School Practitioner Community of Practice
(A network for sharing & exchange)

July 26, 2017

Topic: *What Colleagues are Planning in Kicking-off the New School Year*

Comments from the Field

Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Featured Center Resources on

>**Planning a strong start to a new school year**

From the Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports, UCLA

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Given shrinking education budgets, we have been asked to increase our outreach to make our free resources more available (e.g., for planning, professional development, etc.).

So please feel free to share with anyone you think might benefit (e.g., forward our resources to individuals and share on listservs and websites).

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For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

For previous postings of community of practice discussions, 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 100,000 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.

Kicking-off the New School Year

A new school year provides the opportunity to start with a "clean slate" and an agenda for renewal. With all the discussion about school climate in mind, this is the time to revisit school improvement planning to see how well it encompasses an exhilarating agenda for renewal.

Renewal begins with the events that kick-off the new school year. Too often such events are dominated by pressure to cover the many bureaucratic things that need to be understood (e.g., procedures, regulations, requirements, rules). When this is the case, a perception of "more of the same" is generated. Such a perception counters feelings of renewal and hope about the new year.

Creating an optimistic mood and a sense of excitement requires participatory activities that highlight
- how much all the stakeholders are valued and the critical role they play
- an exciting agenda for renewal
- plans for making renewal a reality
- new opportunities for stakeholder participation and taking on leadership roles.

Comments from Colleagues

With the new school approaching, we know that planning for a fresh start is high on the agenda. So we asked some school colleagues: *What do you recommend (e.g., to administrators, teachers, student support staff, students, families) for getting off to a strong start?*

Here is a sample of what has been shared so far:

(1) A district superintendent shared some thoughts from experiences over the years: "We find that the more consistency we can provide at the beginning of the year, and throughout as well, the better our response form students, and particularly those of poverty or with other risk factors. As a result, a few years ago, we developed common expectations that we communicate to and require from every teacher in the district. We call it Raise Achievement with Common Expectations with the goal of engaging the power of universally applied staff performance strategies. RACE requirements:
>Every teacher every day: lesson objectives posted , greet & dismiss students at the door, hallway presence during passing periods
>Every teacher every week: lesson plans submitted using, grades updated on powerschool
>Every teacher every month: teacher wiki website classroom page updated
>Every teacher every year: classroom procedures posted day 1 on wiki, individual contact with every student before day 1

Each of these items gives parents and students consistent support in 'knowing what is happening' and makes our staff more personally connected to them. In my opinion, one of the most powerful things we do is a required annual contact with every student before Day 1. Every classroom teacher must make personal contact with every student assigned to their home room, seminar, or caseload; and every bus driver is required to personally call each of the parents/students on their busses before the first pick-up. It eases such anxiety in our students and their parents. For many years, I preferred home visits, however our demographic has shifted to one that is not entirely safe for our teachers. I stopped encouraging home visits and instead asked that the contact be sincere and personal, whether a handwritten note or a phone call. Emails and texts are not allowed for this requirement.

At the elementary level we add another layer and offer a back-to-school night where students and parents are invited to bring their supplies the day before school starts, visit with their teachers, and get acquainted with finding their classroom and their assigned desk or cubby storage.

Additionally, each administrator is required to have support and administrative staff present outside the building on the first day of school, greeting parents and students. District office administrators are also required to be at one of the buildings on the first day, participating in this 'welcome back'.

All administrators, building and district, are required to ride a bus route during the first two weeks of school. And it was through this requirement that I began to see 'the other side' of back-to-school. As a child of a teacher, I was always excited for the first day of school. New shoes, new crayons, and a fresh pair of clothes were anticipated as much as meeting my new teacher. By riding the bus, I was introduced to the students and their parents who do not look forward to school. They dread the social anxiety that it causes and fear the financial stress it may bring (even a new pencil, or not having one when others do, can be overwhelming). It was through this lens that I began to understand how we underestimate the critical nature of our efforts to connect with students and parents.

We find ourselves accessing and facilitating many community supports at this time as well. I park a school bus at the local Walmart to help them promote a school supply drive. In return, they flood our schools with free school supplies.... We have community organizations that provide complete sets of school supplies in book bags, pre-packaged by grade level for principals to make available.

> Those are just a few of the things we do to make the start of the year more comfortably structured for our students, parents and staff."

