

(3/15/23) This resource is from the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA

**Featured:**

- >Looking to improve the school's role in enhancing mental health?
  - >Can the impact of social determinants on child and adolescent mental health be altered?
  - >Lessons Learned from Pioneering Efforts to Transform Student/Learning Supports
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- \*\*\*\*\*

**For discussion and interchange:**

>Looking to improve the school's role in enhancing mental health?

We get frequent requests asking about how to rethink, reimagine, and rebuild mental health in schools. Such requests have increased as schools experience the impact of the pandemic with respect to mental health concerns.

Some of the requests ask for “best practices.” Some focus mainly on how to enhance *services* for psychological *problems*. Some seem overwhelmed by the many initiatives relevant to mental health in schools and ask how they fit together (e.g., *MTSS, the Comprehensive School Mental Health approach, Full Service Community Schools, social emotional learning, CDC’s Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child movement, calls for improving school workforce capacity to address youth mental health*).

Our responses caution that prevailing approaches are too limited in nature and scope. And much of the advocacy reifies the tendency for so many people to hear the term *mental health* and think mainly in terms of mental *disorders/illness*. And this colludes with limiting the focus of mental health in schools to finding ways for schools to provide more *services*. In turn, this undercuts efforts to advance how schools broadly and comprehensively address mental *health* in ways that promote health as well as playing a more potent role in addressing emotional and related psychosocial and educational problems.

Advocacy for more mental health *services* in schools often detracts from efforts to address the full range of mental health considerations confronting school staff, students, and their families. Just focusing on clinical services is too narrow a focus for meeting the nature and scope of student and teaching related problems manifested at schools each day and can undercut efforts to improve the focus on promoting wellness (e.g., social emotional learning and development).

Moreover, as we indicated in the last issue of the Center’s **quarterly ejournal**, most current efforts to improve how schools address mental health ignore the realities that

- schools cannot and are unlikely to ever be able to afford hiring or contracting the numbers of student support professionals being asked for by prevailing proposals to increase services (e.g., counseling/therapy)
- efforts to frame student/learning supports as a multilevel intervention continuum (e.g., MTSS) and in the context of Full Service Community Schools are inadequate ways to produce a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of supports in- and out-of-classrooms
- student problems cannot be reduced significantly without transforming how schools provide student/learning supports
- policy makers continue to give most of their attention to improving instruction, and marginalize discussion of factors interfering with learning and teaching.

## Improving Advocacy for Mental Health in Schools

We suggest that advocacy for mental health in schools will benefit from broadening and embedding the message into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. Such a system frames the role schools can effectively play in addressing a wide range of barriers to learning and teaching. It not only encompasses: 1) a full continuum of school-community interventions designed to (a) promote positive mental health, (b) prevent learning, behavior, and emotional problems, (c) intervene as early as feasible when such problems arise, and (d) help in the treatment of severe and chronic problems, 2) it clarifies the major *domains of student/learning supports* needed at each level of the continuum. See

>*Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

>*Rethinking Student and Learning Supports*

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

And for more on this, later thisweek watch for the next issue of the Centers' ejournal.

**For discussion and interchange:**

>**Can the impact of social determinants on child and adolescent mental health be altered?**

From: *About Addressing Poverty: What's a School's Role?*

Multiple, interrelated concerns, such as poverty, child development, education, violence, crime, safety, housing, and employment require multiple and interrelated solutions. Just adding a few additional services and programs to schools is not a solution. (Indeed, this approach is viewed as a recipe for perpetuating the current marginalized and fragmented set of efforts already demonstrated to have outcomes that are too limited.) Interrelated solutions require wide based collaboration. In particular, schools, homes, and communities need to work together strategically in pursuing shared goals related to the general well-being of the young and society.

Mental health concerns become public health concerns when large numbers of youngsters are reported as not doing well.

Civil rights concerns spring forth when large scale disparities become evident.

