on the needs of students, including barriers to learning. Regardless of district zip code, it is easy for a program to run just as it always has, without thought about fidelity to best practices. It would surely benefit students if all schools across the state participated in the SAP Best Practice Guidelines for Fidelity. However, that is just the first step. The school should then utilize the data to identify program gaps and make improvements. Should schools already be

engaged in this process, it is a recommendation that the school additionally complete the Improvement of Team Functioning survey via the PA Network for Student Assistance Services (2019b) to review the component parts of the SAP Program and SAP Team including intervention/prevention; collaboration with colleagues, parents, and agencies; training; policies and implementation procedures of SAP; follow-up; and the referral process for students. (Appendix F).

### 5.3.3 Continued Training at WMS

SAP Teams must also stay up to date on training associated with mental wellness, due to the changes that have occurred over the last few years and due to the impact of COVID-19. Westfield School District will continue to research positive behavior support programs and how they can impact the behavior of students district-wide. A phone conference has already occurred with the local Intermediate Unit to gather preliminary information on a district-wide positive behavior support program, and the team will continue to research its benefits and share with the necessary personnel, administration, and school board as needed. Should Westfield School District move forward with researching a positive behavior plan, it is recommended that each school in the district that utilizes the SAP Program complete the SAP Team Readiness Checklist prior to implementation. This step is necessary to assess the readiness of the SAP Team to align with introducing Positive Behavior Supports (Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance & Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support, 2017). (See Appendix G.) The team should review and discuss the responses before adding a positive behavior support program.

Based on the needs identified on the SAP Training Evaluation pre- and post-surveys, the researcher will look into multiple mental disorder, distress, and diagnosis training, specific to the

impact of COVID-19, on middle-level adolescents. Additionally, the researcher will look into training on building relationships with at-risk students. The local Intermediate Unit, the Prevention Network, the local Behavioral Health Organization, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness will provide the starting points for research on these topics.

The seven-module University of British Columbia training will be suggested as a resource that may benefit all staff at WMS. If it is to be used by staff at WMS, it should be accompanied by optional meetings to discuss the modules and how they may be applicable to students at WMS. Module One would be useful to help staff understand the continuum of language to be used surrounding mental wellness. The researcher will continue to use appropriate language with students, families, and staff when speaking about mental wellness, and she will invite the SAP Team to do the same.

### 5.3.4 Continued Training Statewide

The leader of the SAP team must not only be knowledgeable about best practices, but they must also continue to educate themselves and the SAP Team, with the help of internal and external agencies, to ensure the SAP Team is prepared to support students. Based on the surveys completed by the SAP Teams, each district or school should work to ensure SAP Team members are trained to support students' ever-changing needs, especially surrounding mental wellness. It is also recommended that schools provide mental wellness support for staff. The support can be provided through intermittent professional development offerings on stress reduction and adult mental wellness needs either in person or virtually. In order to promote the program, the district should provide Act 48 hours to staff for participating and/or create an incentive program for staff to participate. Additionally, each district should contact their insurance carrier to see if they offer an

Employee Assistance Program. These programs can be charged at a district cost or a per employee cost and can provide resources to staff on any topic; examples include financial wellness, physical wellness, and mental wellness.

**5.3.5 Communication with Stakeholders at WMS**

The SAP Team must be a liaison for the students, staff, families, and local agencies to ensure students have any and all available resources for their success. At WMS, the relationship with the school-based mental health program will continue to be fostered, including ensuring that staff, students, and families are aware of the program. Additionally, the SAP Team will ensure families and staff are aware of the resource page on the school website, which includes financial assistance resources for families who are low income or experiencing job loss/homelessness as well as a 24-hour text line for anyone struggling with thoughts of self-harm. The SAP Team members will be the liaisons at department and grade level meetings to share newly acquired information to ensure all stakeholders are informed.

Additionally, for the past two years at WMS, students have approached either the guidance office or the main office with wishes to promote mental wellness and support those who are struggling with mental distress. WMS will continue to foster communication with all stakeholders, including student-led groups to help address the stigma of mental wellness support within the student body and to provide resources for students, which includes ensuring students are aware of the SAP Program and SAP Team members at WMS and the school-based mental health program. During the Focus Group, participants addressed the need to include all stakeholders, but students being a part of the SAP communication process, as opposed to just being a SAP Participant, was not mentioned. The SAP Team, when looking to include all stakeholders, should utilize the student

body to ensure the benefits of the SAP Program are communicated clearly to students.

