



**30 years
& counting**

**School Practitioner
Listserv**

**A Weekly Community of Practice Network
for Sharing and Interchange**



November 7, 2016

Request from a Colleague
*>What are the pros and cons of student support staff
being centralized in a district or decentralized by schools?*

- Center Comments
- Comments from Colleagues in the Field

Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Featured Set of Center Resources
>About Our Listservs and Information Sharing
>>Comments from an administrator on enhancing learning supports
>>Campbell County Schools (KY) Comprehensive School Safety
Project

#####

**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>**

#####

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.

Rquest from a Colleague: "I am one of 6 Social Work Program Managers working for a large district. In addition, we work and collaborate with 3 School Psychology Program Managers on a school mental health team. In total we oversee the work of 180 school-based social workers and 115 school psychologists. The oversight and planning for this work used to sit under our Central office, but a few years ago moved to a less centralized model where school principals oversee and evaluate part of that work. In our recent conversations it came up that other large districts have tried decentralization, but after a while, moved back to a fully centralized model for school mental health providers. Do you, by chance, have any information on the pros and cons of centralized oversight vs decentralized oversight? Any help you could provide would be appreciated!" (Note: For more on this district program, we have appended info at the end of this Practitioner.)

Center Comments: A basic organizational principle is structure follows function. Therefore, discussion of centralized vs. decentralized organizational structure for student and learning supports and the personnel involved must be done in the context of the functions to be carried out. And the functions are determined by the vision and mission for students articulated by the district and its schools. With this as context, the fundamental question is what organizational structure will best serve the mission. Secondary are matters such as how best to organize resources, how to provide professional supervision and training, how to work together to develop a better system, and so forth.

With respect to mission: Let's start with the intent of ensuring equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school and beyond. That intent underlies the rhetoric of entitling the reauthorization of the federal education law as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Our position is that school efforts to enhance equity require unifying student and learning supports and developing them into a comprehensive and equitable system that meets the needs of the many rather than a small number of students. From this perspective, we have stressed establishing a multilevel operational infrastructure to develop, implement, take to scale, and sustain such a system. We first conceive such an integrated structure in terms of what is needed at the school level. Then, we stress the connection between a "family" of schools (e.g., a feeder pattern) as essential to enabling cost-efficiency and effectiveness. The role and functions of the district are to provide support and facilitate implementation and system change at schools across the district. The same type of functions are needed at regional and state levels. An interconnected, multilevel operational structure ensures all functions are met. We have laid all this out in several resources. Here is an example.

>*Toward a School District Infrastructure that More Effectively
Addresses Barriers to Learning and Teaching*

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/toward_a_school_district_infrastructure.pdf

Of course, none of this can happen if the superintendent is not on board. For those who are, we have prepared a guide to first steps. See:

>*Developing a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports:
First Steps for Superintendents Who Want to Get Started*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/superstart.pdf>

Now a couple of brief comments on related matters:

Marginalization of student and learning support staff: All such staff (including those now designated in ESSA as specialized instructional support personnel) continue to be marginalized as ESSA guidance and plans are formulated. The latest indication of the problem is seen in the U.S. Department of Education's non-regulatory guidance for Title II, Part A released on September 27.

So when it comes to matters such as supervision and training whoever does it usually has limited resources, and the importance of bringing together all who provide student and learning supports is not addressed. Thus, inservice personnel development designed to create a common knowledge

base for moving forward together is unlikely. In this respect, we have stressed that ESSA's Title II gives short shrift to student and learning support staff, but we suggest that states and districts can and should reverse this trend (see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/annoucoct5.pdf>).

For more see:

- > *What Do "Teachers, Administrators, and Other School Leaders" Need to Learn about Transforming Student and Learning Supports?*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/teachers2.pdf>
- > *Beginning Steps in Personnel Development Related to Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/personneldevelopment.pdf>

About working together to develop a better system: With busy schedules and more referrals than time to follow through, many student and learning support staff are caught up expending nearly all of their time providing services and implementing programs. This is a recipe for maintaining the marginalization, fragmentation, and counterproductive competition that has come to characterize student and learning supports. To turn this all around, it is essential to redeploy some of the time in order to work with other student and learning support personnel and the administration to move toward unifying and then developing a comprehensive and equitable system. This begins with mapping and analyzing existing activity and resources at a school/district using a comprehensive framework that goes beyond the multitier system of student supports (MTSS). A framework that encompasses (a) a *school-community conception of an intervention continuum* **and** (b) *arenas of content* enables better analyses of existing interventions, helps clarify the impact of resource use and which interventions are evidence-based and identifies critical gaps and ways to redeploy resources to strengthen the system. Note: Working with the administration in this way allows them to see student and learning support staff as collaborative partners and leaders for school improvement.

For more on this see

- > *What is a Learning Support Leadership Team?*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resource_coord_team.pdf
- > *Moving toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports: Mapping & Analyzing Learning Supports*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf>
- > *Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School: Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf>

Comments from Colleagues in the Field:

(1) "We have 164 social workers and I cannot imagine what services would look like if everyone was operating unto themselves. A centralized model allows for the development of systems that support the district strategic plan leading to purposeful professional development, support and evaluation. Additionally, it streamlines the hiring process including having oversight of graduate field placements, mentoring and training for new staff. I would also say that this allows us to advocate for the profession and how we are able to best support students and families. ... Our evaluation process has changed over time. In the distant past we had SSW supervisors as the lead evaluators with principal input. This changed to having principals being the lead I believe due to the elimination of supervisor positions. We recently switched back to having the SSW supervisor as a lead with principals/other administrators as co-evaluators. I like the combination as it merges both SSW practice and expectations with the day to day activities which principals observe. We now mimic the teacher Educator Effectiveness process (based on Danielson) but with a specific SSW rubric that was developed by our Dept. of Public Instruction. We're in the earlier phases of this so still have some growing pains. On the upside, it is better aligned to our core work and I feel the process is much more meaningful than it ever has been."

(2) “My opinion is that providers should be assigned to a school so they can establish relationships within the building (staff and students/families) BUT I also think that documentation should be consistent AND that the providers report to one person (Student Support Services Director or something like that) and that they have regular meetings to collaborate, perhaps do some case consultation, resource sharing etc. I think the providers can be inclusive of the school administrator and ‘report to him/her’ re: what's going on in the building but be evaluated by someone from their field who knows their field.”

(3) “I support centralized with personnel who are qualified to oversee the program. When it gets ‘too’ localized under the oversight of educational professionals, there tends to be marginalization of skill and expertise that comes with mental health and mental health services are often interpreted to be what to do with behavior. At the end of the day, many people can assist with behavior and need to. This is a very simplistic answer, and could be the topic of a dissertation and system design. Schools need to learn how to respect the variety of professionals who come to the table and there needs to be clear role and function guidelines so that people are working synchronistically rather than in silos that come from the frustration of the role groups. At the end of the day, the most difficult students can only be managed by a ‘community’ of people. No one person has the answer and usually that is where the problems come in, regardless of how well we are organized. It is the toughest kids that make all of us come to the table and we all need to walk away remembering that student belongs to all of us.”

(4) “If a district wants to insure that its mission and goals are known and pursued throughout the district and wants to insure equitable funding, resources, and service availability, central oversight could support that. The ‘language’ would be the same. But as you know, it's all about relationship building and the needs of individual schools which vary. Schools within districts generally have somewhat different goals that are in addition to the district goals.

Principals should, in my opinion, be part of the evaluation process since they are better attuned--or should be--to school needs. But building administrators often are not versed in the real potential and skills of school employed/based mental health providers nor how to evaluate them using a social work/psychology framework as opposed to a teacher framework. Therefore, sometimes what may appear to be effective/ineffective interventions from the standpoint of the administrator may not, in fact, be so. And vice versa. (For example, at one point I had an administrator who, well intentioned as he was, asked the psychologist or myself to put every kid who was in a fist fight into anger management groups. That was routine for him.) That lack of insight can affect not only the evaluation process but also assignments and interventions used.”

(5) “Most of the research in this area is in the field of business management — but maybe some things we can glean from it?

Centralized systems help to ensure more consistency in services and will encourage common language within and across various services. Expertise and information is held in one unit so that people know where to go for help and answers. Processes can be managed more effectively in that redundancies are reduced and it's easier to document lessons learned. There tends to be less fragmentation and work is in alignment with the overall goals of the district. Everyone knows who the decision-makers are and it is easier to access and leverage them to influence change.

Benefits of being decentralized include the flexibility to adapt to the unique needs of each school and to be able to change more quickly. It is easier to make changes than in a bureaucracy and people involved in the change tend to take on ownership to help ensure the change is positive or successful. Decentralization also develops local capacity to solve problems and work dynamically to address student needs.

Risk of being Centralized is that the people at the top can lose touch with the day-to-day needs of their front-line people. Also, the front line people may be resistant to changes proposed by the central administration. It is generally more difficult to make change and it can be more expensive to run a centralized system.

A decentralized system is difficult to monitor and report disparate processes and functions. Local teams or front line workers may not have the resources or expertise to be fully effective and, in the case of principals making the decisions, they better hope that these building administrators have a functional grasp of mental health and social work. Too often, principals can be ‘in charge’ of their buildings with very little expertise or support to make good decisions. (OK — that’s just my personal opinion. But I really think principals tend to get ‘dumped on’ in these situations without adequate information or support.) Often times, decentralization leads to inconsistent services. And we all know that in education, things that are not valued (consistent and functional) tend to go unfunded. (OK — just my opinion creeping in again. I would hate to see these social worker and psychologist positions be reduced because they weren’t supported and, as a result, were not as effective as they might be.)

Overall, I think the district needs to examine their motives for making this change. Is it an effort to save money? Improve services? Address existing problems of staffing? Address unique needs that exist in specific buildings? It seems like examining these motives could provide some of the questions that needs answers. Maybe it’s neither — maybe this district needs to think about a hybrid.

I am concerned about a principal taking on the role of supervision without direction and support. Perhaps they have that? If not, I think the ‘BIG’ answer is to have a learning supports strategic plan. If the plan interfaces supports based on need and data, and that information is provided to building administrators, perhaps they can be more supportive to the work of these front-line folks. The principals should know what the district plan is, how it supports learning, data for their building as well as the aggregate data of similar grade level buildings in the district, and consult with their mental health teams to target specific building needs within the mission and goals of these folks (what you sent in the original email). Naturally, the building principals and their staff will need to measure their work (quality and quantity) to direct needed changes.

What if the managers worked with other district staff to build their plan and disseminate with administration? If the managers have the data and a plan, that could provide a framework for how to conduct work within a building. That could be the “hybrid” I mentioned. Then the building knows where they fit in the district, have some direction on what they need to attend to, and have the freedom to problem-solve and make decisions.

In that way, the managers do more ‘promotion’ and ‘facilitation’ while the building administrators provide leadership and support. The managers should also work with these administrators on a regular basis to answer questions, offer new ideas and help them analyze their data. I think it might help everyone get on the same page and still have flexibility to do whatever is needed in a specific building.”

(6) “In my opinion.....

Centralization Pros

- Professional representation at the district level
- Training provided by the district department
- Perhaps the district mandates that every campus have a mental health helping professional
- Control of costs
- Uniform message to all
- Hiring is centralized

Centralization Cons

- Campuses cannot create their own model specific to the needs of the campus because the district dictates what each campus is to do
- Campuses may choose to not have a mental health helping professional
- Too much bureaucracy and therefore slow movement and slow to get services to students
- Hiring done by campuses

Decentralization Pros

- Principals can really shape staff on their campus to meet the needs of students at their campus
- Campuses are given freedom to be flexible to the communities needs

- Campus-based staff can create the mental health program that suites the campus
- The staff person belongs to the campus and therefore spends the majority of time at the campus, more on campus time means more services for kids
- The mental health person can be the expert on the campus and call colleagues to consult
- Guidelines and recommendations are provided by a department at the district office.....if there is one

Decentralization Cons

- Principals may not give high priority to mental health
- Psychologist and social work training might be limited at the campus
- Staffing cases with like-minded, similarly trained people is often not possible on campus
- Staff may be assigned extra duties
- Evaluated by person (principal or asst. principal) who might be unfamiliar with job
- The department at the main district office represents psychologists and social workers
- Each campus may have a different model”

(7) “Principals don’t have the bandwidth or wherewithal to oversee and be in charge of mh services; I prefer centralized oversight with modifications and flexibility. Best to work with each school to provide a non ‘cookie cutter’ approach. You want to align any services with the needs of the school community. Centralized helps to decrease fragmentation of services; get an agreed upon vision (Theory of Change model) that can be implemented across all schools so there is one approach; School Systems need to have basic standards, tasks, outcomes, and implementation that consistent across all schools - the needs and interventions may be different, but the direction is the same. This would include Central Offices creating Guidance Documents, Trainings, Webinar, Workshops and providing Technical Assistance.”

#####

Invitation to listserv participants:

What do you advise about keeping learning support personnel centralized in a district or distributed to school sites?

Share lessons learned. Comments. Recommendations. And let us know what’s happening locally?

Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

#####

Featured Set of Center Resources

>About Our Listservs and Information Sharing

We have three listservs that reach out to leaders and practitioners at all levels about (1) daily matters confronting schools, (2) promoting whole child development and positive school climate, and (3) the transformation of student and learning supports. Currently, distribution is to a total of over 114,000 (54,200 on the principals’ listserv; 14,400 on the superintendents’ listserv). We encourage forwarding the information and regularly receive requests to be added. And we receive many comments, requests, questions, and information to share. Here are two we recently received:

