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School Practitioner Listserv

A Weekly Community of Practice Network for Sharing and Interchange

Mental Health in Schools
UCLA
Center
Program and Policy Analysis*

September 12, 2016

A Colleague Shares a Special Goal for the New School Year

  >Preventing staff burnout by providing supports every day

- **Center Comments**
- **Comments from Colleagues in the Field**

Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Featured Set of Center Resources for

  >Preventing burnout: Building strength

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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 is being sent to and forwarded by over 114,000 school and community stakeholders concerned about (1) daily matters confronting schools, (2) promoting whole child development and positive school climate, and (3) the transformation of student and learning supports.

AColleague Shares a Special Goal for the New School Year

"My personal and professional goal this year is to focus on the mental health of our staff/adults. I have been compiling resources and research (including yours) to find best-practices in the area of staff self-care. I've observed far too many dedicated, energetic staff members (of all ages and levels of experience) who become burned out, angry, agitated, exhausted and apathetic - this seems to be occurring at higher numbers in recent years. I'm committed to using my influence in the school district/community/state to do all in my power to help create a meaningful system of support for those who do this difficult work each and every day, and who are shaping the hearts and minds of our young people. If we (adults) are not well, they (the children) will not be, either."

Center Comments: Anyone who works in schools knows about burnout. For some staff, staggering workloads, major problems, and endless hassles are the name of the game. There are many frustrations, large and small, that affect staff (and student) morale and mental health. As with so many other life problems, if ignored, burnout takes a severe toll not only on individuals, but on other staff and many students. Rather than suffer through it all, it is wonderful when staff, especially those who bring a mental health perspective to schools, take a leadership role to address the matter.
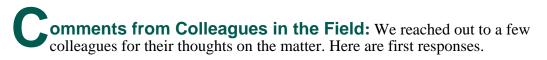
As with all predictable problems in schools, prevention is the most desirable and proactive approach. Research on staff burnout provides important insights into the underlying causes and help in formulating a strategic plan to counter the problem. We have a Quick Find on the topic of *Burnout* – *http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/burnout.htm* . *Listed there is our introductory packet entitled: Understanding and Minimizing Staff* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/burnout/burn1.pdf

Drawing on available research and theory, we stress that, while periodic "morale boosters" are nice, what school staff need is greater systematic attention to enhancing the quality of daily life at school. From an intrinsic motivational perspective, the need is for supports that minimize threats to and that enhance positive feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness to significant others. A few examples of what schools can do immediately include:

- inducting newcomers in a welcoming, socially supportive way
- transforming working conditions by opening classroom doors and creating appropriate teams of staff and students who support, nurture, and learn from each other every day
- transforming inservice training into personalized staff development and support from first induction into a school through ongoing capacity building
- restructuring school governance to enable shared decision-making.

School support staff can play a crucial role in designing strategies to support staff and students and help create a caring, learning environment. Particular attention needs to be paid to enhancing a strong collegial and social support structure and meaningful ways to participate in decision making for staff (and students). The aim should be to ensure that all those at the school experience it as a place where they believe they can succeed, feel supported in their efforts, and feel they have sufficient control over what is happening to them.

Of course, none of this is easy, but it is becoming increasingly essential for reversing conditions that undermine staff well-being and lead so many teachers to leave the profession within their first years on the job.

Comments from Colleagues in the Field: We reached out to a few colleagues for their thoughts on the matter. Here are first responses.

(1) Many leaders do not lead from the heart, meaning they do not address the "burned out, angry, agitated, exhausted and apathetic" side of the job. They would need to develop a support system that proactively focuses on the targeted reasons why their teachers are feeling this way. Is it lack of discipline support? Lack of instructional progress? Lack of an overall positive school climate and culture? In the end it boils down to leadership at the building.

If leadership is designing and implementing a culture of support then the above mentioned feelings typically dissipate as they trust and feel safe in their school and leader. So the first thing I would suggest is the leadership honestly looking in the mirror and understanding their faults. I have never known a "great" school under "great" leadership to have a collective issue with anger, agitation, exhaustion, and apathy. I know many leaders that point the finger at other reasons (teachers, students, parents, central office, etc.) but in the core of it all rests the leader. Unearthing faults in oneself is a difficult task and when the mirror is turned in their direction they tend to deflect the image elsewhere but if there is a school with negative collective issues then change is not a choice it must happen.

