



## **"Drug and Alcohol Abuse by Students with Disabilities"**

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While students with disabilities are typically no more likely to use or abuse alcohol or drugs than their non-disabled peers, the needs of students who are disabled and dependent on alcohol or drugs can be significantly more complex to address. Although drug and alcohol dependency is not considered a disability under the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, a student's alcohol or drug use does not unilaterally exclude him or her from referral for assessment of eligibility for special education and related services. Moreover, school districts may not exclude students from special education services on the basis of their addiction.

For all students in Pennsylvania, school districts are required to provide a comprehensive tobacco, alcohol and drug program which includes instruction in the classroom. In addition, school districts should have a Student Assistance Program, sometimes referred to as a SAP team, designed to identify students who may be experiencing problems, including alcohol, drugs and other problems, which are affecting their school performance. Once a student is identified as at risk or in need of support, school personnel can draw on school resources to assist the student, and, where the problem is more extensive than can be managed with school level resources, aid the parent and the student in accessing services within the community. Parents have a right to be involved in this process and to have full access to all of their child's school records under applicable state and federal laws and regulations.

For students who are disabled and dependent, school districts should also ensure interagency collaboration at the students' Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 team meeting by including the dependent students drug and alcohol treatment providers. Specifically, IEP or Section 504 team members should consider, where appropriate:

- Referring students for a psychiatric evaluation to determine any emotional issues connected to the drug or alcohol use;
- Conducting a functional behavior assessment with regard to the underlying emotional triggers of the usage;
- Counseling services;
- Psychological services;
- Family training; and
- Placement in a program or alternative school with an integrated treatment model for drugs and alcohol.

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This interagency collaboration is critical. By making certain all of the students' providers respond to underlying problems or behavior related to drug or alcohol use in a consistent manner, disabled and dependent students stand the best chance of achieving educational success.

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