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Featured

(1) "How can my district provide leadership in reducing community violence?"

(2) **About concerns that arise in addressing school/community violence**

(3) Is there something special about middle school?

(4) Links to a few other relevant shared resources

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The following request came to the Center before the events that currently are dominating the news. It underscore that violence on campus and in communities is a long-standing concern that schools and communities must work together to address.

For discussion and interchange:
> *"How can my district provide leadership in reducing community violence?"*

Request from the field:

"I am the superintendent of a suburban school district adjacent to a large urban area. Our community has the most shootings per capita in the our state and have been identified by the FBI as the most dangerous area in all of the state. With that said, I have followed your work for sometime, and often use your resources.

We have outstanding Tier 1, 2 & 3 Mental Health/SEL Supports. We have a great asset map.

We also have tremendous building security. I was a special services director for 20 years before I stepped into the superintendent position.

What I am specifically interested in learning about is reducing community violence and the role of the public school system. In one of your recent documents, you shared some interesting information about community violence. Several things stood out, but these are two things that I want to unpack and learn more about.

> "*Healthy and caring schools don't wait to react to tragic events. They are proactive in working with their surrounding community to improve schools in ways that foster positive social-emotional development and prevent problems, as well as having a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of support in place to address the many barriers to learning and teaching that are encountered each day.*"

> "*There is a need for a multifaceted approach to managing threats from students and non students.*"

Where we are struggling is pulling together all the law enforcement agencies and all the non profits agencies together to work more strategically. I am bringing together local, regional and state law enforcement and leaders. Here is what I know- we are not working together to reduce community violence. We are working in silos, and my hope is that with everyone in the same room we can all start "rowing" in the same direction.Would you have any suggestions of how to most effectively plan for mobilizing this coalition?."

We try to help with efforts to bring school and community resources together as a means for reducing community violence. From our perspective, the key to moving forward involves developing a ***School-Community Collaborative***.

> See **Chapter 14. "Enhancing School and Community Collaboration" in *Improving School Improvement***

Temporary school-community connections often are established in the wake of a crisis or to address a particular problem. It is relatively simple to make informal linkages. However, major long-term formal working relationships are driven by a comprehensive vision about the shared role schools, communities, and families can play in strengthening youngsters, families, schools, and neighborhoods. This encompasses a focus on safe schools and neighborhoods, positive development and learning, personal, family, and economic well-being, and more.

Here are some initial steps in moving toward a sustainable school-community collaborative:

(1) The first step we always recommend is finding out what others have done with respect to school community collaboration and especially those with a collaborative infrastructure. For example, see the following brief videos and description from the La Crosse school district:

> **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agY6YqUws3I**
> **https://www.lacrossepartnersinlearning.com/about-us/**

> And see the **California Community Schools Partnership Program:**
> **A Transformational Opportunity for Whole Child Education**

(2) The next step is to fully map existing district and school level efforts to address violence so the work can be shared when outreach is made to invite the community to build a school-community collaborative. The mapping tool we use can be downloaded from our website: **https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf**

(3) Effective pursuit of joint functions requires establishing effective school-community collaboratives at school and district levels. To these ends, it is essential to develop a well-conceived operational infrastructure for collaboration. A prototype of the type of mechanisms needed to provide oversight, leadership, capacity building, and ongoing support as a collaborative plans and implements strategic actions is presented in
> **Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions**

(4) Sometimes working together on a grant (whether you get it or not) mobilizes a group. It also sets a deadline Two current grant opportunities are:

O-COPS-2024-171980, FY24 COPS School Violence Prevention Program, Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services (closing date 6/11/24)
> **https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/353564**

O-BJA-2024-172090, BJA FY24 STOP School Violence Program Competitive Solicitation, Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (closing date 6/12/24)
> **https://www.grants.gov/search-results-detail/353564**

A Few Other Center Resources on Matter:
> >*Collaboration - School, Community, Interagency*
> >*School-Community Collaboration: A Self-study Survey*
> >*Schools, Families, and Community Working Together: Building an Effective Collaborative*
> >*School and Community Collaboration to Promote a Safe Learning Environment*
> >*Effective Strategies for Creating Safer Schools and Communities: Fostering School, Family, and Community Involvement*

And from WestEd: >*Reimagining School Safety: A Guide for Schools and Communities*
 From Rand: *The Evolution of Protest Policing*

Comments from a Center Field Associate

" I can only tell you what worked for us [in Iowa]. Absolutely get everyone in the same room and have a well thought-out plan for structuring this new relationship. It's helpful if the leaders or 2nd in command can be at the table vs. those that implement programs. It's fine to include program folks but it's important to invite those that have knowledge of and/or control of budgets since they will understand the requirements for spending and deployment of resources, what can be done, what's not possible, etc.

   It may also be helpful to collect some information prior to the meeting. A short summary of the purpose of the meeting and the intent to set up collaborative communications/relationships would be a good opener. Then follow with a few questions about what the individual organizations or agencies are doing with regard to the problem. This info could be shared prior to the first meeting and then used as a reference at the meeting so that meeting time is not wasted going into detail.

   An agenda should be structured with the goal of improved communication and blending, braiding, or pooling efforts to maximize resources. Questions will arise regarding sharing information about individual students and their families - but the group is not there yet. Everyone tends to immediately go to the worst cases/problems. There are actually three levels of concern: prevention, early intervention, and then chronic and severe concerns. Stay focused on the bigger picture of structuring services that are complementary rather than redundant. The learning supports "map" could be redesigned by the group to better suit their needs. (The Content Areas are school focused so a few of those may be redefined more broadly.)
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf
   Just keep in mind that while gun violence is the problem, there are so many contributing factors that lead up to that violence. Everything must be considered in the context of the community.

   Just learning about one another is a great first step. Once the group understands what they have and where they can work together, they will be able to identify areas of need. From there, it's a matter of setting long-term and short-term goals, using data to measure progress and continue efforts to make meaningful change.

   The types of change this superintendent is seeking won't come quickly or easily. But, s/he also can't do it alone. Every agency that serves this population has a vested interest and should be at the table."

Community of Practice Participants: *What can you share in response to this Superintendent's request?*   Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Why is collaboration so hard?

Because too often it is an unnatural act between nonconsenting adults!

>About concerns that arise in addressing school/community violence

From the website of the National School Safety and Security Services:

> "We believe… School safety requires a balanced and comprehensive approach. It's about heartware and hardware, not just one or the other.
>   High profile school safety incidents often raise questions of alleged failures of people, policies, procedures, and systems, not failures of security hardware and products. The human side of school safety is critical. It's about mental detectors more than metal detectors...."

Our Center at UCLA promotes thinking about problems experienced at school (such as violence prevention) within the context of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. Within that framework, crisis response and prevention can be planned along an intervention continuum that responds to, minimizes the impact of, and prevents school and personal crises. This requires school-wide and classroom-based approaches for
   (a) promotion and prevention of crises (e.g., enhancing a supportive, caring school environment and assessing whether students feel supported, facilitating social-emotional learning),
   (b) intervening as soon as problems arise (e.g., dealing with bullying, verbal threats, etc.), and
   (c) ensuring severe and chronic problems are continuously addressed (especially those involving students who are disconnected from peers and adults at school).
Many schools have now adopted such a multi-tiered framework. However, they have not delineated the domains of student/learning supports that are needed at each level, nor have they stressed the necessity of weaving together school and community resources. See:

>   >*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide* –

>   >*Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change* –

Also see:
>   >*Addressing Violent Behavior at Schools*

>   >*Crisis response and prevention self-study survey*

For discussion and interchange:
> Is there something special about middle school?

> "*Middle grade schools - junior high, intermediate, or middle schools - are potentially society's most powerful force to recapture millions of youth adrift. Yet too often they exacerbate the problems the youth face. A volatile mismatch exists between the organization and curriculum of middle grades schools, and the intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal needs of young adolescents.*" - Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development

As students, families and school end the school year and anticipate next year, a special focus is on transitions from elementary to middle and from middle to high school. The comments below underline the challenges for students moving to middle schools.

From: *A superintendent's perspective on the essential role of the middle grades*

> "... Our fundamental challenge as educators is to create responsive, caring, safe, and stimulating school environments and experiences that cause students to develop, maintain, and expand their love of learning and intellectual curiosity about their world....
>   Too often, however, if schools are not purposeful about meeting this obligation, the K-12 learning pipeline can spring leaks along the way. Over time, students may become disengaged from the desire to learn, develop a dislike for school, become susceptible to chronic absenteeism, struggle with embracing emerging identities, or, in general, lack the supports they need to thrive

academically, emotionally or socially. Without the intentionality of carefully constructed learning pathways, school programming, and student supports along the journey through elementary, middle and high school, students can become stuck or, at best, develop a mind-set of begrudging compliance just to move forward....