(2) Another colleague made the following recommendations:

For *principals and superintendents* – "Review data from past years to note trends and identify those areas that are most troubling. Share those trends with staff and select a few areas of focus for the coming year. Share research on ways to improve those areas and build skills/information into staff development opportunities. Personally, commit a portion of time everyday to work toward those areas and revisit those areas with staff regularly throughout the year, making sure that data are collected to show progress. (Easier said than done!) Schedules will always be hectic and days will always be full. Strive to keep these goals in the forefront, engage staff, be accessible and supportive. And remember there is a reason why airline attendants ask passengers to adjust their own oxygen mask before helping others."

Teachers – "One of the most striking practices I've witnessed was when teachers allowed their students to come into an empty room on the first day and make it their own. For younger students, teachers allowed students to develop bulletin boards, arrange furniture and generally 'take charge' of their classroom. The relationships and skills (cooperation, problem solving, negotiation, etc.) they developed in the first few days helped them move quickly once they began working together academically. For older students, teachers did similar activities and allowed students to also focus on options for covering the curriculum. Options included research and reporting, hands-on activities, service learning, teamwork, etc. Ownership is important and these types of activities engage all the students in the class."

Teachers and support staff – "One other great *preventive* measure can occur during the 'pre-school' staff meetings or during the first weeks of school. Circulate an entire school roster and allow staff to check off all the names of the students with whom they have a relationship. Inevitably, there will be names with no checks. That list of students, with no existing adult relationships in the school, should be circulated so that staff can select and reach out to those individuals to develop a relationship. Research shows that a single student/adult relationship in the school will substantially increase student success in school. Simple, easy and incredibly effective."

For *older students* – "Approach the new school year with goals in mind and write them down. What do you wish will happen? What will you do to achieve those goals? By when? (Write it down on a calendar!) And, most importantly, who can help you? Think about school staff as well as your parents and peers. Do what you can to maintain positive, helpful

relationships that will advance your goals and avoid those relationships that pull your focus away from those goals. When unsure about what to do — ask an adult you trust."

For *younger students* – "Think about the kind of person that you'd like to have for a friend. What do they do or what makes you want to be their friend? Can you do those same things to be a good friend to others? Practice those behaviors every day and have the courage to make new friends who are kind and respectful to you and others. Before you leave home every morning, decide on one thing you will do to make a new friend or how you will treat someone who is already a friend."

For *parents* – "Knowing that every child is different, ask questions and listen. When in doubt about what to do, contact the school and talk with teachers. Contrary to what many parents may think, most teachers appreciate being contacted BEFORE an issue becomes a problem. Teachers want their students to be successful. Whether it's an academic concern or a relationship issue, visit with school staff. And, should you encounter someone with a less than helpful attitude, find someone else who will listen."

(3) "In general I think always that supports are priority. Supports must be grown by increasing resources allocation and integrating services, breaking down barriers for students to access resources when and as needed.*"* Recommendations:

Principals and Superintendents: "Provide all staff with materials needed. Move quickly to establish accuracy of projected enrollment and make shifts as soon as possible. Write a welcome letter to all district/site teachers informing of salient changes, celebrate progress, convey sense of value and support, common goals for this year and immediate needs. Have a well considered plan of maintaining a save and positive learning environment. Reach out to parents to encourage and set expectation for school year. Suggest ways for parent involvement. Set the tone and celebrate the staff. Look for areas in the continuum of social/emotional/behavior support and allocate resources to fill the gaps. Provide tools/beginning of year staff development to empower staff and set tone of need to incorporate SEL supports as critical for academic growth."

Teachers: "Exercise, eat well and meditate. Strive for open frame of reference and embrace diversity. Build positive relationships. Prepare to teach/integrate positive social/emotional environment. Not just the school rules or positive support line items such as Boys Town but real, personal interconnectedness. Value each student. Find something positive in each child and build on it. Forge alliances with staff and parents."

Student support staff: "What I do during the week before students return: I engage in activities to organize and inform the staff. Calendar the known assessments, confer with teachers regarding specific students to support getting off on good footing, re-connect with students on my watch, support teachers obtaining records as needed, behavior, behavior, behavior. Connect students with resources for example, incoming students with First Five, parenting classes, community and district resources, be sensitive to possible medical conditions of students new to the district and/or recently diagnosed. Prepare needed paperwork to send out immediately, call parents and inform. Have or obtain materials needed to serve all classes and students. I often return to additional classes, modified grade level span for Special Day Class, teachers new to the district/the profession/grade or developmental level of the class."

