

### **Featured**

#### **(1) Toward Improving Parent Involvement**

#### **(2) Parents and Decisions about the Curriculum**

And, as always, you will find

#### **(3) 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**

#### **>Toward Improving Parent Involvement**

All school districts are committed to some form of parent involvement. However, we have learned the hard way that the term means different things in different schools and among the various stakeholders at any school. There are two lessons that seem fundamental.

First, we find that most efforts to involve parents seem aimed at those who want and are able to show up at school. It's important to have activities for such parents. It's also important to remember that they represent the smallest percentage of parents at most schools. What about the rest? Especially those whose children are doing poorly at school. Ironically, efforts to involve families whose youngsters are doing poorly often result in parents who are even less motivated to become involved. Typically, a parent of such a youngster is called to school because of the child's problems and leaves with a sense of frustration, anger, and guilt. Not surprisingly, such a parent subsequently tries to avoid the school as much as feasible. If schools really want to involve such families, they must minimize "finger wagging" and offer more positive experiences than currently is the case.

A second basic lesson learned is that in many homes mothers or fathers are not the key to whether a youngster does well at school. Many youngsters do not even live with their parents. Besides those placed in foster care, it is not uncommon for children to live with grandparents, aunts, or older siblings or to be cared for much of the time by a "nanny." Moreover, even when a youngster is living with one or more parents, an older sibling may have the greatest influence over how seriously the individual takes school. Given these realities, we use the term *home* involvement and try to design engaging opportunities for whoever are the key influences in the home. And we outreach to agencies concerned with foster care, juvenile justice, and the homeless.

Home involvement is a basic domain for student/learning supports (see references below). Schools must develop interventions to address the many barriers to learning and teaching associated with the home and with home involvement. Unfortunately, as with other facets of enabling learning, limited finances often mean verbal commitments are not backed up with adequate resources. Meaningful home involvement requires school decision makers to commit fully. This means creating and maintaining effective mechanisms for improving home involvement and engagement.

There are many ways to think about an appropriate range of activities. We find it useful to differentiate whether the focus is on improving the functioning of individuals (students, parent/caretaker), systems (classroom, school, district), or both (see Exhibit 6-2 at <https://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/ch6home.pdf> ).

Despite the long-standing call by policy makers and researchers for schools to enhance parent/home involvement, the challenges in doing so have confounded many. Interventions include schoolwide and classroom-based efforts designed to (a) enhance family problem solving capabilities and strengthen the home situation, (b) increase support for student development, learning, and well-being, and (c) strengthen schools and the community. The emphasis is on activity that is mutually beneficial, equitable, and engaging. Ultimately, enhancing home involvement requires establishing authentic collaborations with the full range of caretakers, countering inherent inequities in power and resources, and empowering homes and communities, especially in impoverished neighborhoods.

**For more on this, see the Center's Quick Find on**  
**>[Parent/Home Involvement and Engagement in Schools](#)**

### For discussion and interchange

#### >**Parents and Decisions about the Curriculum**

This letter to the editor recently appeared in a local paper.

*Mindfulness being injected into curricula is another fad. Our experience with our daughters in elementary school is that our public school district is getting away from academics. An over reliance on iPad learning, an expansion of reward movies, non academic activities during learning time, doing away with homework and pullout programs like multitiered systems of supports (during which students not involved are told to just spend some time on their apps) are all diminishing the focus that needs to be on learning. We are doing a disservice to public school children by not ensuring that they learn the basics and are challenged academically.*

Recognizing the long-standing debates about the role of schools as political and socialization agents, as a marketplace, and as a source of helping, especially for those with specific needs, consider how you would respond to this parent.

Here is an excerpt from a relevant brief article by a school psychologist responding to concerns raised about their role at schools and the focus on social and emotional learning.

"... As a school psychologist, I was no stranger to parents being wary of what I did and what it meant for their children. ... I quickly realized a big part of doing my job was advocating for it when it was necessary.

I did this by

- making sure parents and students saw me every day. It's easy to fear what you don't know
- getting rid of the education and psych jargon
- advertising counseling and behavior supports
- telling them about the small wins their child was experiencing
- meeting parents where they were at
- sticking to what I thought was good for a student
- being flexible with how I provided supports
- keeping my services goal focused and short-term

I didn't win over everyone. But I did over time make counseling and behavioral supports accepted and sought when needed....