(2) It is very helpful to have a strong social outlet between staff throughout the year. We regularly meet for dinner, appetizers, book clubs and holiday parties. The principal is key in this effort as well. The principal has the ability to make something more stressful than it needs to be, or the ability to help staff find their own growth mindset as they work toward being the best educators they can be. It is certainly a worthy focus for the school counselor!

(3) What I might suggest is for them to do a session with their administrators and/or faculty groups and use both the three components AND the six practice areas of a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports to analyze exactly what their perceptions are.

- For INSTRUCTION ask: What in this area is causing you anxiety and keeping you from doing "good work"?

- For MANAGEMENT ask: What in this area is preventing you from teaching and learning?

- For LEARNING SUPPORTS: for each of the six areas (classroom, crisis, family, community, transitions, support) ask: What could we do in this area that would support you in doing the work with students?

Charting the responses is a good opportunity for people to share their angst and then get support as well for specific areas of concern.

(4) Burn-out is the result of over-work and under-appreciation, so having each employee take a serious, continuous attitude toward self-care is key. Self-care is a popular topic, and I suspect we have all heard the basics many times. As mentioned in https://www.grafton.org/the-importance-of-self-care/, people should:

*Take time to create a personalized self-care plan
*Make lists of pleasurable activities and put them on the calendar (so you don't give away that time to other appointments)
*Spend time doing meaningful work that is not related to employment

      *Exercise, eat well, practice self-calming activities (such a mindfulness)
      *Maintain a balance of all the areas of your life that need time

Notice a pattern? Self-care takes time! Just about everybody I know is too busy... which they say stresses them to a point of discomfort ... but they don't have time to do anything about it because if they slow down something will fall apart....

Anything that enables employees to consistently balance the work time with self-care activities should be a step in the right direction. Self-care needs to be a daily routine. However, supervisors have a tricky job. On one hand, they don't want to see employees doing so much self-care that work suffers. On the other, supporting with the right amount/type of self care may require employees to reveal sensitive aspects about their own mental health. "One size fits all" doesn't work when it comes to self-care, so employees need to be able to reveal what might historically be thought of as "weaknesses" to the supervisor. If I'm feeling really burned-out and not particularly effective, perhaps to the point that I should be seeing the Employee Assistance counselor, then I'm not likely to say anything if I believe my supervisor will use the information to lower my performance rating, gossip about me, or even dismiss me. Thus, employee-supervisor trust-building should be a rock-solid part of the system early in the process. If trust fails just once, it will be very difficult for the rest of the program to continue.

Supervisors need to know staff well enough to understand their stresses and what would be an efficient way for each one to depressurize. One person might love to see a note with a single flower suddenly appear on the desk, and another person might think that's stupid and reach for the allergy medication. The self-care program planners will need to get out of the Central Office and see what is happening in the trenches. When problems are seen from staff members' points of view, it will be easier to figure out the best ways to support their self-care efforts. Eventually, the ideal is to anticipate needs and deliver solutions just before staff are aware they need something. I agree that if the adults are not well, everything we do with our students will suffer. Mental health is a foundation element that has been ignored for too long.

It's really exciting to hear somebody is planning to face this situation head-on. Would love to hear how things are going as you progress on the journey!

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nvitation to listserv participants:

What's your take on all this?

**What do you recommend to provide a climate where
    school staff feel supported and effective all year long?**

    Share lessons learned. Comments.
Recommendations? What's happening locally?

Send your responses to **Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

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We have canceled our regular program because you're probably so preoccupied with stressful thoughts about your job that you're not paying attention anyway!

Featured Set of Center Resources for

>Preventing Burnout: Building Strength

As noted above, a good place to start is with our online clearinghouse Quick Find on

>*Burnout –* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/burnout.htm

It contains direct links to such Center resources as:

>*Understanding and Minimizing Staff –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/burnout/burn1.pdf

>*Teachers Can't Do it Alone! –* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/alone.pdf

>*Opening the Classroom Door –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/spring01.pdf

>*Improving Working Relationships Inside the Classroom –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/relations.pdf

>*Volunteers as an Invaluable Resource –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/voluntresource.pdf

>*Personalizing Personnel Development at Schools:*
A Focus on Student Engagement and Re-engagement –
http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagement.pdf

>*Learning Supports: Enabling Learning in the Classroom –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtipract.pdf

Note: *All our Quick Find have links to a variety of resources from msny other sources.*

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*For information about the

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

And note that our new book detailing the prototypes and related resources is now in press.

For a preview, contact Ltaylor@ucla.edu .

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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/)