

## STUDENT ASSISTANCE, BEHAVIOR HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA - TIERED

[Section 1303-B](#) of the [Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949](#) (PA School Code) requires that a school safety and security assessment incorporate a student assistance and behavioral health support assessment. This assessment must provide an analysis of the school entity's climate, including the availability of Student Assistance Programs and behavioral health professionals to provide assistance to the school entity. Additionally, the PA School Code requires a review of recommendations by behavioral and physical health professionals and consideration of their recommendations.

For purposes of this guide, the student assistance and behavioral health criteria are meant to be utilized by assessors to evaluate and make recommendations regarding behavioral health support and school climate. The qualifications of a person with the expertise to conduct school safety and security assessments with respect to this criterion differ greatly from the qualifications of a person who can assess the physical safety of a school. As such, it is recommended that school entities visit PCCD's [Provider Registry webpage](#) to review the behavioral health assessor registration criteria and identify qualified assessors.

As stated earlier in this guide, the Committee recognizes that every school is unique. Each school entity will have its own set of priorities, resources, and building characteristics that will determine which, if any, of these options for consideration may be applicable. Thus, this criterion is written as a series of "should" statements – rather than mandates – to act as a road map and help guide school entities toward improvements in school climate, safety and security.

Tiers have been applied to the statements to further indicate the uniqueness of each school entity. These tiers, tier 1, 2, and 3 (T1, T2, T3), provide information on the level of services and programs that occur in each school. Tier 1 should be considered the baseline of services to be met, with tiers 2 and 3 being considered additional services that build upon and strengthen the foundations of Student Assistance, Mental and Behavioral Health, and School Climate.

All assessors **must consider** each of the criteria below when conducting a school safety and security assessment for student assistance and behavioral health support. The assessor's resulting report should provide an analysis based on the criteria that will assist the school entity in prioritizing projects and decision-making regarding student assistance and behavioral health support.

The following criteria can be printed and used by assessors to complete the assessment. There is a checkbox provided to designate criteria fulfillment.

### STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS (SAP)

As defined in [22 Pa. Code § 12.16](#), Pennsylvania's Student Assistance Program (SAP) is designed to assist school personnel in identifying issues including alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD) and behavioral/mental health (MH) issues which pose a barrier to a student's success. Pennsylvania requires public school districts to have SAP programs.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Secretary's Plan to the General Assembly](#)

This criterion represents best practice guidelines for teams to consider, and aligns with existing information provided in key SAP documents (i.e., [SAP Best Practice Guidelines for Fidelity](#), [SAP Best Practice Guidelines for New Teams](#), and [SAP FAQ and Best Practice Responses](#)), which should be familiar to school entities. While SAP team composition, roles, and functions vary across schools throughout the Commonwealth, these existing SAP documents were developed by the Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services (PNSAS) to highlight minimum expectations and best practices for teams to work toward. The fidelity document, in particular, provides schools with a “ready-made” tool for SAP teams to self-assess their strengths and needs.

PNSAS Regional Coordinators are available to assist SAP teams with these assessments and provide technical assistance to support schools in meeting the criteria outlined below. Additional resources and information about SAP in Pennsylvania are available at [www.pnsas.org](http://www.pnsas.org).

## SAP CONSIDERATIONS

<b>General School Processes</b>		
✓	Tier	Statement
	T1	1. All K-12 students, including students in special education, should have access to the services of a SAP team.
	T2	2. SAP should be coordinated with other school initiatives to address the needs of students (e.g., Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Olweus Bullying Prevention, etc.). <i>NOTE: The assessor should identify which of these initiatives are present in the school.</i>
	T2	3. Schools should identify potential barriers to a student accessing services (lack of insurance, cost for services, travel, etc.) and look to develop professional relationships in the community to address them.
<b>Team Processes</b>		
	T1	4. Each SAP team should consist of at least four members. The size of each team should be sufficient to effectively handle the caseload.
	T1	5. SAP team members should be representatives from any or all of the following groups: administrator, teacher, counselor, psychologist, school social worker, nurse, or other related professional staff.
	T2	a. When possible, the building level administrator should serve as an essential member of the SAP team.
	T2	b. Each school entity should have a central office administrator who serves as an ad-hoc member of the SAP team to ensure that the SAP teams are operational.
	T1	6. The school entity should actively seek to engage the county mental health and drug and alcohol systems and encourage them to appoint representatives as liaisons to the SAP teams.
	T1	7. The SAP team should meet at least once per week/cycle.
	T1	a. The minimum meeting time should be 40 minutes.