### 5.3.6 Communication with Stakeholders Statewide

In order to gather the information from multiple stakeholders on the mental wellness needs of students, districts should consider drafting and publicizing a survey annually to students, staff, and families on their current needs. Based on this data, the district would then have a better understanding of the resources needed for multiple stakeholders.

Whether locally at WMS, across the state via the SAP Program, or nationally in regard to any school-based mental wellness support, students, families, and staff need to ensure they are prepared for the continually changing needs of students. It is the responsibility of the school to help connect families and students with resources and to ensure staff are prepared to support students who are at risk. With or without the impact of COVID-19 on middle school students' mental wellness, schools must be a place for students to feel supported and connected to school, staff, and peers. Schools should complete a program evaluation of their current mental wellness supports for students, identify gaps, and modify the programs as needed.

**Appendix A Recruitment Script for Dissertation Study**

**Modeled After Recruitment Script from Dr. Melissa Nelson (2019)**

As some of you may be aware, I am a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh and am planning to conduct research on best practices for an SAP team to support students who may be at risk. For this study, participants will engage in a program evaluation of our current SAP System benchmarked to the Pennsylvania Model, focusing on SAP Team member training.

Based on the needs that our SAP Team identifies, professional development sessions will be offered to participants. The professional development sessions will occur during scheduled SAP time and/or scheduled professional development time for the building. Additionally, participants will take a short pre- and post-survey, including a journal response, after each professional development session. Participants will also engage in a focus group discussion conducted at the culmination of the data collection.

All data gathered from the pre- and post-surveys are anonymous.

Responses to the surveys and journal entries will be collected without your name. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from this project at any time. If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please let me know. I look forward to working together to align our current SAP Program to best practices and ensure we are meeting the needs of all students.

**Appendix B SAP Training Evaluation Pre-Survey**

Section 1: SAP

1. I feel comfortable helping students/families access services within the community.
   Very Uncomfortable Uncomfortable Neutral  Comfortable Very Comfortable

2. I work closely with other initiatives/programs in the building to address the needs of students.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. I feel we have enough team members to manage all of the student referrals.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. I follow up on students on my caseload to best support them
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. I feel that the SAP meeting time is used productively.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

6. I feel that the additional SAP time provided this school year is beneficial for SAP purposes.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

7. I am offered training to stay up to date on current issues pertaining to SAP.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

8. I would regularly attend training, if offered, to stay up to date on current issues pertaining to SAP.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

9. I feel comfortable in identifying issues that pose a barrier to student learning.
   Very Uncomfortable Uncomfortable Neutral  Comfortable Very Comfortable

10. I feel comfortable addressing the issues affecting the health, safety, and welfare of students.
    Very Uncomfortable Uncomfortable Neutral  Comfortable Very Comfortable

11. I use prevention strategies to target subgroups of at-risk students.
    Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

12. I feel comfortable meeting with students on my caseload.
    Very Uncomfortable Uncomfortable Neutral  Comfortable Very Comfortable

13. Students seem engaged during our SAP meeting time.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

14. I feel my work on the SAP team helps students.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Section 2: SAP Training Needs

15. I would like additional support on building relationships with at-risk students.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

16. I would like additional training on mental health needs of students.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

17. I would like additional training on the impact of COVID-19 on students.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

18. I would like additional training on school-wide interventions that can be offered to all students.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

19. I would like additional training on the type data that can be used to provide interventions for students.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

20. What professional development, if any, do you feel would benefit your work on the SAP team supporting students?

# Appendix C SAP Training Evaluation Post-Survey

Section 1: SAP

1. I feel comfortable helping students/families access services within the community.
   Very Uncomfortable Uncomfortable Neutral  Comfortable Very Comfortable

2. I work closely with other initiatives/programs in the building to address the needs of students.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. I feel we have enough team members to manage all of the student referrals.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. I follow up on students on my caseload to best support them.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. I feel that the SAP meeting time is used productively.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

6. I feel that the additional SAP time provided this school year is beneficial for SAP purposes.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

7. I am offered training to stay up to date on current issues pertaining to SAP.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

8. I would regularly attend training, if offered, to stay up to date on current issues pertaining to SAP.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

9. I feel comfortable in identifying issues that pose a barrier to student learning.
   Very Uncomfortable Uncomfortable Neutral  Comfortable Very Comfortable

10. I feel comfortable addressing the issues affecting the health, safety, and welfare of students.
    Very Uncomfortable Uncomfortable Neutral  Comfortable Very Comfortable