   Due to a variety of factors associated with early adolescence, many students are most vulnerable to educational disengagement during their middle school years.... Schools must create responsive, caring, safe, and stimulating learning environments in all grade levels in order to maintain student engagement, but be especially intentional with specialized programming and supports during the pivotal middle school years.... Middle schoolers can be gregarious, confident, self-doubting, inquisitive, distracted, distracting, caring, self-absorbed, insightful, responsible, insensitive, and empathetic, all in the same day! To maintain and even accelerate their engagement with learning, students in the middle grades benefit from teachers, counselors, and school leaders who embrace young adolescents for their unique characteristics and are specially trained to provide experiences, programming, and supports responsive to their uniqueness....”

From: *Students still miss social connections*

“...Students who were in 7th, 8th, or 9th grade during remote or hybrid learning experienced little to no in-person interaction during key developmental years. The pandemic dampened their interest in face-to-face social situations and involvement in extracurricular activities. ...
Research shows participation in extracurricular activities increases students’ engagement at school and decreases their chances of dropping out and struggling in class... But students that experienced remote or hybrid learning in middle school or early high school are less involved in extracurricular activities, says Joshua Chard, a teacher and drama director.
“Middle school is sort of the gateway to becoming involved in extracurricular activities,” he explains. “Since students didn’t have in-person extracurriculars in middle school, when they came to 9th grade, it didn’t really occur to them to start joining clubs and be a part of that school community.”
As club advisor of the drama club ... Chard’s theater program typically has 30-40 participants each year, but it went down to 8 participants after the lockdown.... Seeing his students talk to one another more during rehearsals gives Chard a positive perspective on how students may eventually grow more comfortable to socialize offline and participate more in extracurricular activities. ...”

For more on Supporting this and other transitions,
see the following Center resources:

Addressing Barriers to Successful Middle School Transition

Transitions to and from Elementary, Middle, and High School

Transition programs, Grade articulation, welcome

Support for transitions: Self-study survey

Community of Practice Participants:

What can you share about efforts in your locale to support students/families this important transition in making?

Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

>**Effects of developmental relationships with teachers on middle-school students' motivation and performance**

>**Adolescent coping and social media use moderated anxiety change during the COVID-19 pandemic**

>**How money matters for schools**

>**Teacher emotional exhaustion: The synergistic roles of self-efficacy and student–teacher relationships**

>**'I never feel like I am prepared enough': Teachers' self-efficacy, challenges and experiences teaching students with disabilities**

>**Helping Kids Make Decisions**

A Few Upcoming Webinars

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

5/8 Pathways to Re-Engagement: Summer Opportunities
5/8 Enhancing School Safety Using Behavioral Threat Assessment (part two)
5/9 AI instructional tools and classroom integration
5/13 Addressing Significant Disproportionality Through
    Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
5/16 Empowering grassroots mentoring
6/5 Use of humor in treatment and recovery
6/6 Challenges and insights around AI
6/26 Accelerating English Learner Success
7/11 Enhancing School Safety Using Behavioral Threat Assessment (part three)
7/23 Stress management and resiliency training
8/13 Administrator Basics for Supporting English Learners with Disabilities

How Learning Happens (Edutopia's updated series of videos explores how educators can guide all students, regardless of their developmental starting points, to become productive and engaged learners.

Webinar recording: **Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth**

It's amazing how accustomed we have become to a certain order. And you become more aware of that order when you see something change it. - Nina Simone

If there's one thing I have always hated, it's being told what to do. - Fran Lebowitz

**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**
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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

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

Our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.
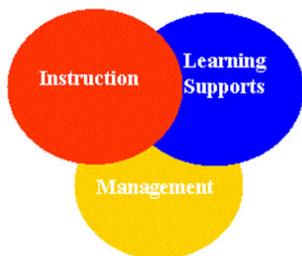
Let Us Know about what ideas are being proposed for moving in new directions to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

And if anyone is thinking about increasing the capacity of a district or school with respect to developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, we can help. Send all info and requests to ltaylor@ucla.edu

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.

THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!

For new sign-ups – email 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? Recently renamed the Center for MH in Schools and Student/Learning Supports, 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.