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✓	Tier	Statement
	T1	b. An additional 40 minutes should be allocated to case management and intervention activities as needed.
	T1	8. The SAP team should work to provide a safe, respectful, and inclusive school environment; one that is culturally responsive to the students and their families.
	T3	9. The School Safety and Security Coordinator should understand the SAP process in the District and attend SAP meetings when necessary.
<b>Community Services Collaboration</b>		
	T1	10. The school should have written cooperative agreements or letters of agreement with the service provider system, single county authority, county MH, and county ATOD agencies. <i>NOTE: The assessor should review these documents.</i>
		a. These agreement documents should outline each party's respective roles, responsibilities, and expectations.
		b. These agreement documents should contain details regarding the release and sharing of information between the entities involved.
	T1	11. There should be a process for resolving conflicts between the school and service providers' agencies outlined in the letter of agreement. The PNSAS Regional Coordinator may also assist with conflict resolution.
	T2	12. The SAP team should work with the SAP liaison agency (e.g. single county authority, county drug & alcohol and/or county mental health agency, and private providers) to provide updates to school staff on trends in ATOD use, signs and symptoms, and prevention education.
	T3	a. SAP should be coordinated with community providers of MH and ATOD services and other child-serving agencies that assist students in removing barriers to their education.
	T2	13. If the parent provides written permission, supports should be provided by the SAP team for students who receive services from any child-serving agency.
	T2	14. SAP teams should assist students who have been placed in alternative education, alternative education for disruptive youth, residential treatment facilities, youth detention centers, etc. in the transition of returning to general education classes.
<b>Training and Professional Development</b>		
	T1	15. All members of the team should have successfully completed the Pennsylvania SAP K-12 training provided by a Pennsylvania Approved SAP Training Provider.
	T1	16. SAP members should receive periodic training updates, informational sessions, and other related in-service trainings in order to stay current on issues pertaining to SAP.
	T1	17. Team Maintenance Meeting(s) should be held during the school year based on identified training and professional development needs.
	T1	18. There should be ongoing training and training of new team members, either from the district or through grants.
	T1	19. Each school building should have a building level administrator who is properly trained.

✓	Tier	Statement
	T2	20. Each school entity should have a central office administrator who is properly trained.
	T3	21. The School Safety and Security Coordinator should be SAP trained.
<b>SAP Referral Process</b>		
	T1	22. The process for accessing SAP services and the steps utilizing the SAP team when a referral is received should be published and distributed to school staff, board members, students, parents, and the community. (See Appendix C for a sample <a href="#">SAP Process Flow Chart</a> , which is available at <a href="http://www.pnsas.org">www.pnsas.org</a> .)
	T1	23. Confidentiality guidelines for the SAP process should be clearly stated.
	T1	24. Parents/guardians should be an integral part of the SAP process.
	T1	25. Parents/guardians must provide informed written consent for the SAP process to commence once a referral is made.
	T2	26. When the SAP team has been unable to obtain parental consent for referred students to begin the SAP process, schools should take additional steps to engage families in order to identify and address potential barriers (e.g., logistical concerns, lack of information, distrust, etc.).
	T2	a. When appropriate, the SAP team should provide information to referred students on their ability to consent to drug and alcohol and/or mental health services, in accordance with <a href="#">Act 47 of 2018</a> and <a href="#">Act 65 of 2020</a> .
	T2	27. The SAP team should identify and recommend implementation of appropriate school-based interventions and/or supports for all student referrals, especially for students with repeat referrals and referred students whose parents/guardians decline consent for the SAP process.
<b>Data and Reporting</b>		
	T1	28. The School Board should be updated on SAP activities at least annually.
	T2	a. Teams may consider using aggregate PDE 4092 and/or Joint Quarterly Reporting System (JQRS) data, along with other data sources (e.g., PA Youth Survey (PAYS) data) to summarize building and district-level needs and/or outcomes.
	T1	29. Each school within the District must submit and release its referral data to the PDE Online Reporting System (PDE 4092), including:
	T1	a. Identifying the person who is responsible for submitting and releasing the referral data.
	T2	b. How often the data is submitted.
	T3	c. The ability to disaggregate reported data to allow reviewing for possible disproportionality (to the extent that individual student level data cannot be identified).
	T2	30. The effectiveness or success of the SAP team process should be measured, whether through anonymous student surveys or parental feedback. The <a href="#">SAP Satisfaction Survey</a> is a sample tool available that may be completed by staff, parents, and students. (See Appendix B for links to additional tools for SAP team members to monitor and assess their functioning.)

## BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

This criterion represents best practice standards for assessing the availability of behavioral health services in the school. These best practices are drawn from research and established guidelines from national organizations focused on school-based behavioral health, and they are aligned with existing state and federal law. Within this guide, the term behavioral health encompasses mental health and wellness, as well as substance use.

Approximately half of all mental illnesses have an onset during or prior to adolescence, and there is a well-established relationship between students' behavioral health and their academic, social, and emotional outcomes. Schools have an essential role in the prevention, early identification, and intervention of student behavioral health concerns.

School-based behavioral health approaches should incorporate prevention strategies to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors among all students, provide mechanisms by which to identify at-risk students, and support those students with known behavioral health concerns. While MTSS and PBIS are mentioned where applicable, it is recognized that not all schools may be fully utilizing such frameworks for all of their students. Regardless of specific programming, school-based behavioral health efforts should be both comprehensive and multifaceted and must be integrated with other aligning school-based initiatives (e.g., SAP, school climate improvement).

### BEHAVIORAL HEALTH (BH) CONSIDERATIONS

General School Processes		
✓	Tier	Statement
	T1	1. The school entity should have a system in place for assessing the services that are needed, and what is not currently available (i.e., a needs assessment).
	T2	2. Assessments should be conducted at different levels – schoolwide, classroom level, individual student levels, etc.
	T3	3. The school should work to effectively integrate each of the components of the <a href="#">PA Quality Indicators of Emotional Support Services and Programs</a> .
	T3	4. The ratio of school psychologists to students, school counselors to students, school nurses to students, and social workers to students (if these practitioners are present) should be determined and comparable to the recommended National standards.
	T3	a. Assessor should look at the scope of activities in which these professionals are engaged, as well as how time is allocated, to meet the needs of the school community.
	T3	b. Assessor should review whether the numbers of those specific staff positions are sufficient to meet the needs of the school community.
	T1	5. The school should adopt universal programs or strategies (e.g. Tier 1 MTSS) to educate students on behavior health issues and support general mental wellness, including as part of the formal curriculum (e.g., in health, guidance classes, etc.).
	T1	a. Implementation and promotion of <a href="#">Safe2Say Something</a> should be readily evident.

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✓	Tier	Statement
	T2	b. Mental wellness and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs, lessons or strategies should be evidence-based and/or in alignment with established best practices.
	T1	6. The school should offer age-appropriate programming on behavior health issues and general mental wellness.
	T1	a. The school offers suicide prevention programming. (See Appendix B for information on suicide prevention programs.)
	T1	b. The school implements trauma-informed approaches to education. (See Appendix B for links to trauma-informed educational approaches.)
	T1	c. The school has a bullying prevention plan in place. (See Appendix B for information regarding model bullying prevention plans.)
	T1	d. The school has programs regarding bullying and cyberbullying.
	T2	7. The school should identify potential barriers to a student accessing services (lack of insurance, cost for services, travel, etc.)
	T3	8. The school entity should have resources (funding) available to provide BH services. Assessor should review what funding is available for this purpose.
	T1	9. The school entity should have a threat assessment plan to be in place by the beginning of the 20/21 school year.
	T1	10. The school entity should have a threat assessment team that is trained and in place by the beginning of the 20/21 school year.
<b>Community Services Collaboration</b>		
	T1	11. Group counseling or group interventions (Tier 2 MTSS) should be available for students at-risk for behavioral health concerns or with identified areas of need. Assessor should identify what is available, including supports for students affected by trauma.
	T1	12. Individualized (Intensive/Tier 3 MTSS) interventions should be available to support students with identified behavioral health needs, including mechanisms for linkages with community-based resources.
	T1	13. There should be a guide to available services in multiple languages, both in the school and in the community, that is accessible by parents and school personnel.
	T1	14. School staff should utilize a referral flowchart to guide where students can be referred based on their needs or situation.
	T1	15. The school should utilize the proper releases and referral forms to enable students to access agency services and should act in accordance with confidentiality guidelines.
	T2	a. The assessor should review these materials.
	T2	16. Schools may undergo a “resource mapping” process to determine what services, supports and interventions are available and what may be needed.
	T2	17. Schools should look to develop professional relationships in the community to mitigate barriers to a student accessing services.