11. I use prevention strategies to target subgroups of at-risk students.
    Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

I feel comfortable meeting with students on my caseload.
Very Uncomfortable Uncomfortable Neutral  Comfortable Very Comfortable

13. Students seem engaged during our SAP meeting time.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

14. I feel my work on the SAP team helps students.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree


Section 2: SAP Training Needs

15. I would like additional support on building relationships with at-risk students.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

16. I would like additional training on mental health needs of students.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

17. I would like additional training on the impact of COVID-19 on students.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

18. I would like additional training on school-wide interventions that can be offered to all students.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

19. I would like additional training on the type data that can be used to provide interventions for students.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

20. I feel the professional development provided was helpful for me as an SAP Team member.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

21. What additional professional development, if any, do you feel would benefit your work on the SAP team supporting students?


22. Please provide a reflection of what you have learned from the professional development sessions and how it can help you support students in SAP. As an example, you may have connected something to a previous or current interaction with a student.

**\*Modeled after Dr. Melissa Nelson's Journal Prompt (2019)**

**Appendix D SAP Training Evaluation Pre- and Post-Survey**

| Name of the Survey | Original Survey Questions | Researcher's Adapted Questions | Intended Use of Response |
|---|---|---|---|
| Improvement of Team Functioning | Has sufficient data view process in place to identify students in the building who need support | I feel comfortable addressing the issues affecting the health, safety, and welfare of students | To assess if SAP Team members feel confident identifying who needs help |
| Improvement of Team Functioning | Provides prevention strategies to target subgroups of the general school population that are determined to be at risk | I use prevention strategies to target subgroups of at-risk students | To assess if SAP Team members know what it means to be at risk and how to support at-risk students |
| Improvement of Team Functioning | Has received adequate updating to keep the work of the team on the cutting edge | I feel comfortable in identifying issues that pose a barrier to student learning | To assess if SAP Team can identify what students need |
| Improvement of Team Functioning | Works closely with the other initiatives in the building to address the needs of students | I work closely with other initiatives/programs in the building to address the needs of students | To assess if SAP Team collaborates |
| Improvement of Team Functioning | Has enough team members to handle all of the referrals | I feel we have enough team members to manage all of the student referrals | To assess if more SAP Team members may be needed |
| Improvement of Team Functioning | Follows up with students who have been referred to ensure that the action plan is being carried out | I follow up on students on my caseload to best support them | To assess if SAP Team members are meeting with students |
| Improvement of Team Functioning | Uses the time productively | I feel that the SAP meeting time is used productively | To assess if changes should be made to the SAP Team meeting time |
| Improvement of Team Functioning | Provides prevention strategies designed to | I would like additional training on school-wide | To assess if SAP Team members would like |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | reach all students within the building | interventions that can be offered to all students | training on school wide (Tier 1) interventions |
| Effectiveness Checklist | Team members participate in a maintenance and development training program | I think additional training would be helpful | To assess if SAP Team members think additional training would be beneficial |
| Effectiveness Checklist | Team members have opportunity and support for advanced SAP training | I am offered training to stay up to date on current issues pertaining to SAP | To assess if SAP Team members are offered training |
| Best Practices for Fidelity | SAP Teams have connections to and set up linkages with services within the community | I feel comfortable helping students/families access services within the community | To assess if SAP Team members know what community services there are and how to use them so support families |
| Researcher Created | | I feel that the additional SAP time provided this school year is beneficial for SAP purposes | To assess if the additional time provided this year is beneficial |
| Researcher Created | | Students seem engaged during our SAP Meeting time | To assess if SAP Team members feel students are engaged |
| Researcher Created | | I feel my work on the SAP Team helps students | To assess if SAP Team members feel their work helps students |
| Researcher Created | | I feel comfortable meeting with students on my caseload | To assess if SAP Team members feel comfortable using the time provided in 2021-22 |
| Researcher Created | | I would like additional support on building relationships with at-risk students | To assess if SAP Team members want specific training on relationships with at-risk students |

| Researcher Created | | I would like additional training on the mental health needs of students | To assess if SAP Team members would like training on mental health needs |
|---|---|---|---|
| Researcher Created | | I would like additional training on the impact of COVID-19 on students | To assess if SAP Team members would like training on COVID-19 impact |
| Researcher Created | | What professional development, if any, do you feel would benefit your work on the SAP Team supporting students? | To assess what other training the SAP Team members feel they need |

**Appendix E Focus Group Questions**

**Focus Group Questions:**

1. **Practice -** In what ways, if any, has the Professional Development impacted your practice on the SAP Team?
   a. How has the professional development helped you better support students in the SAP Program? (Think about your newly scheduled meeting time and our SAP Team meeting time.)
2. **Fidelity -** In what ways do you think the professional development helped us better align the team and your work to SAP best practices?
   a. What do you feel should be our next steps to aligning to best practices?
   b. **Continued Needs -** What additional training do you feel you would benefit from to support students on the SAP Team?

