School Practitioner Listserv

30 years & counting

A Weekly Community of Practice Network for Sharing and Interchange

Mental Health in Schools
UCLA Center
Program and Policy Analysis*

January 9, 2017

Request from a colleague
 >About measuring mental health in schools

Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Featured Set of Center Resources
 >Tools for assessing a school's support for students
 >Tools for assessing students
 >Personalizing instruction

##
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.

Request: "I am wondering if you have a tool to help a school system do a mental health needs assessment regarding students' mental health needs as well as whether the school system is meeting the needs of the students?"

Center Response: From a prevention perspective, the second question ("whether the school system is meeting the needs of the students") comes first and should encompass assessing factors essential to promoting positive mental health development (not just problems manifested by students). To do less is to ignore the school's (and the community's) responsibility for youngsters' social-emotional development and well-being.

While the pressure on school staff concerned with mental health is to identify students who show indications of "depression," anxiety, frustration, lack of engagement, suicide, substance abuse, etc., this focus reifies the trend to pathologize the term mental health. (Too many people currently perceive the term as synonymous with mental illness.) And when assessments only look for factors in the environment that cause and contribute to problems, they collude with tendencies to deemphasize the promotion of mental HEALTH and with tendencies to "blame the victim."

> *So, the first assessment focus is on the context to see what needs to be changed/improved.*
>
> *And, the first step in improving mental health in schools is to improve the way the school* (a) promotes well-being and prevents problems, (b) responds as soon as problems arise, and (c) plays an appropriate role related to addressing severe and chronic problems.

Promoting well-being and preventing problems reduces the number of students in need of special assistance and improves processes for identifying those who do need special assistance. Responding quickly when problems arise helps prevent problems from worsening. Then, a well-designed response to intervention process provides authentic individual assessments that can help school's clarify the nature and scope of a student's problems, and as necessary, play a role in treating the most serious problems.

See the section of this email featuring resources for links to tools for assessing a school's support for students, tools for assessing students, and resources for personalizing instruction.

Before going there, please read the following notes on screening.

Some Notes about Screening for Mental Health Problems at Schools

No one is likely to argue against the value of preventing and responding quickly when problems arise. And schools clearly have a role to play in watching for student learning, behavior, and emotional problems and addressing those that are barriers to learning and teaching. Indeed, in recent years, schools have been increasingly vigilant about identifying potential and existing student problems. Resources regularly are deployed to deal with a variety of student problems (e.g., bullying, emotional concerns, suicidal behavior, ADHD, LD).

Even so, continuous policy conflicts arise over whether schools should play a formal, institutionalized role in first level screening for mental health problems.

Issues arise around:

> *Is universal first level screening for behavior and emotional problems an appropriate role for schools to play?*

If schools do first level screening, what procedures are appropriate and who should do it?

Given the screening will produce false positives, won't this collude with practices that label commonplace adolescent problems as mental illness?

By focusing mainly on screening individuals:

Are schools avoiding the reality that some students' problems are the product of bad environmental conditions (at school, home, in the neighborhood)?

Does such screening contribute to "blaming the victim."

And given the various costs of school-wide screening:

What is the evidence that the benefits will outweigh costs?

Will school screening do more harm than good?

> In our discussion of the 2016 report from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force on screening for major depressive disorder (MDD) in adolescents, we noted that the Task Force makes the following caution about positive findings stemming from first level screening: "A positive result on an initial screening test does not necessarily indicate the need for treatment" (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/depress.pdf).
>
> The task force also emphasizes that initial screening is to be "followed by a second phase in which skilled clinicians take into account contextual factors surrounding the patient's current situation, through either additional probing or a formal diagnostic interview."

It is essential for schools to play a role in supporting students who manifest warning signs. However, we view that role not as one of formal first level screening for the many emotional problems that can plague young people. Certainly, schools must be alert to students who are not doing well. And there are many resources available to guide school staff in monitoring for warning signs as part of their regular encounters with students. However, schools must do more than identify problems. They must have an intervention system in place to address learning, behavior, and emotional problems in ways that enhance equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond.

Such a system includes pursuing changes in the school environment that create unhappy students (and staff) as well as providing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports. We stress that the intervention system needs to encompass (a) personalized instruction focused on whole child development, accommodations, and special assistance in regular classrooms, (b) supports that facilitate transitions, (c) practices that increase connections with families, (d) strategies for responding to and, where feasible, preventing school and personal crisis and traumatic events, (e) outreach to increase community involvement, and (f) a focus on facilitating student and family access to effective services and specialized assistance as needed.

> To these ends, we suggest that mental health in schools needs to be embedded into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing the full range of concerns that arise daily at schools and that the system needs to be fully interwoven with the school's efforts to improve instruction. See
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> >http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/fall15.pdf
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> >http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/embeddingmh.pdf
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> ###

Invitation to listserv participants:

What is your experience in working to support students by strengthening the environment? What do you recommend in screening students?

**Share lessons learned. Comments. Recommendations.
Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

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Featured Set of Center Resources

>Tools for assessing a school's support for students

Assessing what the school doing to enhance positive well-being, see

>>*Measuring School Climate –* http://schoolclimate.org/climate/practice.php

>>*Strategies for Social and Emotional Learning –*
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/513f79f9e4b05ce7b70e9673/t/53063624e4b0c6a4f3335f56/1392916004591/stategies-assessment-SEL-EDC.pdf

Assessing what the school doing to address interfering factors

>>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: A Set of Surveys to Map What a School Has and What It Needs –* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/surveys/set1.pdf

> Surveys for 6 arenas of concerns and related system needs that underscore the content of a unified, comprehensive, equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. The areas are (1) classroom-focused enabling, (2) crisis assistance and prevention, (3) support for transitions, (4) home involvement and commitment, (5) student and family assistance, and (6) community outreach for involvement and support.

>>*RTI and Classroom & Schoolwide Learning Supports: A Guide for Teachers and Learning Supports Staff –* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtiguide.pdf

>Tools for assessing students

For resources on student assessment (from our Center and from others), see the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on

>>*Assessment/Screening –* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1405_01.htm

Among the Center developed documents listed there is:

>>*Screening/Assessing Students: Indicators and Tools –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/assessment/assessment.pdf

>Personalizing instruction: An essential step before assessing individual students

See the following Quick Finds.

>>*Personalized Learning –* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/classenable.htm

>>*Accommodating differences and disabilities –* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/idea.htm

>>Dropout prevention – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/dropout.html

>>Early Intervention – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2305_01.htm

>>Motivation, engagement, and re-engagement – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm

>>Prevention for students at risk – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/prevention.html

>>Resilience and protective factors – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/resilience.html

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**THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND
INTERESTING THE INTERCHANGES BECOME!
Sign-up for the Listserv mailings – email Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

**Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.
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 on *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/)**

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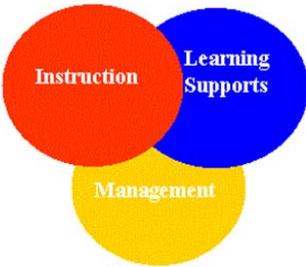
*For information about the

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
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