✓	Tier	Statement
	T2	18. A formal agreement should be in place between providers and schools to provide students with access to needed MH/BH services that are available in the community. Assessor should review this agreement.
	T2	a. The agreement should delineate the provision of services and the level of responsibilities of the entities involved.
	T2	b. The agreement should provide information regarding the level of ongoing communication and sharing of information between the entities involved.
	T2	19. Students 14 years and older seeking community mental/behavioral health services whose parents are not in agreement should be provided with information related to applicable laws and community services.
<b>Training and Professional Development</b>		
	T1	20. Teachers and staff should be educated on how to identify and refer students that may be at risk for behavior health concerns in accordance with existing procedures and available resources (e.g., SAP team, MTSS team, crisis response team, school-mental health professionals, threat assessment, etc.), as well as in trauma-informed approaches to education, in accordance with <a href="#">Act 44 of 2018</a> and <a href="#">Act 18 of 2019</a> .
	T1	21. School mental health professionals, administrators, and/or SAP team members should be provided with opportunities for targeted training to support students at risk or with identified behavioral health concerns through school-based interventions and supports, as well as on crisis response and trauma-informed approaches to education.
<b>Data and Reporting</b>		
	T2	22. Schools should consider the use of multiple sources of data to identify the needs of the school (e.g., universal screening, analysis of attendance, office disciplinary referrals, school climate, school nurse visits, PAYS data, etc.).

## SCHOOL CLIMATE

This criterion represents best practice standards in school climate, documented in research, and reflected in federal resources and the PDE Office for Safe Schools school climate improvement process.

School climate is a multi-faceted phenomenon that reflects the school community's norms, goals, and values and is based on students', parents', and school staff's perceptions of school life. Research has found that a negative school climate is associated with higher rates of school violence and disorder. A positive school climate is recognized as a protective factor supporting positive youth development.

School climate improvement strategies should be led by building level teams empowered to engage the broader school community in identifying needs and implementing improvement strategies. Climate assessments should involve multiple data sources and include, at minimum, surveys, of students' and other stakeholders' perceptions of the school climate. Quality climate assessments are psychometrically sound and include multiple domains

informed by research, such as: safety, school connectedness, positive relationships, engagement, social-emotional learning, and student supports.

