School Practitioner Listserv

29 years & counting

Mental Health in Schools
UCLA Center
Program and Policy Analysis*

A Weekly Community of Practice Network
for Sharing and Interchange

October 5, 2015

Request from a Principal:

>*Need evidence based programs to apply for a student support grant*

From the Field:

>**Homework: An example of using evidence to change practice**

Featured Center Resources:

>**Re. homework and out of school learning**

Follow Up on a Previous Interchange:
>**Re. Transition of fifth graders to secondary school setting**

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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 *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports*,* this community of practice network has expanded in number of participants and topics discussed.* The thematic emphasis is on (1) daily concerns confronting those working in and with schools, (2) the transformation of student and learning supports, and (3) promoting whole child development and positive school climate.

Request from a Principal: "I am looking for an Evidence Based Program that would focus on several areas including: alcohol and drug prevention, assistance for children at risk of dropping out, grief counseling, suicide prevention, parenting skills, family communication education, and social skills education and development. I am applying for a grant that specifically requires the Evidence Based Program measure progress in these areas. I am a principal in a poorest rural county. Our county is home to one of the geographically largest school districts in the state. In recent years, due to budget restraints, we have lost our 5 Elementary Counselors. As you can imagine, this creates a significant gap in the services provided to our at risk students. The District has 5 small Elementary Schools with an average free and/or reduced lunch population of 65%. In addition to high poverty, our students face limited access to public services due to our rural setting. This grant would potentially fund two student support staff to operate within the 5 Elementary Schools. Any help you can give in pointing me toward an Evidence Based Program that would address the above mentioned needs, would be greatly appreciated."

Center Response: As always, we are struck by how immense the challenges are in addressing barriers to learning and teaching. And as always, we want to provide information directly related to the request and then offer *a note of caution about the risks of limiting the focus of student and learning supports.*

First, about your grant proposal: These days grant applications often suggest resources for programs they see as qualifying as evidence based. Be sure to look to see if this is the case. Most applicants will focus on such recommendations. If the application doesn't offer such a list, go to the to sites listing evidence based programs. We indicate links to such sites in a resources entitled:

> *>Annotated "lists" of Empirically Supported/Evidence Based Interventions for School-aged Children and Adolescents*
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/aboutmh/annotatedlist.pdf

Each site has a search feature to find specific programs for specific types of concerns.

You can find additional resources on evidence based programs on the Center website quick find online clearinghouse on the topic page

> *>Empirically supported/evidence based programs –*
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/ests.htm

A note of caution about the risks of limiting the focus of student and learning supports.
We are concerned that grants perpetuate projectitus and contribute to the ongoing fragmentation and marginalization of efforts to transform student and learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system. With specific reference to the push not only for another project but one that is "evidence-based," see the following:

> *>Evidence-Based Practices in Schools: Concerns About Fit and Implementation –*
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/summer07

Here is an excerpt from that discussion:
> "Historically, schools have been confronted with yet another project, another program, and another initiative. Many of these aim at addressing learning, behavior, and emotional problems and making schools safe and drug free. Added to the picture in recent years has

been the demand that schools adopt practices that are evidence-based. Increasingly, terms such as science-based or empirically-supported are assigned to almost any intervention identified as having research data generated in ways that meet scientific standards and that demonstrates a level of efficacy deemed worthy of application....

While specific evidence-based practices might be helpful, a few more services or programs will not equip most schools to ensure that all youngsters have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Policy and practice analyses indicate that such schools need to develop a comprehensive system of student supports. Development of a comprehensive support system is guided by a unifying intervention framework. And, it is such a framework that provides a conceptual context for evaluating how well any proposed practice will fit with efforts to develop such a system.

With this in mind, our Center has outlined a framework that encompasses (1) a continuum of integrated intervention systems and (2) a multifaceted and cohesive set of content arenas.

The intent, over time, is for schools to play a major role in establishing a full continuum of integrated intervention systems, including

- systems for promoting healthy development and preventing problems
- systems for intervening early to address problems as soon after onset as is feasible
- systems for assisting with chronic and severe problems.

While most schools have some programs and services that fit into one or more of these three levels of concern, the work is not coalesced into integrated systems. Moreover, the tendency to focus mostly on the most severe problems has skewed the process so that too little is done to prevent and intervene early after the onset of a problem. As a result, public education has been characterized as a system that 'waits for failure.'...

We operationalize the continuum into a component to address barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., an enabling or learning supports component). Such a component helps to coalesce and enhance programs to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Critical to this is defining what the entire school must do to enable all students to learn and all teachers to teach effectively. School-wide approaches are especially important where large numbers of students are affected and at any school that is not yet paying adequate attention to equity and diversity concerns....

For schools the need is not just to add evidence-based practices; it is to do so in ways that contribute to development of a comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching."

Listserv Participants: Please share what you can about the impact of grant projects and the emphasis on practices that have an evidence-base. Of particular interest is the impact on building a unified and comprehensive system of supports that enhnaces equity of opportunity for all, not just a few students. We look forward to hearing from you about this critical set of concerns. Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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From the Field:

Excerpt from: Homework and Family Stress: With Consideration of Parents' Self Confidence, Educational Level, and Cultural Background (2015) by R. Pressman, D. Sugarman, M. Nemon, et al. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 43*, 297-313.

"...Putting aside the debate, as to whether or not homework is academically beneficial, comes, perhaps, a more relevant debate: ought a parent to be involved in a child's homework at the instructional level? The conundrum relates to educational inequities among public school students who come from families with one parent, whose parent may be unavailable at homework time, and/or may not have the education, temperament, or language proficiency to assist the child vs. students who come from families with two parents, one or both of whom are available, and may have educational training and/or temperament to provide their children with instruction. It may be argued, that the expectation that parents provide instructive guidance to a child with his homework, would be, through no fault of the child, a benefit to some children and a detriment to others.

Ironically, parents' successful intervention of teaching or correcting assignments may obscure teachers from discovering academic problems or needs of the child. Additionally, there is an emerging body of evidence that such assistance may even be academically and behaviorally detrimental. (Donaldson-Pressman, Jackson, & Pressman, 2014). Considering the overload of homework in primary grades, there exists the possibility that a high degree of parent correction and instruction, in early grades, may result in a pattern of academic dependency that persists thorough a child's senior year...

In our review, we found concurrence that homework be limited and thoughtfully applied to primary school children. In addition, there is a body of evidence to support the thesis that an overload of homework is associated with a decrement in performance...

We found that homework load, parents' view of self-efficacy in assisting with homework, and language/cultural factors were all contributors to family stress. Additionally, we found that a major part of this picture was the expectation, among parents, that they assist their children with homework at the instructional level. Because of the variability in parents' knowledge, skill, and availability, we wondered about the wisdom of this expectation. Moreover, it raises a question of inadvertent educational discrimination against families who may be disadvantaged because the parents may be: Spanish speakers; unavailable to assist their child; limited in skill, knowledge or temperament to teach their child.

Based on our findings we recommend:

1. Reforming the distribution of primary school homework to conform to the 10 Minute Rule. (Ten minutes multiplied by the child's grade level was the recommended allotted time for nightly homework. Teachers would, therefore, assign about 10 minutes of nightly homework for first graders and this expectation would increase to 120 minutes for seniors in high school. The "10 Minute Rule" was purported to be embraced and promulgated by National Education Association (2006).
2. Creating homework that is interactive and real world applicable, (e.g., math used to help build a birdhouse, compute money needed to buy a toy at the store, or balance a checkbook) so the family experiences it together in a meaningful way.
3. Restructuring homework so that parents perform as mentors and/or agents of support rather than as tutors or instructors (Donaldson-Pressman, Jackson & Pressman, 2014):
   a. Providing the child with appropriate tools to execute the homework.
   b. Making available a designated quiet place for the child to study.
   c. Insuring that the child is actually in that place at a designated time, for the recommended time per grade, and distraction free."

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Featured set of center resources:

>Re. homework and out of school learning

Because homework is such a major problem for many students and their families and for school staff, we have a Quick Find dedicated to the topic. See:

>*Homework help for educators, students, and families –*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/qfhomework.htm

As is the case for all Center Quick Finds, there are links to resources not only from our Center, but from others who focus on this matter.

Two examples of Center documents are:

>*Homework is a Mental Health Concern --*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/homework.pdf

>*Homework Avoidance –* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/homeworkpn.pdf

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Follow-up:

>Re. Transition of fifth graders to a secondary school setting

In a previous school practitioner we shared a parent's concern about a district's decision to move fifth graders to a secondary school building. Below are some reflections received from a colleague:

"I have some experience with this matter as a parent and a social worker in a middle/high school where we educate students grades 5-12. My daughter, a chronologically and emotionally young child for her grade, was a fifth grader in our building last year. I was very concerned about her transition, not just because she was moving to MS, but because she was moving from a separate Spanish Immersion program in which she had been with the same 20 students since 1st grade. Without getting into too many details, the experience was an incredibly positive one for my daughter. She had 4 different academic teachers and of course different teachers for art, music, PE, etc. The built-in movement breaks of moving from class to class allowed her to get enough silliness out to be able to focus in her classes and not get distracted by trying to get more fun into her day during instruction. She also enjoyed getting to know so many more students and teachers. It opened up a whole new circle of friends for her.

As an educator in a building that has grades 5-12, the job can be demanding for those of us that teach at all grade levels, but the children seem to benefit from it. The 5th and 6th grades have their own separate bell schedule, but share a school nurse, gymnasium and cafe with all of the other grades. We have found that the 5th graders benefit from being with the older kids because they serve as a resource to them. We pair up older students with our 5th graders to mentor and tutor them. The older students also seem to enjoy seeing the "little 5th graders" and do change their behavior to be more appropriate when they see them in and around the building. This is a small town in which everyone knows each other. I believe this has a big impact on why this model can work out here so well. "

*For information about the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*, see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html

Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to enabling equity of opportunity and promoting whole child development.

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THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE BECOMES!

Send relevant resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences to ltaylor@ucla.edu

Note: Responses come only to our Center at UCLA for possible inclusion in the next week's message.

We also 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/