Featured

>*Welcoming School Staff and Forming Working Alliances
As the School Year Begins*

Also for discussion:
>Enhancing Ongoing Alliances Between Teachers and Student/Learning Support Staff
>Who's Really Interested in *TRANSFORMING* Student and Learning Supports?
And, as always:
>*Links to a few other resources relevant to continuing education*

**This Community of Practice *Practitioner* is designed
for a screen bigger than an Iphone*.***

For discussion and interchange:
>**Welcoming school staff and forming working alliances as the school year begins**

As the school year starts, it helps to consider what they caution at the outset of an airplane trip:

Put on your oxygen mask before helping children.

When we search *"Starting the new school year right,"* we find many recommendations for teachers to make things good for students.

But we find too little about how to start the school year right for school staff (teachers, student support staff, and all others who are essential to schools being positive, safe, and supportive places).

Here's some matters to consider in welcoming and connecting staff and preparing them for the school year ahead that have relevance for promoting staff well-being and preventing burnout.

A positive start begins with administrators modeling what are widespread recommendations to staff about starting the school year right with students. We assume, for example, that most administrators offer a welcoming message that conveys caring and support. Key aspects of this include the following:

>welcoming remarks that (a) maximize messages that are inspirational and highlight the help that will be in place to support staff when they need it and (b) provide information about demands, rules, accountabilities, etc. in ways that don't dampen enthusiasm

>newcomer induction that ensures the individual is matched-up with an experienced and caring "buddy"

>helping to connect staff into collegial and socially supportive ways that can create a sense of community, safety, and a positive school climate. This involves ensuring that there is an operational infrastructure that provides (a) mentors rather than supervisors, (b) peer-to-peer support, (c) personalized on-the-job opportunities for growth, (d) a system of student/learning supports, (e) mechanisms for collaborative work and school improvement, (f) meaningful ways to participate at decision making tables, and more.

Successful schools are collaborative enterprises. All stakeholders need each other's support to enhance desired outcomes, especially for students who are not doing well at school.

Excerpt from: *Expanding Collaboration at School*

For a long time, teachers have gone into their classrooms and figuratively and often literally shut their doors behind them. As a result, for better and worse, they and their students have been on their own. On the positive side, the closed door supports a teacher's desire for a degree of autonomy in the workplace. It also limits inappropriate monitoring and meddling.

The downside is that, in too many instances, some teachers report a feeling of aloneness in the school setting. And a closed door culture deprives teachers of essential supports and opportunities to learn from colleagues. Too often, classroom problems and the isolation from colleagues leads to feelings of frustration, alienation, and contributes to "burn out." When this happens, students are cut off from a variety of resources and experiences that are essential to their progress and well-being.

Because the negatives outweigh the potential gains, there are increasing calls for "opening the classroom door" to enhance collegial collaboration, consultation, mentoring, and enable use of a variety of expert assistance, volunteers, family members, and the community-at-large. Expanding and integrating social capital allows schools to improve resources and strategies for enhancing learning and performance in- and out-of-the classroom. Collaborating in the best interests of students and staff enables stakeholders to complement each others' areas of competence and provide each other with nurturance and personal support. An open classroom collaborative culture also provides new opportunities for team teaching, mentoring, and personalizing staff development. These changes are especially important for preventing commonplace learning, behavior, and emotional problems and for responding quickly to problems as they arise, and collaboration allows for relief in addressing problems. Moreover, such fundamental changes in the culture of classrooms and schools are seen as essential to enhancing a caring climate, a sense of community, and overall teaching effectiveness.

For discussion and interchange:

>**Enhancing Ongoing Alliances Between Teachers and Student/Learning Support Staff**

A student support staff member was heard telling a new colleague:

The first month is slow for us. The referrals don't come in until the end of September.

That may be how it is, but it isn't a good way for a school to prevent and address learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

The first weeks are crucial in building positive relationships and success for students (and staff). Support staff and teachers need to develop a working relationship that brings support staff into classrooms to enhance student success and prevent "garden variety" learning and behavior problems. Such alliances are key to minimizing the need for special service referrals. See:

>*Opening the Classroom Door*

>*Teachers Can't Do it Alone!*

>*Improving Working Relationships Inside the Classroom*

>*Promoting Staff Well-being and Preventing Burnout*

>*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*

Here is what a colleague had to say about welcoming and connecting teachers and student support staff.

We asked a colleague to respond to the following questions which are worth discussion by all stakeholders concerned with improving schools.

(1) What can schools/districts do to form mechanisms for ongoing alliances between teachers and student support staff at the beginning of the new school year?

(2) How can these alliances plan first on welcoming students and their families to the classroom so we see improved attendance and engagement?

(3) What special concerns do these alliances face in middle and high schools when teachers see a different group of students each period?

Here is her response:

"At the beginning of the school year welcome to staff, an hour or so could be allotted for teachers and support staff to develop and agree on a few goals? A facilitated discussion on concerns around attendance and engagement could help identify key issues specific to their building that need attention. There are several ways to go about this, but I'll present one facilitation practice that begins with a question. "When I think about my students and their families, what concerns me most about poor attendance?" (This is only an example. A key question must be crafted to specifically fit the school environment and one that strikes a chord with teachers and support staff alike.) ...

This activity should take 20 minutes or so with the rest of the hour session being spent discussing ways to address these priority concerns/goals. One possible strategy that could emerge to address the above example: Each teacher and support staff reaches out to initiate and develop a relationship with one family that typically doesn't interact with school staff. This small action can yield huge benefits since future concerns can be channeled to that family through someone they already know rather than being bombarded with concerns from two or three teachers they don't know. This also means that teachers and support staff will need to change their practice and agree how they will communicate with one another around student concerns. Details may need to be fleshed out at a later time, but staff should leave the meeting with one goal related action they will personally take in the next number of days/weeks. What may also happen is that, over time, individual staff members may find other creative ways to change their practices to address these goals that weren't discussed during this session.

