School Practitioner Listserv

29 years & counting

A Weekly Community of Practice Network for Sharing and Interchange

Mental Health in Schools
UCLA
Center
Program and Policy Analysis*

March 16, 2015

Special Focus on *School Connectedness*

Request from a Colleague

>Resources to promote school connectedness

Comments from the Field

>On promoting school connectedness

Featured Set of Center Resources

>Addressing the context for enhancing school connectedness

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Please forward this to a few colleagues you think might be interested. The more who join, the more we are likely to receive to share.

For those who have been forwarded this and want to be part of the weekly exchange, send an email to **Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

For previous recent postings of this community of practice, see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm

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Note: In keeping with the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports*, this community of practice network has expanded in number of participants and topics discussed. The thematic emphasis is on (1) daily concerns confronting those working in and with schools, (2) the transformation of student and learning supports, and (3) promoting whole child development and positive school climate.

Request: Wanted: School connectedness research/tools/activities to foster student success by enhancing relationships with staff and teachers.

Center Response: The topic of school connectedness is growing in popularity. Given the importance of the concept, care must be taken not to let it become just another buzzword. A prime emphasis needs to be on improving *working* relationships at a school between adults and students, among adults, and among students. Establishing effective, respectful, caring, and durable working relationships requires time and calls for contextual improvements (e.g., developing a personalized approach to instruction, minimizing factors that work against connectedness, providing student and learning supports in the classroom and school-wide). Positive working relationships are at the core of school connectedness; school connectedness is at the core of a safe and supportive school climate.

For a start in identifying resources, go to the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on
>*School Climate* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/environments.htm
It provides links to a range of materials (from our center and from others). For example:

With regard to research, see
>*Social and School Connectedness in Early Secondary School as Predictors of Late Teenage Substance Use, Mental Health, and Academic Outcomes* –
http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(06)00422-8/abstract
Examines associations between social relationships and school engagement in early secondary school and mental health, substance use, and educational achievement 2–4 years later.

With regard to resources on school connectedness and how to promote it, see
>*School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth*
(from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention)
http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness.pdf
>*School Connectedness* (from the California Safe and Supportive Schools site)
http://californias3.wested.org/tools/1
>*Improving Working Relationships Inside the Classroom* (from our Center)
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/relations.pdf
>*School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate* (from our Center) http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schooleng.pdf

A special concern is for disconnected students. Here's a few thoughts from our work:

Response to intervention can be useful starting point in efforts to re-engage a student. Minimally, the approach adds additional assessment information about what has gone wrong. As we all know, the causes of student problems are hard to analyze. What looks like a learning or an attentional problem may be emotionally-based. Misbehavior often arises in reaction to learning difficulties. What appears as a school problem may be the result of problems at home.
       Properly implemented, a response to intervention process delineates problem-solving steps and strategies. From this perspective, we suggest the following approach.

   (1)   Understand the problem – the first steps in re-engaging a student should involve getting the youngster's view of what's wrong (including, as feasible, exploring the problem with the family). Consider this process:

(a) Through enhanced personal contacts, build a positive working relationship with the youngster and family.

(b) Focus first on assets (e.g. positive attributes, outside interests, hobbies, what the youngster likes at school and in class).

(c) Ask about what the youngster doesn't like at school.

(d) Explore the reasons for "dislikes" (e.g., Are assignments seen as too hard? as uninteresting? Is the youngster embarrassed because others will think s/he does not have the ability to do assignments? Is the youngster picked on? rejected? alienated?)

(e) Explore other possible causal factors.

(f) Explore what the youngster and those in the home think can be done to make things better (including extra support from a volunteer, a peer, friend, etc.).

(g) Discuss some new things the youngster and those in the home would be willing to try to make the situation better.

Note: Examples of interview instruments to help access the student's perception of the situation are in the resource from our Center entitled
>*Pre-referral interventions: Tools* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/reengage_qt/tools.pdf

(2) Try new strategies in the classroom — based on the best information about what is causing the problem.

(3) If the new strategies don't work, talk to others at school to learn about approaches they find helpful (e.g., reach out for support/ mentoring/coaching, participate with others in clusters and teams, observe how others teach in ways that effectively address differences in motivation and capability, request additional staff development on working with such youngsters).

(4) If necessary, use the school's referral processes to ask for additional support services.

(5) Coordinate with referral resources.

Listserv Participants: How do your local schools promote school connectedness? Let us know so we can let others learn. Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Comments from the Field: **On promoting school connectedness**

(1) " I've used a staff meeting to present data on how much better youth can do with at least one adult relationship in the school. Then I circulate a class roster. Teachers cross off the names of all the students they already have a connection to and we figure out who's left over. That list of names gets divided among staff members. It's often revealing for staff members to see the entire list and then let them select one youth that they will reach out to - who is probably already in their class. I'd also recommend revisiting the plan once a month or so to let teachers talk about successes or challenges and share ideas. If this become routine, the expectation gets established among staff (and support staff if possible) that every student has somebody they trust at school. (I've done this in smaller school districts with some success but am not sure how it might need to be adapted for a larger district - with lots of students.)"

(2) "Although it may seem self-evident that students who feel connected to their schools because of positive relationships with their teachers will do better, not everybody believes this. I have had a number of educators tell me 'I don't get paid to be a kindly uncle to my students' or words to that effect and these people will not change their ways because some research says they should. Many improvement plans die in the public schools due to a relatively low treatment integrity.

In my experience, it seemed that smaller schools did better at presenting a common, unified educational philosophy than learger schools. Simple unconditional acceptance of all students as they are can be a powerful educational technique, especially when compared to 'we don't know where that student should go, but we don't have anything for students like that here.'

I'm most familiar with the following materials cited by the National Association of School Psychologists, although school psychologists aren't the only ones beating this drum."

>http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/40/7/connecting-students.aspx
>http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr05/vol62/num07/A-Case-for-School-Connectedness.aspx
>http://cecp.air.org/download/MCMonographFINAL.pdf

##

F eatured Set of Center Resources

>Addressing the context for enhancing school connectedness

How can we create school and classrooms environments
that enhance students feelings of connectedness?

As students move from elementary school and one teacher per year, creating close connections with adults at a school becomes a greater challenge – multiple teachers in middle school, large enrollments in high school make school connectedness less likely for many students. At all levels, the concern is to both minimize ways the environment might work against school connectedness and maximize positive opportunities. Addressing such concerns calls for a full continuum of interventions that encompass a wide range of classroom and school-wide approaches. All this is a major focus for our Center.

We highlight relevant resources for improving classroom and school environments through our online clearinghouse *Quick Finds*. For example, go to the *Quick Find* menu at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm and browse such topics as:

>Ability Grouping >Accommodating Differences and Disabilities
>After-school, Summer, and Expanded Learning Opportunities
>Barriers to Learning >Bullying >Burnout >Classroom Climate/Culture
>Classroom Management >Cultural Competence >Disciplinary Practices
>Early Intervention >Environments that Support Learning
>Home/Parent Involvement in Schools >Learning Supports
>Motivation/Engagement/Re-engagement >Small classes/small schools
 . . . *and many more.*

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***Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
enabling equity of opportunity and promoting whole child development.***

For information about the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student
and Learning Supports*, see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html

Also see: *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified,
Comprehensive, and Equitable System –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf

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***Please share relevant resources ideas, requests, comments, and
experiences!*** **Send to** ltaylor@ucla.edu

**Note: Responses come only to our Center at UCLA for possible
inclusion in the next week's message.**

**We also post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net
Exchange* on our website at**
        http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm
and to *Facebook* -- access from the Center's home page
                http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/