School Practitioner Listserv

30 years & counting

A Weekly Community of Practice Network for Sharing and Interchange

Mental Health in Schools
UCLA Center
Program and Policy Analysis*

July 11, 2016

Concerns from the Field:

>*Planning a peer buddy welcoming program*

- **Center Response**
- **Responses from Colleagues in the Field**

For Your Information:

>*Early family support interventions: Creating context for success*

>*Fact Sheet: Proposed Regulations to Encourage Better and Fairer Tests, Reduce Burden of Testing*

Featured Set of Center Resources:

>*Welcoming: New and returning staff, students, and families*

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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 *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.

Concern from the Field: ""I am a School Counselor at a K-8 School. We have new students that come every year to our school. We are also building a new school and doubling our school size, which in turn will bring more new students as well. I am looking to start a formal peer buddies mentor program for students who decide to be buddies to new students. Do you happen to have a curriculum for students in order to become peer buddies or know where I can look to find that information."

Center Response: Changing schools, changing grades – are among the many transition demands with which students regularly cope. Every transition can exacerbate problems or be an opportunity to promote positive learning and attitudes and reduce alienation.

Schools need to build their capacity to address transitions proactively and in the process to be guided by their goals for enhancing personal and social functioning. This requires school-wide and classroom-based interventions designed to enhance successful transitions and prevent transition problems. Examples of programs include school-wide and classroom activities for welcoming new arrivals (students, their families, staff) and rendering ongoing social support *(including but not limited to peer mentors)*; counseling and articulation strategies to support grade-to-grade and school-to-school transitions and moves to and from special education, college, and post school living and work; and before and after-school and inter-session activities to enrich learning and provide recreation in a safe environment. Immediate outcomes from such efforts are reduced alienation, increased involvement at school, and engaged learning.

Planning for peers to welcome and support new students is a great way to start off the school year. Such activity is part of the foundation for creating a positive school climate and a sense of community. A colleague who worked with a peer mentor program shared the following:

> *"... customize to the school's needs. Sometimes generic curriculum for mentoring can be nebulous. It would take the leadership team sitting down and determining what they truly want out of their peer mentors and why they are looking to begin this program. If there are issues with transitions for new students coming to the school then it may take more than a peer mentor program to work with barriers. There are a lot of peer mentoring programs available to review. Once the research is complete then the leadership team should sit down and really dissect the who-what-where-when-and how of the vision and goal of the peer mentoring program."*

We recommend that the leaders responsible for learning supports at a school establish a workgroup to plan and prepare welcoming and social support (including peer mentoring) for new students, families, and staff. *Welcoming ideas & plans for the beginning of the school year* are highlighted as month 1 of the Center feature: "Ideas for Enhancing Support at your school this month." (See http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/schoolsupport.htm.) For resources on peer mentoring, see the peer mentoring section on the National Mentoring Resource Center's website – http://www.nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php/smart-search.html?q=peer+mentoring

Here is an excerpt from our Center's resource listed above; it can be accessed directly at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rhythms.pdf#page=5.

"Some families are not sure how to interact with the school. Three ways to help them feel welcome and a part of things are to:

- ensure the Office Staff are provided with training and resources so they can create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere to everyone who enters the school
- establish processes whereby teachers invite a student and family to a Welcoming Conference that helps clarify student and family interests and answers their questions
- provide workshops and follow-up assistance for teachers to help them establish welcoming procedures and materials.

And, because the emphasis is on Welcoming, any written material given out at this time specifically states WELCOME and is limited to simple orientation information. To the degree feasible, such material is made available in the various languages of those likely to enroll at the school.

All this is meant as a chance to get to know teachers and school and for teachers to facilitate positive connections between family and school such as helping the student and parents connect with a school activity in which they seem interested.

Like any other interventions, efforts to welcome and involve new students and families require institutional commitment, organization, and ongoing involvement. That is, the process must be school-owned, and there must be a mechanism dedicated to effective program planning, implementation, and long-term evolution.

When a family comes to register, it is essential that there be a designated staff/volunteer to welcome and provide information (in primary languages). This includes information about needed documents (e.g., residence, immunizations) and how to access missing documentation. In registering a new student and family, someone needs to welcome and begin an orientation and tour, with initial introductions to teacher(s), principal, support staff, and others. This includes providing information about matters such as: (a) how the school runs each day, (b) special activities for parents and students, (c) community services they may find helpful, (d) parents who are ready to help them join in, (e) students ready to meet with new students to help them join in, and (f) how the family can help the child learn and do well at school.

The following are additional examples of prevention-oriented welcoming and orienting strategies for minimizing negative experiences and ensuring positive outreach.

Schoolwide:

>*FRONT DOOR*: Set up a Welcoming Table (identified with a welcoming sign) at the front entrance to the school and recruit and train volunteers to meet and greet everyone who comes through the door.

>*FRONT OFFICE*: Work with the Office Staff to create ways to meet and greet strangers with a smile and an inviting atmosphere. Provide them with welcoming materials and information sheets regarding registration steps (with appropriate translations). Encourage the use of volunteers in the office so that there are sufficient resources to take the necessary time to greet and assist new students and families. It helps to have a designated registrar and even designated registration times.

>*WELCOMING MATERIALS*: Prepare a booklet that clearly says WELCOME and provides some helpful info about who's who at the school, what types of assistance are available to new students and families, and offers tips about how the school runs. (Avoid using this as a place to lay down the rules; that can be rather an uninviting first contact.) Prepare other materials to assist students and families in making the transition and connecting with ongoing activities.

>*STUDENT GREETERS*: Establish a Student Welcoming Club (perhaps the student council or leadership class can make this a project). These students can provide tours and some orientation (including initial introduction to key staff).

>*FAMILY/VOLUNTEER GREETERS*: Establish a General Welcoming Club of parents and/or volunteers who provide regular tours and orientations (including initial introduction to key staff). Develop a Welcoming Video available in the front office.

>*WELCOMING BULLETIN BOARD*: Dedicate a bulletin board (somewhere near the entrance to the school) that says WELCOME and includes such things as pictures of school staff, a diagram of the school and its facilities, pictures of students, information on tours and orientations, special meetings for new students, and so forth.

Classroom:

>*CLASSROOM GREETERS*: Each teacher should have several students who are willing and able to greet newcomers who come to the classroom. Recent arrivals often are interested in welcoming the next set of new enrollees.

>*CLASSROOM INTRODUCTION*: Each teacher should have a plan to assist new students and families in making a smooth transition into the class. This includes ways to introduce the student to classmates as soon as the student arrives. (Some teachers may want to arrange with the office specified times for bringing a new student to the class.) An introductory Welcoming Conference should be conducted with the student and family as soon as feasible. A useful Welcoming aid is to present both the student and the family member with Welcoming Folders (or some other welcoming gift such as coupons from local businesses that have adopted the school).

>*PEER BUDDIES*: In addition to the classroom greeter, a teacher can have several students who are trained to be a special buddy to a new student for a couple of weeks (and hopefully thereafter). This can provide the type of social support that allows a new student to learn about the school culture and how to become involved in activities.

>*FOLLOW-UP OUTREACH FROM ORGANIZED GROUPS*: Establish a way for representatives of organized student and parent groups (including the PTSA) to make direct contact with new students and families to invite them to learn about activities and to assist them in joining in when they find activities that appeal to them.

>*SUPPORT GROUPS*: Offer groups designed to help new students and families learn about the community and the school and to allow them to express concerns and have them addressed. Such groups also allow them to connect with each other as another form of social support.

>*ONGOING POSITIVE CONTACTS*: Develop a variety of ways students and their families can feel an ongoing connection with the school and classroom (e.g., opportunities to volunteer help, positive feedback regarding participation, letters home that tell "all about what's happening").

Communications to Enhance Welcoming

A prime focus in addressing welcoming is on ensuring that most communications and interactions between the school and students and families convey a welcoming tone. This is conveyed through formal communications to students and families, procedures for reaching out to individuals, and informal interactions. Communications and invitations to students and their families can be done in two forms:

- general communications (e.g., oral and written communications when a new student registers, classroom announcements, mass distribution of flyers, newsletters)

- special, personalized contacts (e.g., personal conferences and notes from the teacher).

For those who are not responsive to general invitations, the next logical step is to extend special invitations and increase personalized contact. Special invitations are directed at designated individuals and are intended to overcome personal attitudinal barriers and can be used to elicit information about other persisting barriers.

For more transition resources, see the Featured Center Resources section of this Practitioners' Community of Practice.

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nvitation to listserv participants: *What's your take on all this?* What plans are you making to welcome students, teachers, families -- especially newcomers? Any lessons learned you can share? Comments? Recommendations? What's happening locally?
Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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For Your Information

> **Early family support interventions: Creating context for success**
> by Deborah Dara (2016). *Global Social Welfare, 3, 91-96.*
> http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40609-016-0048-2/fulltext.html

Abstract: Ecological or multidimensional theories are commonly used to explain the causal pathways that contribute to complex social problems. While it is generally understood that context matters for improving and strengthening parental capacity and positive child development, it is less well recognized that context also matters for the capacity of interventions, even those that are well specified and researched, to realize their full potential. Indeed, the attention being given to directing public investments to "evidence-based models" suggests that a program, once proven to work, can be successfully transplanted in a range of communities and that positive outcomes can be replicated at scale. However, rarely do these so-called proven programs replicate their impacts when taken to scale. Maximizing the impacts and viability of evidence-based programs, in many ways, depends upon the ability of local communities to facilitate collaboration across sectors and target investment around a shared mission and set of core outcomes. The purpose of this commentary is to articulate why focusing on both program and context offers policymakers a more promising pathway for achieving meaningful and sustainable improvements in a child's well-being and healthy development

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> **Fact Sheet: Proposed Regulations to Encourage Better and Fairer Tests, Reduce Burden of Testing –**
> http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/nprmsassessmentfactsheet762016.pdf

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Featured Set of Center Resources

>Welcoming: New and returning staff, students, and families

For more ideas on welcoming and supporting newcomers, see our online clearinghouse Quick Find on *Transition Programs/grade articulation/welcoming –* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm. There you will see links to Center resources as well as links to the work of others. Here is a sample of the Center resources and their direct URL links:

> *Welcoming Strategies for Newly Arrived Students and Their Families –*
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/welcomingstrategies.pdf

> *Back-to-School Anxiety –*
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/backtoschanx.pdf

> *What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families –*
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/welcomeguide.htm

> *Transitions to and from Elementary, Middle, and High School –*
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transitionstoandfrom.pdf

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

> *Easing the Impact of Student Mobility: Welcoming & Social Support –*
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/easimp.htm

> *Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families –*
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/welcome/welcome.pdf

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 *For information about the

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports,

see

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html

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

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

**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 to *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/)