# Appendix F SAP Best Practice Guidelines for Fidelity

## STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
## BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR FIDELITY

This list of these "critical elements" highlight those elements of the SAP system that are considered absolutely essential to the effectiveness and integrity of SAP as it has existed in Pennsylvania for over 28 years.

Directions: Please rate your Student Assistance Program for fidelity using the following scale. Please place a check in the correct box.
"0" – not currently in place
"1" - we currently have this in place but it needs some work
"2" – we currently have this in place and feel it is working well
"3" – this is an exemplary element in our program

| SAP GUIDELINE | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. SAP is the designated vehicle that requires and assists each school district to establish and maintain a program to provide appropriate counseling and support services (for students who experience problems related to the use of alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and health endangering substances). | | | | |
| 2. SAP is used by school personnel to assist in identifying issues that pose a barrier to a student's learning and school success. | | | | |
| 3. SAP is clear that it is not a treatment program but a systematic process, mobilizing school resources and community linkages. | | | | |
| 4. The processes used by the SAP Team in a school are determined by a collaborative integration of state guidelines, professional standards, and procedures adopted by the local school board of directors. | | | | |
| 5. Parents are an integral part of the SAP process. | | | | |
| 6. Informed written parental consent is obtained for the SAP process. | | | | |
| 7. The SAP team has developed guidelines on how parents will become involved in the SAP process. | | | | |
| 8. The SAP is a professionally trained team, consisting of school staff from multiple disciplines and county or community agency liaisons. | | | | |
| 9. Liaisons from Mental Health and/or Drug & Alcohol Providers attend approved SAP Core Team Training by a Pennsylvania Approved SAP Training Provider (PASTP). | | | | |
| 10. Detailed Letters of Agreement between the schools and the county MH/ID and D&A offices are written, outlining respective roles, responsibilities and expectations. | | | | |

| SAP GUIDELINE | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. There is a minimum of 4 members of the SAP team, representative of all the groups that comprise school staff. | | | | |
| 12. A Central Office Representative and a Building Administrator are on the SAP Team and regularly attend SAP team meetings. | | | | |
| 13. Each member of the team has successfully completed the requirements of the professional training of the SAP Core Team delivered by a PASTP is required. | | | | |
| 14. SAP Teams have connections to and set up linkages with services within the community. | | | | |
| 15. The SAP team has input and receives information from the County Coordination Teams. | | | | |
| 16. SAP Teams have identified issues affecting the health, safety and welfare of students and determine if those issues are within the scope of the school. | | | | |
| 17. The SAP Team, working with parents and agencies, provides supports for students receiving, or who have received, services from any child-serving agency. | | | | |

| SAP GUIDELINE | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18. The Regional Coordinators of the PNSAS are to: provide support and technical assistance to our individual teams and schools; monitor the team's implementation of the SAP process; and, provide support and technical assistance when requested. | | | | |
| 19. SAP Teams annually in-services school staff, board members, students, parents and the community about the role, responsibilities and limitations of SAP in helping with problems affecting a child's performance in school. | | | | |
| 20. Teams work closely with other initiatives in the building to address the needs of students. (i.e. RTII, PBIS, Olweus, etc.) | | | | |
| 21. All students, K-12, (including students in Special Education) have access to the services of a SAP Core team. | | | | |
| 22. The process for accessing SAP services and the steps utilizing the SAP team when a referral is received is published and distributed to school staff, board members, students, parents and the community. | | | | |
| 23. SAP Team Maintenance Sessions are held at least twice a year. | | | | |
| 24. Each school submits anonymous on-line referral data through the On-Line Reporting System. | | | | |
| 25. Only those persons who have completed a Student Assistance Program training conducted by a PASTP and who have received a certificate may sit on the team. | | | | |
| 26. SAP Team members are regularly attending updates, information sessions and other related in-service trainings in order to stay current on issues pertaining to SAP. | | | | |
| 27. SAP Teams meets for a minimum of 40 minutes per week/cycle and are provided 40 minutes for case management and intervention activities. | | | | |
| 28. SAP Coordinator is designated for each building. | | | | |
| 29. Consequences for policy violations for alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, bullying and other forms of violence are clearly stated and include SAP as the resource for assistance. | | | | |
| 30. Teams have an adequate budget for training. | | | | |
| 31. SAP structures and organization are clearly outlined. (Members, roles and responsibilities, process etc.) | | | | |
| 32. Referral process includes clear and consistent student data collection and review process. | | | | |
| 33. Teams have support from the school board. | | | | |
| 34. Confidentiality guidelines are clearly stated. | | | | |

