

## **“WHAT DOES A SAC DO?”**

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What is a SAC? You have probably heard the word before but for many parents and caregivers it is not clear what they do, if there is one at your child’s school, or where in the school you can find them.

A SAC is a Student Assistance Counselor. There is a part-time SAC in each elementary school, a full-time SAC in each middle school and three at the high school. They have many functions but their primary goal is to work with students and families to address social-emotional issues that may hinder academic and social success. A Student Assistant Counselor’s work is fully aligned with district goals; namely, improving academic achievement, closing the achievement gap and enabling all students to remain in their home district in the least restrictive settings.

According to Linda Lendman, SAC at Bullock and Nishuane elementary schools, a Student Assistant Counselor’s work is primarily preventative. “On the elementary level, our work includes running social skills groups for all students, facilitating special subject groups (divorce, loss, community service) and working very closely with caregivers and teachers. We also help with emergencies, economic issues, and referrals for community service.”

At the middle school level, SACs assist students in navigating the social and academic stress they encounter in their teenage years. As they grow up, students begin to tackle issues such as peer pressure to engage in high risk behaviors and relationship challenges.

Much of student stress is rooted in the normal response to peer, family and school tensions. Occasionally, students act out in a way that can be defiant and even self-destructive due to their impaired ability to cope. Addressing these issues early can enable students to thrive.

At the high school level, there is one SAC in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy and two SACs covering grades 10-12. In the high school, SACs work closely with guidance counselors to get to know each child and to help them make informed decisions.

The role of the HS student assistance counselor can be separated into four parts:

- 1) Assisting families and students with alcohol and drug issues by connecting students and families to community resources;

2) Providing support for families, staff and administration for students who may have academic issues relating to social-emotional/mental health issues such as peer pressure, relationship difficulties, family problems, self-esteem and depression, among others;

3) Assisting students with the adjustment to high school and open campus life and getting to the next step of college or career.

4) Serving as members of the high school student support teams (such as crisis, 504, I&RS, and emergency management teams) and assisting with staff development.

In short, Student Assistance Counselors provide a support system for students and families to use when circumstances threaten school performance. Students may see the SAC for assistance with any personal issue. Many parents contact their child's SAC to discuss a potential problem or ask for help connecting to community resources.

Get to know the Student Assistant Counselor at your child's school. Develop a working relationship with him or her that will strengthen the "safety net" that supports your child. Working together with SACs, nurses and teachers can make a difference in the lives of our children.