



**School Practitioner  
Listserv**



A Weekly Community of Practice Network  
for Sharing and Interchange

*27 years  
& counting*

**February 17, 2014**

**Request**

>Working on attendance problems when the family provides excuses

**Feedback from Colleagues**

>About the request from a parent asking:  
“How can I get appropriate feedback about my child's MH progress as mandated by IDEA?”

**Featured Center Resource**

>Focus on technology in addressing barriers to learning

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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](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)  
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**Request:** "I am a clinical social worker in a high school . I am wondering if you have any information that would be helpful dealing with attendance issues primarily for students in the high school and middle school. Some students, in the high school have met the compulsory age so educational neglect is not an option.. We do not have students that do not attend school because they are hanging out on the street and ‘skipping school’ in the true definition of ‘truancy’ . We have students who don't attend because their parents write notes excusing them for reason that are not valid. It is clear that some students are having issues with school avoidance, anxiety and attachment and others are oppositional and defiant. Students ‘don't want to come to school’ and parents write notes excusing them. Any policies or procedures that can help me in developing interventions and procedures would be most appreciated We have recently formed an attendance task force to look at this issue. It is not a great number of students but the ones that are involved in this behavior take up a tremendous amount of resources."

**Listserv Participants:** This widespread problem is just the type of matter that a community of practice, such as this *School Practitioner Listserv*, is designed to address. In addition to presenting the matter here and asking you to share what your local schools are doing to address such attendance problems, we have also sent the request directly to several colleagues who focus specifically on the topic. Below is the first response received. This is followed by the Center’s response. Next week we will share the additional information we receive.

**Colleague Response:** "My reaction is that the way you need to engage middle and high school students is by helping them think about what are their hopes/dreams/goals in life and then backwards map what is it that they need to do to be able to get there — including the reality that they need to attend school so they can learn and achieve — and develop a habit that will be essential to success when they get a job. And, then as you do that- -you unpack what are the challenges they face in working on that goal -and if it is, for example, anxiety or avoidance, we need to find out what is creating that sensation and figure out what would help address that concern. In addition, I think it is really important to look at overall data to find out if this isn't just a problem facing a particular student -- but if for example -- data showing high levels of suspension — is suggesting there is a larger school climate issue that must be addressed. Or, maybe the data show that no one is attending a particular middle school class because the classroom instruction isn't engaging ... then you need to look at what is happening with that teacher. I also suggest that you look at the work of New York City and their Success Mentors which significantly turned around chronic absence — including among middle and high school students. ... It is, in my mind, a combination of effective use of data, personalized outreach with a caring adult or peer, and some elements of more systemic reform."

[*Center note:* About *Success Mentors* and how it fits into a multifaceted plan in combating chronic absenteeism – see

<http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/NYC-Chronic-Absenteeism-Impact-Report.pdf> ]

**Center Response:** Mentioned are two groups: one involving students who are anxious/avoidant; the other oppositional/defiant. In both cases, as the students get older the problems become more difficult to address. Whatever the cause, these students frustrate school staff and parents/families to the point many feel overwhelmed.

A place to start is to further clarify factors generating and exacerbating the problem. For example, we know that there are instances when absences are the result of a student playing a special companionship, caretaking, or income earning role with family members. Other students are avoiding school because of negative social or academic interactions at school. Conferences with students/families can help determine specific causes and provide ideas for solving it.

On a broader level, a work group (e.g., task force) focused on the problem and what student/family conferences clarify needs to consider any policy and general implications for enhancing the student/learning supports system. This includes ensuring the system effectively identifies and addresses prevention and responding as soon as there is an indication of a problem. For all students identified as a concern, the challenge is making the school experience new/different/worth making the effort to attend.

For students who already are significantly disconnected, there may be a need to expand “alternative schooling” (e.g., partial day programs in smaller groups for these students). In some cases, enabling the students to reconnect from home using interactive technology can be useful (e.g., students agree to do assigned school work at home and submit it electronically for credit).

**Some Resources:** For links to resources from our Center and from other sources, begin with our Quick Find on *Attendance* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/attendance.html>

There you will see links to:

>*School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies & Practices Going in the Right Direction?*

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/school attendance problems.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/school%20attendance%20problems.pdf)

>*School Attendance: Focusing on Engagement and Re-engagement*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schoolattend.pdf>

Because student motivation (especially intrinsic motivation) is central to addressing many attendance problems, also take a look at the Quick Find on *Motivation* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

There you find links to:

>*Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School*

<http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagingandre-engagingstudents.pdf>

>*Engaging and Re-engaging Families When a Student is Not Doing Well*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/familyengage.pdf>

- >Engaging and Re-engaging Students and Families
  - Unit I: *Motivation: Time to Move Beyond Behavior Modification*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagei.pdf>
  - Unit II: *Strategic Approaches to Enhancing Student Engagement/Re-engagement*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engageii.pdf>
  - Unit III: *Enhancing Family Engagement and Re-engagement*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engageiii.pdf>
  - Unit IV: *Embedding Engagement and Re-engagement into a Unified and Comprehensive System of Student and Learning Supports*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engageiv.pdf>

Other Quick Finds that may also be helpful:

*Case Management* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/casemanagment.htm>

*Using Technology to Motivate Engagement in Learning*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/techschool.htm>

*Alternative Education*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/altschool.htm>

PLEASE SEND YOUR RESPONSES TO THIS REQUEST TO [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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## Feedback from Colleagues:

>*About the request from a Parent asking:*  
**“How can I get appropriate feedback about my child's MH progress as mandated by IDEA?”**

"I am a school social worker in Illinois. I provide social work services (counseling) to students with an IEP. In our state, school social workers must have a specific specialization to work in schools as part of an accredited MSW program, as do the school counselors. The coursework associated with this provides extensive education on IDEA and the requirements that we have to report the progress to the parents. The Illinois State Board of Education has social/emotional learning standards that we use to guide our goals that are reported to the parents quarterly. This allows us to use a goal that may be more vague, such as a if a child has difficulty with self-injury, our goal may be based on coping strategies, which I would then use ISBE SEL Standard 1A to determine a goal that is appropriate and reportable to the parents, rather than giving them details about each session that may be confidential. The link for the standards is [http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/social\\_emotional/standards.htm](http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/social_emotional/standards.htm)"

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## Center Featured Resource:

### >Focus on technology in addressing barriers to learning

Current reports indicate that at least 95 percent of schools in the U.S.A. have Internet access. School districts are developing web pages and are using a variety of technology and programs that enable students, families, school personnel, and other stakeholders to interact from anywhere and at anytime.

In recent years, advances in technology have influenced every aspect of schools and student lives. Most of these advances have provided opportunities that hold great promise for strengthening positive outcomes for all students. Hardware and software permit teachers to establish a variety of paths to learning ranging from tutorials to enriching introductions to unlimited topics, from fundamental math to musical composition, from motivated practice to creative production, from independent to cooperative learning. And if a student doesn't succeed initially, technology enhances opportunities for subsequent success.

Because of the rapid advances in the use of technology in schools, we are adding links to more resources in our online clearinghouse – see the Quick Finds entitled

>*Technology as an Intervention Tool*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/techschool.htm>

>*MH Related Software and Media*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/mhmultimedia.htm>

*We are in the process of updating these and encourage you to send us items you think belong in the Center's Online Clearinghouse.*

As new information becomes available, we also endeavor to update documents we have developed and to produce new resources. Our first product along these lines was entitled:

>*Using Technology to Address Barriers to Learning*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/sampler/technology/techno.pdf>

And we have just developed a Technical Assistance Sampler on:

>*Examples of Using Interactive Technology to Assist in Addressing Barriers to Learning*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/technol.pdf>

*The above resources are designed to provide additional aids for linking into networks around the world.*

Content of the new sampler:

***Examples of Using Interactive Technology to Assist in Addressing Barriers to Learning***

- >About Interactive Technology and Schools: *Caveats and Cautions*
- >Federal Initiative to Advance Use of Technology in Schools
- >A Few Examples from Across the Country
- >Students Are Already Connected
- >Enhancing Learning supports
  - A. Classroom based efforts to enable learning
  - B. Support for transitions
  - C. Home involvement and engagement in schooling
  - D. Crisis prevention and response
  - E. Community outreach for involvement and support
  - F. Student and family support
- >Professional development to enhance use of interactive technology for learning supports
  - A. Preparing new teachers and student support staff
  - B. Ongoing professional development
- >Technology to support systems
  - A. Introducing and social marketing the work
  - B. Enhancing communication and managing data/information
  - C. Capacity Building
- > How to connect with our Center through technology

**Please share! Send in relevant resources ideas, requests, comments and experiences to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**Note: Responses come only to the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA for possible inclusion in the next week's message.**

**We also 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 the *Facebook* site (which can be accessed from the Center's website homepage <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>)**