**Appendix G SAP Members Survey for Improvement of Team Functioning**

# SAP MEMBERS SURVEY FOR IMPROVEMENT OF TEAM FUNCTIONING

In an effort to maintain high standards and quality of service, we are seeking your input on the Student Assistance Program in order to improve the functioning of the team. Your participation in this survey is very important to us and your responses will be treated with confidentiality. Please return your completed survey to:

*Read each statement in the list below, and circle a number to indicate how much you agree or disagree.*

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree Somewhat | Neutral | Agree Somewhat | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable |

**I believe the student assistance team:**

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Has a sufficient data review process in place to identify students in the building who need support; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. Addresses the most pressing issues identified in the building; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3 Provides prevention strategies designed to reach all students within the building; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. Provides prevention strategies to target subgroups of the general school population that are determined to be at risk; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. Provides prevention interventions to identify individuals who are experiencing early signs of substance abuse and other related problem behaviors and direct them to appropriate services; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. Conducts an adequate number of educational support groups to address the needs identified for our students; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. Has maintained the confidentiality of the students and parents; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. Has adequately informed staff about the referral process and keeps the referral source up to date; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. Works closely with the other initiatives in the building to address the needs of students (i.e. RTII, PBIS, Olweus, etc.); | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 10. Has reviewed all the forms used for the program and have updated them based on new information provided by a Pennsylvania Approved SAP Training Provider; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 11. Develops action plans with student, staff and parent input that are sufficient to address the presenting issues; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 12. Follows up with students who have been referred to ensure that the action plan is being carried out; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 13. Has received adequate updating to keep the work of the team on the cutting edge; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14. Has the needed support from central office; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 15. Has the needed support from the building administrator; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 16. Has the needed faculty support; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 17. Provides sufficient updates to faculty and administration on the student assistance program and current issues impacting the educational environment; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 18. Conducts sufficient parent awareness sessions around at risk issues that impact school climate and the social and emotional learning environment; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 19. Uses an effective decision-making process where all opinions of team members are valued; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 20. Values the work the SAP team does; | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 21. Uses the time provided productively. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 22. Give adequate time for program evaluation for the improvement of the team's work; and | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 23. Has enough team members to handle all the referrals. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

We are always looking for ways to improve the work of the SAP team. Please provide additional suggestions and comments below.

# Appendix H SAP Team Readiness Checklist

## 1.1 SAP Team Readiness Checklist

**Directions:** With the members of the SAP team, review the questions below. If your team answered "NO" to any of the questions please, review and discuss. Any issues that may result from the review of this checklist should be addressed before you proceed with SAP and PBIS alignment and integration. Remember that your Student Assistance Service Regional coordinator is available to assist you.

| Question | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| 1.   Does the SAP team include a building administrator (i.e. principal, assistant/vice principal)? | | |
| 2.   Does the SAP team include general education teachers? | | |
| 3.   Does the SAP team include social worker and/or psychologist? | | |
| 4.   Does the SAP team include special education teacher? | | |
| 5.   Does the SAP team include special area teacher? | | |
| 6.   Does the SAP team meet on a routine basis? | | |
| 7.   Are building administrators involved and supportive of SAP? | | |
| 8.   Are building administrators supportive & assist in arranging for common meeting times so all team members can attend? | | |
| 9.   Do all SAP team members routinely attend meetings? | | |
| 10.  Does the SAP team have clear delineations of roles and responsibilities? | | |
| 11.  Does the SAP team have formal referral procedures and decision-making processes in place for SAP? | | |
| 12.  Does the SAP team's screening process include clear and consistent student data collection and review procedures? | | |
| 13.  Are confidentiality guidelines for the SAP team well delineated with members demonstrating respect for understanding of privacy rights of parents and students? | | |
| 14.  Does your team have a clear and consistent parent consent process and procedure? | | |
| 15.  Does the SAP team routinely explore and utilize in school resources for referred SAP cases separate from a referral for assessment? | | |
| 16.  Do outside agencies offer psychoeducational groups? | | |
| 17.  Does the school have a mentoring program? | | |
| 18.  Do drug and alcohol liaisons routinely work with the SAP team? | | |
| 19.  Do mental health liaisons routinely work with the SAP team? | | |
| 20.  Are SAP team members willing to be trained in school-wide PBIS? | | |
| 21.  Are SAP team members supportive of the additional responsibilities they could be given? | | |
| 22.  Does your SAP team have written SAP procedures for referrals? | | |