Of course, this teacher/support staff alliance needs to be maintained throughout the year. A monthly meeting to share successes, new ideas, check on progress, and make needed adjustments to plans will be important. However, it's very likely that precious staff time spent focused on these common concerns/goals will result in more time saved by individuals trying to support students throughout the year. Also, focusing more narrowly on a few key and common issues will "warm the water around the iceberg". In other words, the big problems may begin to "melt" away as the focus on a few goals around engagement and attendance "warms" the school environment."

I don't want to go back to school!
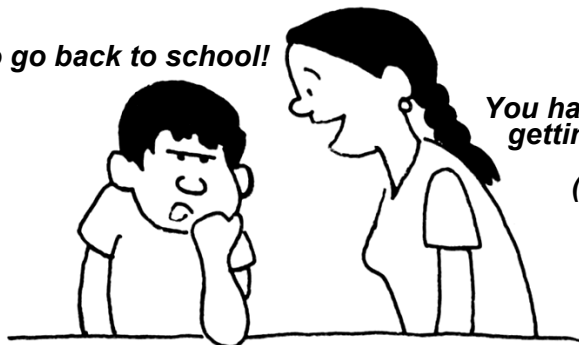
You have to go – getting an education is essential ...

(and so is finally getting you out of the house).

For discussion and interchange:

>**Who's Really Interested in *TRANSFORMING* Student and Learning Supports?**

We regularly hear the laments about how schools are not effectively addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students and families. This is seen as a fundamental reason that many schools are not closing the opportunity and achievement gaps.

And we regularly get requests for help in improving student and learning supports.

But we find most folks are not thinking in terms of making essential changes in school improvement policy and guiding transformative systemic improvement in student/learning supports.*

Indeed, we have come to fear that hardly anyone is really focused on the type of systemic changes that are needed to make a significant dent in the increasing number of learning, behavior, and emotional problems schools encounter every day.

Are we wrong?

Let us know want you think about all this.

And if you know of places that are in the process of transforming student/learning supports, please share the information with us.

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*What we find is that most folks who discuss ways to improve student and learning supports focus mainly on

>adding a few more personnel to help address learning loss and MH problems
>simply embracing the MTSS framework
>adopting/adapting the Full Service Community Schools model
>enhancing coordination and integration of services

Such approaches clearly are relevant and can be built upon, but they are insufficient in meeting the needs at too many schools for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students and families. And by themselves these efforts ignore and too often impede making essential changes in school improvement policy and guiding transformative systemic improvement in student/learning supports.

For an example of what a transformative approach, see

>*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*

> **Are these topics being discussed in your locale?**
> Please let us know so we can share the info widely. Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu

>**Links to a few other relevant shared resources**

>>**The impact of comprehensive student support on teachers: Knowledge of the whole child, classroom practice, and Teacher Support**
>>**Breathing life into social emotional learning programs: A Bio-Psycho-Social approach to risk reduction and positive youth development**
>>**"My Training Did Not Prepare Me for This.": Supporting New Teachers andBridging the Gap Between the University and the Classroom**

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>>**Emotionally supportive classroom interactions and students' perceptions of their teachers as caring and just**

>>**At risk students and teacher-student relationships: student characteristics, attitudes to school and classroom climate**

>>**El Camino: A Goal-setting Sexual Health Promotion Program**

>>**State-level Data for Understanding Child Welfare in the United States**

>>**Don't blame mental illness for shootings. Short fuses, easy access to guns form deadly mix**

A Few Upcoming Webinars
For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts

7/25 Organizational commitment to a culture of care
7/29 Navigating Concerns on Youth Crime, Violence, and Behavioral Health
7/30 Practical parenting strategies
8/7 Attending to non-academic factors
8/13 Administrator Basics for Supporting English Learners with Disabilities /
8/14 Responding to bias and discrimination in schools
8/15 Conversations with youth
8/20 Welcoming students through transitions
8/22 Compassionate leadership
9/19 Empowering grassroots mentoring
9/26 Organizational culture
10/17 Wellness and resilience

How Learning Happens (Edutopia's updated series of videos explores how educators can guide all students, regardless of their developmental starting points, to become productive and engaged learners.

Webinar recording: *Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth*

For more webinars, go to the our Center's links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm

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To Listserv Participants
- **Please share this resource with others. (Everyone has a stake in the future of public education and this is a critical time for action.)**
- **Let us know what's going on to improve how schools address barriers to learning & teaching and reengage disconnected students and families. (We can share the info with the over 130,000 on our listserv.)**

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

Looking for information? (We usually can help.)
Have a suggestion for improving our efforts? (We welcome your feedback.)

We look forward to hearing from you!
Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Schools committed to the success of all children must be redesigned so that teachers, student support staff, and others at the school can help students as early as is feasible when they become aware of a behavior, emotional, learning, and/or physical problem. Such a redesign can minimize the impact of such problems and appropriately stem the tide of referrals for out of class specialized assistance (e.g., mental health services) and special education.

Through the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*, our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

If you are aware of efforts underway to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching, please share with us.

And if anyone is thinking about increasing the capacity of a district or school with respect to developing *a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports*, we have many resources to help in moving forward. For example, see our recent guide:

>*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*

Send all info and requests to ltaylor@ucla.edu

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**Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
promoting whole child development, advancing social justice,
and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.**

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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.

THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER

Who Are We? Recently renamed the Center for MH in Schools and Student/Learning Supports, our national Center was established in 1995 under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project (which was established in 1986). We are part of the Department of Psychology at UCLA. The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor.