30 years & counting

School Practitioner Listserv

A Weekly Community of Practice Network for Sharing and Interchange

Mental Health in Schools
UCLA Center
Program and Policy Analysis*

June 6, 2016

Concerns from the Field:

(1) What's the best approach to designing mental health plan for our district?

(2) What contributes to the differences in student motivation teachers report in suburban v. urban schools?

Featured Set of Center Resources:
>Poverty and barriers to learning

A Tragic and Personal Note About the Shooting on Our Campus

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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 *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.

Concern from the Field: "I am part of a group that is just beginning to design a mental health plan for our district. As we begin this work, we continually use the resources provided by your team at UCLA. Some of the issues we are currently exploring are:

- Do we screen for mental health?

- If so, which screeners are most effective for our population?

- Which prevention programs should we explore?

- How can we be sure the screener and prevention programs correlate or compliment each other?

Based on your recent newsletter, we aren't alone with these questions. My director is interested in seeking some time with you and/or your staff for our team to bounce our plans and work off you and obtaining feedback as to what to keep doing, change, or drop. Do you still provide coaching and if so, what is the best way to connect? I look forward to hearing more and we appreciate all the resources and guidance provided by your team. Thanks,"

Center Response: As you probably have seen from looking over our resources, we think that the broad aim of enhancing mental health in schools is best achieved by working to unify and develop a comprehensive and equitable system of student and learning supports. We view this as a better investment of time and resources than formally pursuing universal first level screening and continuing the ad hoc and fragmented approaches we see in most schools. (Our experience is that teachers and other school staff, as well as many parents are already doing a great deal of first level screening and what schools need is a system that effectively hears their concerns about students and responds.)

From our perspective, the aim of mental health in schools is to provide a full intervention continuum that

(a) moves beyond current Multi-tier System of Support (MTSS) thinking (i.e., stresses unifying a school's resources for student and learning supports and blending in community resources to fill critical gaps; the emphasis is on developing a comprehensive, equitable, and systemic component; *one facet* of this component is a full continuum that promotes healthy social emotional development, prevents problems, responds quickly when problems arise, and contributes effectively to helping with severe and chronic problems)

(b) cohesively organizes student and learning supports into a set of well designed and delimited intervention arenas (e.g., we have categorized six that schools are involved in addressing each day).

We view embedding mental health concerns into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports not only is consistent with designing a mental health plan for the district but is critical to ending the marginalization of such work. We also see developing such a system as the most effective way to do strategic planning and for deploying sparse district and school (and community) resources.

Here are some specific Center resources that further clarify all this:

(1) See the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports –* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html . Note the various resources, and for an overview, browse the resource entitled: *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf

(2) Re: MTSS, see: *Moving Beyond the Three Tier Intervention Pyramid Toward a Comprehensive Framework for Student and Learning Supports --* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/threetier.pdf

(3) See the *Mental Health Practitioners Toolbox* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm. The toolbox reflects a broad view of mental health in schools and the role mental health plays in the well-being of students, their families, and their teachers. And it stresses the value of embedding mental health into a comprehensive classroom and school-wide system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Specifically, the resources underscore how essential such a system is to ensuring all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and illustrate how we embed mental health into the broader framework.

The Nine Sections of the Toolbox are:

> I. Framing Mental Health in Schools
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> II. Concerns and Controversies
>
> III. Challenges and Opportunities in the Classroom
>
> IV. About Behavior Problems and Social and Emotional Learning
>
> V. Mental Health Assistance for Students at School
>
> VI. Focusing on the Well -being of School Staff
>
> VII. On -line Clearinghouse Quick Finds and Fact & Information Resources
>
> VIII. Online Continuing Education Modules & Guidebooks
>
> IX. Quick Training Aids & Tutorials

(Each section of the toolbox is under continuous development and all feedback and suggestions are appreciated.)

ABOUT A CENTER DISCUSSION WITH ADMINISTRATORS AND TEAMS

We are always interesting in helping. We know transforming systems is difficult, and we endeavor to be helpful to schools everywhere as they try to move forward. With this in mind, we regularly provide technical assistance to all who request it. For those developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports, we also offer coaching.