>Comments from an administrator on enhancing learning supports

“Often in schools we discuss the concept of differentiated instructional “supports” and academic intervention. It is becoming increasingly clear to me that the key is really in **teacher engagement and time on task with the planning and instructional material design process....In many homes parents can’t help their students with their school work due to language barriers, education levels, work schedules, etc.** When educators

design tasks that go home which require a presumption that there is parental support or some form of tutoring, the achievement gap widens between those with and those without resources. Sadly in many districts, there is not enough planning and learning time for the teachers to really take a close look at our practices and the assumptions that drive certain decisions that we may be making devoid of thinking through the implications as the stress of poorly designed assignments that hit the kitchen table. (If there is a kitchen table to work upon.) A student who attempts a homework assignment at the kitchen table **devoid of support or a way to self-support** may quickly begin believing that the particular subject is not for them or that they are not smart enough to do the assignment. When said assignments factor into grades, etc. the lack of confidence hole and distaste for school or the subject deepens. What began as a simple lesson planning and design issue has the potential to cut much deeper into the psyche of children and we adults may not even be aware of the impact of the thousand paper cuts like this over a student's academic career. The conversation about learning supports and their respective power to promote or power to destroy a love of learning or a love of school is a critical one that must become central to teacher training and professional learning sessions. **Furthermore, if teachers really understand each child's learning barriers, then he/she may be in a better position to design lesson tasks that have built in supports that are customized with so that the student may self-propel his/herself over the learning obstacles. .."**

>Information Sharing from Campbell County Schools' (Northern Kentucky) Comprehensive School Safety Project

Connie Pohlgeers, Shelli Wilson, and Adam Liechty from the Campbell County Schools in Northern Kentucky asked us to share information about their Comprehensive School Safety Project . which was just awarded a 5 million dollar grant from the National Institute of Justice. Here is the abstract from their proposal.

Youth violence continues to be a significant concern in US schools, yet no study has utilized network brokers nor have they embedded brokers into a MTSS to reduce school violence. The purpose of this study is to empirically test a promising technological method that first identifies and directly involves brokers in a multi-tiered school anti-violence model. Different aspects of the MTSS model will be implemented based on tiers (or level) of need (aka Universal, Selective, and Intensive interventions), each of which will involve peer brokers. This project will be applied to over 1,000 students from different ages across a four-year period and will identify key peers necessary to mitigate the bystander effect, thus promoting social resiliency among those with whom they interact. Campbell County School District will partner with a research team from Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center along with grant consultants specializing in social analysis network as well as bullying and the bystander effect. In addition, the district will partner with the Kentucky Center for School Safety. Research will be conducted to determine if brokers are the key agents in optimal school violence prevention outcomes. The team will test the use of multi-tiered anti-violence programs. The team will then determine if one of the mechanisms leading to reduced violence incidences is increased social resiliency. Finally, the team will determine if these resiliency factors are explained by inclusion of brokers in the prevention program. This study will involve schools from 2 separate school districts in the Northern Kentucky region. The team will have yearly access to objective school violence data for each of the schools, both at the district level as well as targeted schools within the district. The two school districts that were selected are similar to number of schools in the district, school enrollment size, demographic variables, and school violence incidences. In addition to objective data, network data as well as self- and peer-reported data will be collected during the fall semester of each academic year. In total, this 4-year, longitudinal study will analyze data from over 2,000 students, of which over 1,000 will receive the violence prevention curriculum.

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/>)

Appendix

Here is more information about the requestor's district program:

"The School Mental Health Team assesses for barriers to optimal school progress. We provide high quality services that promote the development of healthy relationships, sound decision making, and regulation of emotions and behavior.

Team Goals

- Increase access to mental health services for ALL students
- Assess for critical areas of concern impacting education
- Support students and staff in addressing areas of concern

Key Areas of Focus

- Consider trauma exposure in all forms of assessment
- Increase the number of students screened for trauma exposure
- Increase the offerings of trauma-informed treatment within the school setting

School Psychologists – The mission for School Psychologists is to identify and provide the necessary support for students to benefit from their educational program through:

- Consultation with teachers, parents, and administrators to find effective solutions regarding problems in learning and behavior.
- A wide variety of assessment techniques at an individual, group, and systems level to evaluate: academic skills, learning aptitudes, personality and emotional development, social skills, and eligibility for special education.
- Intervention with children and families to help solve conflicts and problems in learning and adjustment.
- Prevention by identifying potential learning difficulties.
- Education and staff development.

School Social Workers – The mission for School Social Workers is to identify and provide the necessary support for students to benefit from their educational program through:

- Targeted evidenced based interventions to promote mental health and school success.
- Collaboration and consultation with other service providers, classroom staff and caregivers.
- School wide universal interventions to foster positive school adjustment and social emotional well-being.

It is our expectation that school social workers will collaborate with school staff to develop a multi-faceted approach to delivering school mental health services. School social workers will:

- >Identify clear protocols for responding to student needs;
- >Plan and implement programs in response to the needs of the students, staff, and school community;
- >Document, track and assess outcomes to ensure services align with larger school improvement goals;
- >Engage staff and families as partners in promoting the social and emotional well-being of students."

*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