#### **When Controversy Comes Knocking**

... it is essential to keep advocating for what we know works. SEL is a positive in schools. It is invaluable to students at every level. To make the case, we have to

- show that social emotional learning represents the skills we all value and use every day
- have open conversations where we acknowledge concerns
- talk about what SEL is not
- keep ourselves honest about practices, what is needed and what works
- build connections with parents.

**Share** – Share the activities you are doing and their purpose.... When you share about activities, share student quotes, work, or videos, if okay....

**Speak Plainly** – Take out any jargon whenever possible. You live in the education world every day and use these terms as a shorthand. The educators around you know what you mean and it's a quick way to talk about things.... In a recent study done by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, parents felt most positive about the term life skills. They were also generally positive about the term social, emotional and academic learning....

Talk to parents about topics they are familiar with. Things like setting goals, handling frustration, positive thinking, making friends, being a leader. ...

Parents want their children to be good people who have all the tools to be successful. Period. Parents also rightfully see themselves as very much responsible for helping their children learn these skills. Consider that developing social-emotional skills is more of a home-school partnership than other skills you teach. ...

Tell parents why you are teaching SEL skills. Maybe you are trying to decrease behavior issues or bullying incidents. Maybe you want to improve attendance and class participation. Be honest about the intentions of your activities and the outcomes you are looking for. If your why is not in line with your parent community, then there are more conversations to have. Parents want to know you are working with them, not around them...."

From: ***Social Emotional Learning Controversial? How to Talk to Parents about SEL***

### **Comments from the Field:**

We asked several colleagues how they would respond. Here is a sample of what they said:

- (1) "This is a hard one, because I am in agreement with this parent, struggling with this in the public school teachers deferring to computers without much accountability for teaching and am amazed at some of the new schools like Alpha Schools and other programs like Edmentum that are capitalizing the access to information and the importance on how to teach students to think and to get better at prompt engineering, like how to beat AI for high schoolers.

Regarding the political ... We are a "red town" in a blue state, and we have changed a lot of language around mindfulness to address Social Behavioral competencies that we are not getting push back from. We are rebranding the idea of SEL to social behavioral and soft skill competencies needed for the work place. We use culture for "Breath" practices or calming practices rather than using the term "mindfulness".

- (2) "My response is that this reflects the "operator-dependent" nature of so much SEL/SECD and related work in the schools. By that, I mean that the ideas-- like mindfulness or MTSS-- can be sound but also can be implemented in a wide range of ways, from well to poorly, and as we know things tend not to be distributed evenly around the mean. We have too much poor implementation. And there is another element. Schools are not great at communicating what they are doing and why. Especially when they are checking a check box and not dedicated to intentional, systematic, effective implementation. Describing MTSS as a "pullout program" suggests either poor communication, poor understanding, relying on her children for information, or all of the above. But MTSS is challenging to implement well, so that's another consideration.

If what the letter described is accurate (or more rather than less accurate), it would be hard to argue that the time could not be better spent. What we "message" is that SEL makes YOUR valued outcomes happen. That is, by integrating SEL with academics (including aspects of mindfulness), your will increase your students' academic success. Adding these things "into" and not "on top of" or "instead of" is the key to common-sense acceptance as well as success."

- (3) "The political divides are so unfortunate. When we actually talk to one another, we find we have more in common than we thought. And just because we disagree doesn't mean that we have to hate one another. Sad times....

It's difficult to respond with any specificity since there is so much room here for

"interpretation" of what's really happening in this elementary school. Public schools are intended to serve ALL students, challenge ALL students, and support ALL students. This is a tall order when students can have such diverse backgrounds, skill levels and abilities. Additionally, schools are being asked to do more and more with less and less financial support. I'm not downplaying these concerns. In fact, if this was all I knew about my child's education, I would also be concerned.