## **SCHOOL CLIMATE CONSIDERATIONS**

<b>General Guidelines</b>		
<b>✓</b>	<b>Tier</b>	<b>Statement</b>
	T1	1. Schools should use a validated survey instrument to measure climate.
	T1	a. The selected survey should be age and population appropriate.
	T1	b. The selected survey should be psychometrically sound.
	T1	2. The survey should be conducted at regular intervals (e.g., yearly, multiple times a year, etc.) to allow for stakeholder perceptions of school climate to be measured and compared over time.
	T1	3. The survey should collect information on stakeholder’s perceptions of the school climate across multiple domains which tap into quality of students’ relationships at school, social emotional learning, student supports, teaching practices, and safety.
	T2	4. The survey should collect data from multiple stakeholder groups (i.e., student, teacher, parent/guardian).
	T2	5. The survey may collect information about the shared values, unwritten norms, traditions, and expectations in the school. If this is not addressed in the climate survey, it should be addressed in another way (e.g., building-wide audit, focus group or open-ended survey questions).
	T3	6. The survey should include questions about how youth/families perceive accessing services and the potential barriers they face around perceived stigma, confidentiality, accessibility (e.g., schedules), etc.
	T2	7. Data should be able to be disaggregated (to the extent that individual student level data cannot be identified) to look at various sub-populations of students, allowing examination of disproportionality in school climate experiences which may reveal equity issues.
	T2	a. Data disaggregation should include by grade level, race, gender, ethnicity, and English language learner status (i.e., to the extent that individual student level data cannot be identified).
	T3	b. The data disaggregation may provide information on special populations (i.e., to the extent that individual student level data cannot be identified).
<b>Team Review Structure</b>		
	T2	8. There should be a team structure in the school to review climate-related data and develop an improvement plan that addresses training, systems, and practices.
	T3	a. Ideally, this team should be representative of stakeholders in the school community, including administrators, teachers, school-based professionals, parents/guardians, students, etc.



<b>Data Utilization and Application</b>		
✓	Tier	Statement
	T1	9. The assessor should determine if the school entity participates in the PAYS and/or the PDE School Climate Survey.
	T2	a. If so, the assessor should review how that data is used.
	T2	10. The assessor should also review how the school entity utilizes information available from other existing reports (e.g., US Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, etc.).
	T2	11. The school entity should review SAP survey data and its relationship to other behavioral and climate-related data in planning MTSS supports, as well as the school community's perceptions of SAP.
<b>General School Processes</b>		
	T1	12. The school entity should have a bullying policy.
	T1	a. The policy should be posted in the school and on the school website.
	T1	b. The policy should identify the appropriate school staff person to receive incidents of alleged bullying.
	T1	13. The assessor should review the school entity's policy and procedures for how bullying reports are handled.
	T1	a. The assessor should review reports of bullying to ascertain compliance in practice with the school entity's policy and procedures.
	T3	b. The assessor should determine if appropriate interventions and supportive practices are present for both the targeted student and the student suspected of bullying.
	T1	14. A school entity should have written policies addressing the roles and responsibilities of any School Resource Officers, Police Officers or Security Guards it employs.
	T1	15. There should be adequate opportunities in the school for pro-social involvement (e.g., clubs, sports, activities, music/arts, etc.).
	T2	a. There should be evidence that students are proportionally engaged in the curriculum and school activities.
	T2	16. School wide expectations regarding student behavior should be clearly defined, taught and reinforced to students, such as through a student code of conduct.
	T2	17. The school entity should make use of universal strategies to prevent discipline problems, build skills and foster positive relationships among students (e.g., restorative practices, PBIS, character education, SEL programs, etc.). The assessor should identify what is available in the school and be prepared to offer recommendations on strategies.
	T2	18. The school entity should ensure that classroom environments and disciplinary practices are preventative and responsive.
	T2	a. The school entity should consider how the school and classroom environments systemically and intentionally prevent behavior problems.

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✓	Tier	Statement
	T2	b. The school should support diverse students and students affected by trauma (e.g., utilizing trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices).
	T3	19. The school entity should assess the potential impact of threats or school crisis events on the school climate after they occur.
	T3	a. The school entity should review and assess the protocols, procedures, and communication plans that are in place to assist students and other members of the school community.
	T3	b. The assessor should review the post-incident review processes in place.
<b>Training and Professional Development</b>		
	T1	20. Staff and faculty should be trained on classroom management, de-escalation techniques, and trauma informed approaches to education.
<b>Community Services Collaboration</b>		
	T1	21. The MOU with local police and emergency responders, etc. should document that all appropriate first responders have the direct contact information for school administrators to facilitate communication about possible student needs.
<b>Data and Reporting</b>		
	T2	22. If the school entity employs School Resource Officers, Police Officers or Security Guards, information about the staff, students', and parents'/community members' perceptions of that presence should be collected.
	T2	a. The data collected should be able to be disaggregated (to the extent that individual student level data cannot be identified) to allow for review and analysis of various sub-populations of students, including examining disproportionality and the issue of equity.