NEW REPORT OUT ON THE CURRENT STATUS OF MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS

Given the recommendations of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health and the recent reauthorization of IDEA, this is a critical time in the history of efforts to address the mental health of children and adolescents.

Because of this, the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA has just released a report entitled: "The Current Status of Mental Health in Schools: A Policy and Practice Analysis." (Online at – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/currentstatusmh.htm>; hard copies can be requested by email at smhp@ucla.edu or by calling toll free 866/846-4843.)

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Brief overview of points stressed in the report:

> At present, mental health activity is going on in schools with competing agenda vying for the same dwindling resources. Diverse school and community stakeholders are attempting to address complex, multifaceted, and overlapping psychosocial and mental health concerns in highly fragmented and marginalized ways. This has led to inappropriate competition for sparse resources and inadequate results. The bottom line is that limited efficacy seems inevitable as long as the full continuum of necessary programs is unavailable and staff development remains deficient; limited cost effectiveness seems inevitable as long as related interventions are carried out in isolation of each other; limited systemic change is likely as long as the entire enterprise is marginalized in policy and practice.

> The current state of affairs calls for realigning policy and practice around a unifying and cohesive framework. Initiatives for MH in schools must be connected in major ways with the mission of schools and integrated into a restructured system of education support programs and services. This means braiding resources and interventions with a view to ensuring there is a *system of learning supports*, rather than separate programs and services. Coordinated efforts naturally are part of this, but the key is development of a system of learning supports that meets overlapping needs and does so by fully integrating mental health agenda into school improvement planning at school and district levels. For this to happen, policy must end the marginalization of such efforts and address the complications involved in making the essential systemic changes. The report includes specific examples of policy that are moving schools in new directions for providing student/learning supports.