What we ask before we get deeply involved is that folks do enough review of what we are about so that they have awareness and some details about what we advocate. To aid in this, we have compiled many introductory materials and resource aids in a *System Change Toolkit for Transforming Student Supports* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm . For example, see the following resource designed to guide principals who have decided to move forward:

> *>Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School: Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf

We also develop documents designed to help teachers and other school staff rethink some of what they are doing to better address students' learning, behavior, and/or emotional problem. For example, see:

> *>Learning Supports: Enabling Learning in the Classroom* — http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtipract.pdf
>
> and also see the
> >Continuing education self -study and formal inservice modules – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/training

After interested administrators and planning teams orient themselves to our approach, we are ready via email and conference calls to bounce ideas, provide feedback on plans and designs. Then, we can formulate a plan for coaching sustainable implementation.

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Invitation to listserv participants: *What's your take on all this?* What would you advise a group getting started on designing mental health for their district? What is your experience? Lessons learned? Comments? Recommendations? What's happening locally? Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Concern from the Field: *What contributes to the differences in student motivation teachers report related to suburban v. urban schools?*

Center Response: Inequities related to where students live and go to school are a long-standing concern. The above question stresses suburban vs. urban neighborhoods. However, the distinction between suburban and urban schools is insufficient when discussing differences in student motivation, performance, and achievement. Studies of neighborhoods include terms such as urban, inner city, suburbs, exburbs, rural, residential, commercial, industrial, racially isolated, barrios, ghettos.

When differences in student motivation, success, and well-being are discussed, studies consistently point to differences in student and family background and current living conditions, prior school preparation of students, factors that shape successful schools, peer influences, and a variety of individual characteristics. And the complex interaction among all identified factors is always stressed.

Students growing up in poverty usually are seen as experiencing many factors that work against their motivation and readiness to pursue what the school is trying to teach. Of course, some students who are raised under economically better conditions also experience interfering factors. However, there are stark differences in the proportions of each of these groups with respect to succeeding at school.

Every teacher would like a classroom full of students who are motivationally ready and able to learn what the teacher has planned for the day. Given that what is being taught often isn't a good match with student intrinsic motivation, schools themselves too often have a negative effect on student motivation. As those who study motivation stress, schools dampen motivation when they engender threats to students' *feelings of self-determination, competence, and connection with significant others.* Such threats are regularly experienced by students (and staff) in many struggling large urban schools as well as those in impoverished rural locales and by some in schools that are deemed to be succeeding on-the-whole.

While schools concerned with addressing inequities can use student motivation as an indice of differences related to geographic locales, the real need is to focus on *enhancing equity of opportunity* for student success at school and beyond. This requires a potent system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. From the perspective of student engagement, it requires increased attention not only to engaging students, but to re-engaging disconnected students. From an intrinsic motivational perspective, it requires that schools focus to a much greater extent than they currently do on minimizing threats to and maximizing feelings of self-determination, competence, and connection with significant others with a concern for students and staff.

There is a considerable literature related to all this. For example, below are a couple of recent references that underscore concerns about inequities. Others can be accessed through the Center's Quick Finds -- a few of which are highlighted in the section of this Practitioner that features Center resources. *If anyone participating in this community of practice has other related references they think should be attended to, please send them along for us to share.*

>*How Does Family Well-Being Vary across Different Types of Neighborhoods?*
   A report from the Urban Institute
Excerpt: "A substantial body of social science research finds that living in high-poverty and racially isolated neighborhoods can undermine the well-being and life-chances of both children and adults. Clearly, neighborhood environment is not the sole or even the most important factor influencing people's well-being; individual and family attributes also play critical roles and interact in complex ways with neighborhood characteristics. Just because researchers observe a high incidence of a problem (such as poor health or teen parenting) in high-poverty neighborhoods does not necessarily mean that the neighborhood environment caused the problem. It may mean that many families with these problems ended up living in high poverty neighborhoods, perhaps because housing was more affordable there or because discrimination limited access to other neighborhoods. Nevertheless, rigorous research indicates that neighborhood isolation and distress can contribute to or exacerbate individual and family distress. Regardless of whether neighborhood conditions cause problems in the lives of families, an increased incidence of problems in particular neighborhoods warrants policy attention...."

>Neighborhood residence and mental health problems. Y. Xue, T. Leventhal, J. Brooks-Gunn, & F.J. Earls (2005). *Archives of General Psychiatry, 62,* 554-563.
   http://archpsyc.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=208555

From the abstract:
"Context: Little research has investigated possible effects of neighborhood residence on mental health problems in children such as depression, anxiety, and withdrawal.
Design and Setting: The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods is a multilevel, longitudinal study of a representative sample of children aged 5 to 11 years in the late 1990s recruited from 80 neighborhoods. A community survey assessing neighborhood social processes was conducted with an independent sample of adult residents in these 80 neighborhoods and is used in conjunction with US census data to assess neighborhood conditions.
Results: The percentages of children above the clinical threshold were 21.5%, 18.3%, and 11.5% in neighborhoods of low, medium, and high socioeconomic status, respectively. A substantial proportion of variance in children's total internalizing scores (intraclass correlation, 11.1%) was attributable to between-neighborhood differences. Concentrated disadvantage was associated with more mental health problems and a higher number of children in the clinical range, after accounting for family demographic characteristics, maternal depression, and earlier child mental health scores. Neighborhood collective efficacy and organizational participation were associated with better mental health, after accounting for neighborhood concentrated disadvantage. Collective efficacy mediated the effect of concentrated disadvantage.
*Conclusions:* A large number of children in poor neighborhoods have mental health problems. The mechanism through which neighborhood economic effects operated was community social control and cohesion, which may be amenable to intervention."

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nvitation to listserv participants: ***What's your take on all this?*** Comments? Recommendations? What's happening locally? Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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I KNOW YOU LIKE LUNCH-TIME BEST,
BUT THERE MUST BE SOMETHING ELSE
YOU'D LIKE TO DO AT SCHOOL!
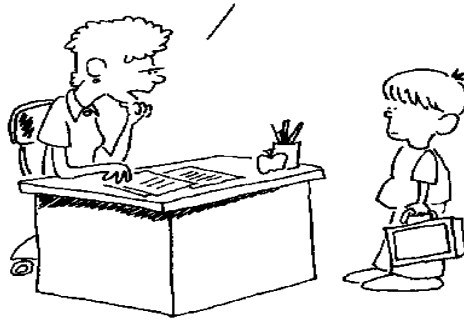
Featured Set of Center Resources

>Poverty and barriers to learning

Summer is time for planning, staff development, and formulating new directions to achieve better results. The Center's Quick Finds provide links to resources to help with planning and implementation. Go to the drop down Quick Find menu and see the over 130 topics.

Browse as examples:

Barriers to Learning
    Children and Poverty
        Children of Alcoholics & Substance Abusers
           Cultural Competence and Related Issues
             Domestic Violence
             Foster Care
               Homeless Children and Youth - Education
               Immigrant Students and Mental Health
               Juvenile Justice Systems - Mental Health Needs
               Prevention for Students "At Risk".
               Teen Pregnancy and Prevention.

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A Tragic and Personal Reminder

The events of Wednesday on our campus echo in every school across the country. The response here underscores how much schools have to plan for what to do when a crisis/emergency happens, what to do in the immediate aftermath, what to do in the days and weeks that follow, and ultimately they need to consider whether such an event might have been prevented and take steps for the future. And they need to evaluate their responses in order to improve their plans.

As you know, *Crisis Response and Prevention* is one of the six content arenas in the unifying intervention prototype framework we have developed http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf. Our Center provides links to many resources for schools related to this (go to the Center's homepage http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/ and click on the icon labeled *Responding to a Crisis*). As an example, see the resource entitled "The school's role in addressing psychological reactions and loss" http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/lossdiscussion.pdf

For some on our campus, this is a time of personal loss and grieving. For all of us, it is a time for reflection and commitment to making things better.

*For information about the

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

THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND
INTERESTING THIS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE BECOMES!

Send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

We 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/ **)**