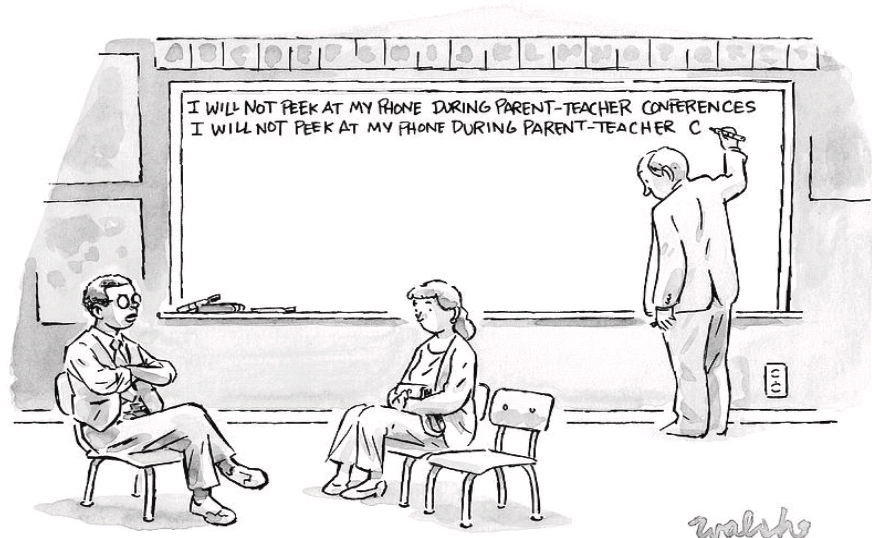
What I hope is that this parent becomes an advocate for her/his daughters by becoming directly involved in their education. My suggestion, if s/he's not already done so, is to go directly to the classroom teachers with these concerns and let them know what changes s/he would like to see regarding their child's education. There may be curricular mandates or staffing shortages, for example, that cause teachers to direct students to work on their iPads. Teachers know that some students are capable of working independently, so this could be a strategy to free up time to help students that are lagging behind. (This is only speculation and needs to be discussed between the teacher and parent.) I would hope the parent and teacher could work together to find solutions designed to challenge the girls and keep the parent informed of progress. If the parent doesn't get satisfaction from the teachers, the principal is next in line - then the school board. Going through channels is not always easy but is a good way to get a better understanding of why things occur as they do.

What is not helpful is to rely on hearsay and opinions of other parents, politically motivated or one-sided information that is generally critical of public education, or to make assumptions based on reports of children. No doubt children may be truthful, but may also have a skewed perspective of events. Face to face adult conversations about educational expectations are more likely to get the desired results. Bottom line - understanding the reasons for no homework, more movies or use of iPads is the only way to find workable solutions. Most teachers get into the business to help children/students (we know it's not for the money!). Work with these folks to get what your children need. “

***How would you respond to this parent?*** Let us know. [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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

- >>Scoping review: potential harm from school-based group mental health interventions
- >>Assessing Disproportional Calls Home for Problems at School
- >>Psychosocial Interventions Preventing Gang-Related Crime Among Young People
- >>Guiding young people's social media use in school policies: opportunities, risks, moral panics, and imagined futures
- >>Direct and Indirect Effects of Socioeconomic Status and Neighborhood Sense of Community on Mental Health



## A Few Upcoming Webinars

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

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

9/10 Rethinking attendance with AI  
9/10 Supporting grieving families  
9/10 Theories of change  
9/10 Homeless youth: McKinney-Vento basics  
9/11 Understanding special education  
9/15 Responding to children in crisis  
9/16 Strengthening family engagement  
9/16 Creating a low stress environment  
9/17 Helping families support their child's mental health needs  
9/17 Engagement of influencers in prevention  
9/17 Understanding grief  
9/17 Strategies to improve student engagement  
9/17 Working toward positive outcomes  
9/17 Artificial intelligence tools for school counseling  
9/17 Supporting Unaccompanied youth  
9/18 How parents can help anxious children  
9/18 Emotional regulation and academic performance  
9/18 Special education eligibility  
9/18 The power of emotion regulation to drive k12 wellbeing  
9/24 Family Engagement is the Foundation for Attendance and Learning  
9/25 Understanding the IEP process  
9/29 De-escalating children in distress  
10/1 Determining McKinney-Vento eligibility with care  
10/8 System change: A schoolwide comprehensive model

***How Learning Happens*** (Edutopia's series of videos explores how educators can guide all students to become productive and engaged learners.

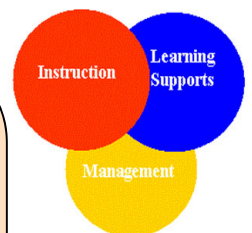
***Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth*** (Webinar recording)

***National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports***

***JUST RELEASED for 2025-2026***

***An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports:  
A Month-by-Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing Resources***

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/agendapaper.pdf>



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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 140,000 on our listserv.)

**For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto: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! Contact: [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@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](mailto: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? 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.