Economic concerns and worries about global competitiveness emerge with enhanced visibility about the costs to society of so many students dropping out before high school graduation and the quality of postsecondary education.

From: *Social Determinants of Health, Structural Racism, and the Impact on Child and Adolescent Mental Health*

In recent years, there has been a greater emphasis on examining the factors, particularly the social factors, that affect health outcomes and contribute to population health inequities. The social determinants of health, as defined by the World Health Organization, are "the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and develop, and the wider set of forces, including

economic policies, social norms, and political systems, that shape the conditions of daily life and impact health outcomes.”

The social determinants of mental health are similar, but include the added societal stigma associated with mental health and substance use disorders. The social determinants of mental health are particularly relevant for children, as they are reliant on the adults who care for them and have even less control over these societal factors. Additionally, the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development that occurs during this critical time lays the foundation for mental health and well-being into adulthood....

The most striking disadvantage for children and adolescents is in the education system, as the quality of education is directly linked to numerous health outcomes by increasing health literacy and healthy behaviors and indirectly by affecting other social determinants such as employment and income....

School is seen as a safe space for children to develop and to learn not only academics but also about themselves and the world. However, this is not true for many marginalized children, as funding for many school districts is derived from property taxes, and with lower property values, as a downstream effect of redlining, schools in these neighborhoods receive significantly less funding. Less funding means less access to educational resources, experienced teachers, and advanced course work....

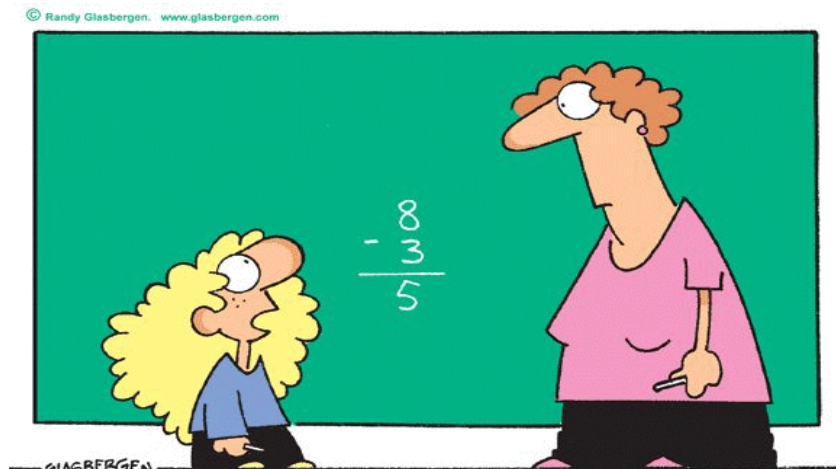
An extensive amount of literature is dedicated to individual and family protective factors against these exposures, including an inner sense of confidence, positive self-identity, effective parenting including strategies with higher control, sense of support from nuclear and extended family, and a cohesive neighborhood among others....

The underlying structural forces that drive these social determinants must be addressed to improve health outcomes. If we address these factors in children, we can decrease inequities in mental health disorders across the life span. This requires a shift from thinking about the patients we directly treat to thinking about population health. ...”

For a perspective on the range of social determinants, see examples of risk-producing conditions, protective buffers, and conditions for promoting full development related to development and Learning in *Barriers, Buffers, & Youth Development*.

For more on this topic, see the following Center Quick Finds:

- >*Social Determinants of Health, Mental Health, and Academic Achievements*
- >*Diversity, disparities, promoting equity*
- >*Cultural competence*
- >*Homeless students*
- >*Immigrant students*
- >*Children and Poverty*



“What gives anyone the right to take 3 away from 8? Why should 8 be diminished to the lesser value of 5 just to satisfy someone’s obsession with math?”