Parents: "Personal commitment to invest of themselves for their child's education. Stay informed. Watch for teacher assignment and meet with teacher even if only to introduce self and be supportive. Share a goal or two that parent would like to see child progress toward. Maybe short and long term goal. Form alliance with teacher. Obtain calendar and plan to attend all parent-school interactions such as Back To School Night. Participate in PTA. Be informed of district resource to obtain clothes, meals, school materials as needed."

Students: "Connect present efforts with positive long term outcomes. Promote relevance of education. Identify at least two person goals for this school year. This may be done as developmentally appropriate to all grade levels."

(4) *Recommendations for administrators:* "Principals set the tone for the entire school and school year for that matter. Therefore, at the start of the new school year it is important for principals to listen any suggestions that students, parents, teachers, and staff have for improving the school and just the work/classroom environment in general. I feel as if sometimes there are not many platforms to provide suggestions or if are suggestions given they are not implemented. The same thing would apply for the superintendents in where they must start listening to the changes that are asked to be made within school districts."

For teachers: "I know that many teachers can experience burnout as the academic year progresses, so I think it is important for teachers to set up time during the day to take a minor break. For example, teachers for the most part have a conference period. During that time they can set up something as simple as 10 minutes to stretch, meditate, or just listen to music in their classrooms as a way to recharge. Teachers can also reach out to other teachers in the same department to generate ideas for their lesson plans. I think it is a great idea for teachers to do common planning since not only do they get to share ideas but it also ensures some consistency across the classrooms."

For student support staff: "There are several things that can be done. For one thing, for schools that experience high rates of truancy or absenteeism they can try to develop an action plan to start off the year right. Another idea would be to have them identify which students need academic help as soon as the first report card is submitted. In this way student support staff can offer resources, such as individualized academic assistance, to students that need it."

For parents: "I would suggest getting familiar with the student's new teachers in that way if at any point throughout the year the parents have any questions and concerns about their child they already have a set relationship with the teachers. I also think that parents should get involved in their child's education throughout the year as much as they are able to, such as attend a parent conference, a performance, or even volunteer. Another thing that I would suggest is for parents to encourage their child to get involved in after school activities/programs, do community service, essentially get educational experiences that go far beyond what a classroom can teach."

For students: "Wwhether they are in middle school or high school, to be reflective. Often we go into a new school year thinking of it as a fresh start, which it is, but not really thinking about how to improve based on the prior academic year. With that said, I believe students should think about what were some of the strategies that worked for them academically (e.g., study habits) and personally (e.g., stress-relievers) and some that did not and what they could have done differently. In this way when the new year starts they can work on what needs improvement and have an action plan on how to exactly to do it. I also would advise students to identify people on campus to whom they can turn to if they ever need help. I feel like having at least two people on campus that the students can trust will relieve some of their stress when a problem does arise. From personal experience, I have sometimes seen students lost as to whom to turn to when they are dealing with issues, so if they can establish relationships at the beginning of the school year will just be helpful in the long run. I find it best that students need someone else to talk to beyond their counselor."

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nvitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

What are your hopes/plans/recommendations for starting the new year off in the best way?

Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Featured Center Resources on

>Planning a strong start to a new school year

>Getting the School Year Off to a Good Start –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newschoolyr.pdf

>Kicking off the School Year with a Sense of Exciting Renewal:
Generating Hope, Not Ho Hum – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/kickoff.pdf

And see the Center Quick Finds on

>School Climate – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/environments.htm

>Supporting Transitions – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm

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If you missed the quarterly ejournal for summer 2017 or the monthly ENEWS or haven't browsed our new free book entitled *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide,* **you can access them and more from the Center's homepage**
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/

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THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND
INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!

For new sign-ups – 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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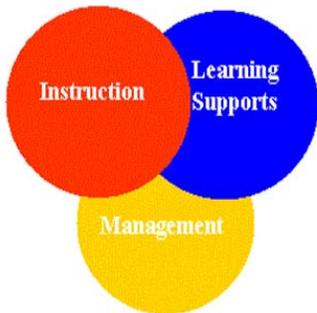
*Information is online about the

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

And see the new book:

>Transforming Student and Learning Supports:
Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System
https://titles.cognella.com/transforming-student-and-learning-supports-9781516512782.html