

## **First Concern in Improving Mental Health in Schools: Above All Do No Harm**

With the increasing concern about mental health in schools, we see renewed calls for "integrating mental health training into teacher in service trainings." While it clear that teachers are concerned about student mental health and that teachers can benefit from learning more about how to help those in need, the first concern for all school personnel is how to improve schools to minimize causing/contributing to learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

For those schools adopting a multi-tiered support system (MTSS), this means

- enhancing the focus on promoting positive development and preventing problems
- avoiding exacerbating learning, behavior, and emotional problems by addressing them as soon as they arise
- minimizing the emotional overlay that develops when students have chronic problems.

While all this has implications for personnel development, accomplishing this agenda is not primarily a matter of "integrating mental health training into teacher in service trainings." Improving mental health in schools is first and foremost about system change. See Embedding MH into Student/Learning Supports - <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aboutmh/aboutmhover.htm> . If we are to avoid perpetuating the myth that more teacher "training" is the magical answer to the many problems experienced by students and schools, personnel development has to emphasize the role of all staff in system transformation. See Improving School Improvement -- [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving\\_school\\_improvement.html](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html) .

(Also, in September watch for the Center's fall e-journal article - Rethinking MTSS to Better Address Barriers to Learning.)

Let us know if you need additional information.

Best wishes,

Howard & Linda

Howard Adelman, Ph.D.  
Professor of Psychology &  
Center Co director

Linda Taylor, Ph.D.  
Center Co director

Dept. of Psychology, UCLA  
Los Angeles, CA. 90095 1563  
Ph: 310/825 1225 310/825 3634  
Email: [adelman@psych.ucla.edu](mailto:adelman@psych.ucla.edu) [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)  
Website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>