## Lessons Learned from Pioneering State Departments, Districts, and Schools that Have Flirted with Transforming Student/Learning Supports

With respect to the [National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports](#), folks ask:

*What has been learned from efforts to transform student/learning supports?*

Pioneering and trailblazing efforts across the country have pursued ambitious and comprehensive "out-of-the-box thinking" and provided an intriguing glimpse into the future of student/learning supports. In the process, they helped clarify the type of systemic changes that are required to succeed.

Some state education agencies pursued statewide initiatives. Some did so in collaboration with leaders and personnel from other agencies and organizations (health, mental health, youth development, etc.). Design documents were developed to provide a blueprint to guide the work at area education agencies, districts, and schools. In one state, the state department of education hired a "Student Support Coordinator" for each district to implement the transformation of student/learning supports. For several years, the work was done in collaboration with the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and Scholastic, Inc. And, Scholastic went on to incorporate the work in their [Rebuilding for Learning initiative](#).

We have extracted from all this work and other related experiences a variety of general and specific [lessons learned](#). We also developed a [System Change Toolkit](#).

In terms of system level changes, the various efforts have highlighted four key and interacting considerations that must be the focus of new directions thinking. First and foremost, they point to the need to

- Revisit school improvement policies in order to expand them in ways that will end the marginalization of student/learning supports
- Adopt intervention frameworks that unify and guide development of a comprehensive, equitable, and systemic learning supports component at every school
- Rework the infrastructure at school, complex, and district levels to ensure effective leadership, redefine roles and functions, and establish resource oriented mechanisms
- Develop strategic approaches to enable effective and sustainable systemic change and replication to scale

With specific respect to the replication, scale-up, and sustainability, our early learning is highlighted in:

[>Implementation Science and Complex School Changes](#)

As we continue to learn, we have come to appreciate just how intertwined implementation and improvement science are. Click [here](#) to see a working draft of an expanded version of our earlier framework.

## >Links to a few other relevant shared resources

**Large-Scale Training in Mental Health First Aid**

**Critical Civic Motivation of Marginalized Youth: An Expectancy-Value Approach**

**A systematic review of longitudinal changes in school burnout among adolescents: Trajectories, predictors, and outcomes**

**Examining facilitators and barriers to evidence-based professional practice by mental health providers in schools**

**Creating a System of Care for Early Adolescents Grieving a Death-Related Loss**

**Moving from "Reform" to "Rethinking"**

**Pursuing Equity At the Intersection of Language, Culture and Disability** (The Thought Leader Conversation Series from WestEd's National Center for Systemic Improvement)

**We cannot treat our way out of the obesity epidemic**

**Educator Turnover Has Markedly Increased, but Districts Have Taken Actions to Boost Teacher Ranks**

## **A Few Upcoming Webinars**

For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts – <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

3/15 Prevention: from vision to action

3/16 Resiliency unmasked: the impact of grief and trauma

3/16 Educator burnout: How to support good work

3/20 Transformative systems through equity

3/22 Transforming kindergarten

3/22 Exploring the staff shortage impact on education

3/22 Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Students Experiencing Homelessness

3/23 Supporting Vulnerable and At-Risk Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care

3/28 Classroom Strategies for Building Equity and Student Confidence

3/28 McKinney-Vento School Selection Rights

3/29 Disrupting PD Day in Schools with Continuous Professional Learning Experiences

3/29 Elevating Culturally Affirming and Sustaining Services and Practices in Youth Service Agencies

3/30 Belonging and Engagement: The Keys to Showing Up



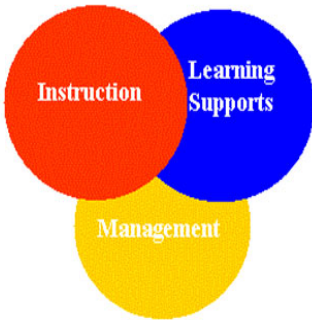


## To Listserv Participants

- **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](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!***  
Send to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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For information about the  
**National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports**  
go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

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](mailto: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/> )**