# Appendix I PA SAP Effectiveness Checklist

**Pennsylvania Student Assistance Program**
**Effectiveness Checklist**

| Member name | | Date | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Building | | District | |

Instructions: Please rate each SAP component indicator for your SAP by using the following scale:
**1:** = Never Present          **2:** = Sometimes Present          **3:** = Present All Of The Time

### Component 1 Policy and Procedures

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Building administrators are involved and support SAP | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health SAP liaison works with team | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| SAP Coordinator for the Building | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Policy violations and consequences for alcohol, drugs, involving weapons, tobacco | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| SAP Structure and organization (including members and titles, clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, meeting times, membership selection criteria, etc.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | Total |
| | | | | |

### Component 2 Communications

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Description of SAP Services for faculty, students and others including handbooks, brochures, etc. | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| In-services for teachers, pupil personnel, support staff, and administrators provide time and support for SAP informational updates | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Specific student communication strategy | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Specific parent communication strategy | 1 | 2 | 3 | Total |
| | | | | |

### Component 3 Referral Mechanisms

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SAP is accessible to all targeted students | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Formal referral procedures and decision-making process | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Screening process includes clear and consistent student data collection and review procedures | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Confidentiality guidelines for team are well delineated with members demonstrating respect for and understanding of parents' and students' privacy rights | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Cases are continuously monitored | 1 | 2 | 3 | Total |
| | | | | |

### Component 4 Parent Participation

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Formal parent involvement procedure | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Policy statement defining parents/guardians as decision makers who provide active consent and includes a formal parent involvement and satisfaction procedure | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Confidentiality guidelines known and respected | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Demonstration of respect for parent and family privacy rights | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Clear and consistent parent consent process and procedures | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Information release form process and procedures for consent to exchange confidential student information | 1 | 2 | 3 | Total |
| | | | | |

## Component 5 Team Planning

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regular meeting time sufficient to complete SAP work | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Members' roles and responsibilities are articulated (e.g. leaders, secretary, case manager) | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Case assignment and management procedures | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Regular meeting space with access to telephone | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Inter-team communication system | 1 | 2 | 3 | Total |
| | | | | | |

## Component 6 Intervention and Recommendations

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Support and provide linkages for students and parents to access school and community services | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Team monitors and receives feedback on school and community assessments | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Continuous monitoring of student progress, parent involvement and recommendations | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Written guidelines for dealing with problems that are beyond the scope of the school's responsibility (e.g. provision of treatment, suicidal assessment) | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Written information available on community resources, services, and other options | 1 | 2 | 3 | Total |
| | | | | | |

## Component 7 Follow-up and Support

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Procedures promote student access to and compliance with school and community services and treatment recommendations | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| School resources are available and accessible | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Student follow-up procedure and process promotes student contact and support | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Community resources are available and accessible | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Continuous monitoring of student progress, parent involvement and treatment recommendations compliance | 1 | 2 | 3 | Total |
| | | | | | |

## Component 8 Training

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Team members participate in all Commonwealth Approved training | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Team members participate in a maintenance and development training program | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Team has adequate training schedule and budget | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Team members have opportunity and support for advanced SAP training | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| School and community agency staff participate in ongoing SAP training | 1 | 2 | 3 | Total |
| | | | | | |

## Component 9 Outcome Indicators and Evaluation

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SAP monitoring and improvement mechanisms are in place | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| SAP team maintains a student data management system to track student attendance, GPA, failed courses, grade retention, and school leaving | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Student SAP service participation and utilization system provides accurate and timely information | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Student interventions, recommendations, and outcomes are regularly assessed for quality and goal attainment | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Stakeholder input and suggestions are solicited and utilized | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| SAP satisfaction information is solicited and utilized | 1 | 2 | 3 | Total |
| | | | | | |

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