

Drug and Alcohol Education, Counseling and Support Services

24 P.S. §15-1547

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PURPOSE

The use and abuse of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs by youth in our Commonwealth continues to pose one of the most serious problems facing educators, parents and communities. Section 1547 of the PA School Code, enacted as Act 211 of 1990, requires school districts to implement a comprehensive tobacco, alcohol and other drugs program including instruction in the classroom. In addition, Section 1547 required the Secretary of Education to recommend to the General Assembly a plan to require and assist each school district to establish and maintain a program to provide appropriate counseling and support services for students experiencing problems with drugs, alcohol and dangerous substances. The Secretary's plan, which was submitted to the General Assembly on April 19, 1991, is available upon request.

IMPLEMENTATION

Classroom Instruction

Section 1547 requires each public school student to receive instruction in alcohol, chemical and tobacco abuse in every year in every grade from kindergarten to grade 12. While the law requires universal instruction for all students, it does not prescribe the curriculum, methodology or content of the courses of study. The law requires that the instruction be age appropriate, sequential, discourage use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, and communicate that the use of illicit drugs and the improper use of legally obtained drugs is wrong. The law does not require local schools to set up an independent course of study but rather to integrate the instruction in health or other appropriate courses of study.

In-service

As part of its in-service training program, local schools are required to provide programs on alcohol, other drugs, tobacco and controlled substances for all instructors whose teaching responsibilities include the course of study on tobacco, alcohol and other drug prevention.

Counseling and Support Services

In response to the Secretary of Education's plan to the General Assembly, the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Departments of Health and Public Welfare, designated the student assistance program as the vehicle to require and assist 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 drugs, alcohol and dangerous controlled substances.

The Commonwealth's student assistance program is designed to assist school personnel to identify issues, including alcohol, drugs and others, which pose a barrier to a student's learning and school success. Student assistance is not a treatment program; rather, it is a systematic process using effective and accountable professional techniques to mobilize school resources to remove the barriers to learning, and, where the problem is beyond the

scope of the school, to assist the parent and the student with information so they may access services within the community. The student assistance team members do not diagnose, treat or refer for treatment; but they may refer for an assessment for treatment.

It is the parent's right to be involved in the process and to have full access to all school records under applicable state and federal laws and regulations. Involvement of parents in all phases of the student assistance program underscores the parent's role and responsibility in the decision-making process affecting their children's education and is the key to the successful resolution of problems.

The core of the program is a professionally trained team, including school staff and liaisons from community agencies, who process issues based upon state guidelines, professional standards and policies and procedures adopted by the local board of directors. Professional training for team members in all phases of the student assistance process, which is consistent with state guidelines and conducted by a training provider approved by the Departments of Education, Health and Public Welfare, is required to ensure the appropriateness of the recommended services, effective interagency collaboration and compliance with state and federal laws protecting the privacy rights of parents and students.

The rigorous training for team members, which results in a certificate from the approved training provider, ensures the board of school directors, school administrators, parents, students and the public that team members have received up-to-date professional training consistent with accountable standards and appropriate professional procedures. The State Guidelines for Student Assistance Program Implementation, the State Guidelines for Student Assistance Program Training and Technical Assistance and a list of Approved Training Providers are available upon request.

Schools' Responsibilities

The use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs and other related issues do impact upon a child's performance in school; however, it is neither the mission of the school nor its responsibility to resolve all problems which impact upon school performance. Student assistance team members are trained to identify problems, determine whether or not the presenting problem lies within the responsibility of the school and makes recommendations to assist the student and the parent.

In cases where the problem lies beyond the scope of the school's responsibility, it is the team's responsibility to inform the parent of the problem affecting the child's performance in school, provide information on community resources and the options to deal with the problem, and, where necessary, set up linkages with resources to help resolve the problem.

For those youngsters receiving treatment through a community agency, the team, in collaboration with the parent and the agency, plans in-school support services during and after treatment. The team's effectiveness in helping the student and the parent remove the barriers to learning and improve student performance depends on the training of individual team members, maintenance of the student assistance process, level of administrative commitment and board support, active parent and student involvement and the available resources both in the school and the community. Sufficient time for the team members to carry out their responsibilities is essential. It is imperative that the team educate school staff, board members, parents, students and the community about its role, responsibilities and limitations in dealing with problems which affect children's performance in school. All segments of the community should be made aware that the team does not provide

diagnosis or treatment services nor does it replace the parents' decision-making responsibility relative to the resolution of their children's problems.

Data in a statewide survey conducted in the spring of 1995 shows that the use and abuse of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs is a serious problem for youth in our Commonwealth. Effective education is the most cost efficient method since preventing the problem will save valuable resources. However, where problems involving alcohol and other drugs do occur, it is important that the school, parents, students and communities are prepared to deal with them. The Commonwealth's student assistance program can both prevent and offer help in dealing with these problems. Section 1547 calls upon the schools to reach out to parents and the community to help prevent and deal with the problems which arise from the use and abuse of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. It is incumbent upon all in the school and community to work together to combat this threat to our children – nothing less than our children's future depends upon our success.

REFERENCES:

Purdon's

24 P.S. §15-1547

State Board of Education Regulations

[22 Pa. Code § 12.31](#)

[22 Pa. Code § 12.32](#)

[22 Pa. Code § 12.33](#)

Federal Statute

20 U.S.C. §1232g, FERPA

20 U.S.C. §1232h

Federal Regulation

34 C.F.R. Part 98

34 C.F.R. Part 99

Other

Secretary's Plan to the General Assembly, April 19, 1991

State Guidelines for Student Assistance Program Implementation

State Guidelines for Student Assistance Program Training and Technical Assistance

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