



**School Practitioner
Listserv**



**A Weekly Community of Practice Network
for Sharing and Interchange**

*27 years
& counting*

March 10, 2014

Request

>About Connecting Families and Schools

Featured Center Resource

*>Analyses of Matters that Affect School Improvement
Policy and Practice*

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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**

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R **request:** "I was wondering if you could provide me with some good references re: the obstacles that prevent parents from being involved in school, attending meetings, feeling connected. In several districts where I work, the school staff have stopped trying to have parent meetings because they say no one shows up. I need to address this and help them overcome the obstacles."

C **enter Response:** Given that this is a widely experienced problem, we not only are referencing our resources, we include responses from colleagues who we asked to share their current perspectives.

First: see resources from our Center and elsewhere by accessing our Online Clearinghouse Quick Find on:

>Parent and Home Involvement – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/homework.htm>

The resources from our Center listed there include:

- >Enhancing Home Involvement to Address Barriers to Learning: A Collaborative Process
- >Fostering School, Family, and Community Involvement.
- >What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families
- >Parent and Home Involvement in Schools
- >About School, Home, & Community Connecting & Collaborating to Address Barriers to Learning
- >Engaging the Strengths of Families, Youth, and Communities in Rebuilding Learning Supports
- >Engaging and Re-engaging Families When a Student is Not Doing Well
- >Welcoming Strategies for Newly Arrived Students and Their Families
- >Home Involvement in Schooling: A Self-study Survey
- >Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families

Here are a sample of responses we received when we requested current perspectives from several colleagues in the field:

(1) "This publication may help. *Parent Involvement In Children's Education: Efforts by Public Elementary Schools* – <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98032.pdf>

My personal experiences suggest:

- continue to have parent meetings. Just because 'today's' parent is not showing up does not mean that 'tomorrow's' parent will not appreciate the opportunity and be happy to show up
- make sure ... they feel that their presence at the meeting makes a difference (find out what their concerns are in advance and be prepared to address those concerns)
- schedule meetings at a time convenient for the parent
- lessen the intimidation factor - welcome the parent to bring a friend/family member (no one likes to go solo into a meeting where everyone else seems to know each other)
- provide transportation if needed
- inquire if childcare is available for the parent if needed
- thank parents for attending - they are more likely to want to come back

(2) "This is often a problem with our parents who are low income or fixed income. They can't afford to take off from work, yet we request their attendance during work hours. I always call parents and ask them when they are off from work, what days or what time –

and try to schedule the meeting during those times. Often, I end up holding meetings when they come to pick their children up from school.... Not ideal, but necessary sometimes.

Too many people at a meeting is also intimidating. I try to call parents and review assessments over the telephone first to build a relationship and give them time to process the information. No one wants to hear that their child is disabled in front of a bunch of strangers. I ask parent to come 15 minutes before the rest of the committee so they can settle in first with me. I try to keep the group small - with only required members and give the parent a chance to talk or ask questions.

We also are holding a lot of meetings by phone. I do not like it, but it is better than not at all. We conduct the meeting as usual but use a conference phone.

Language - sometimes we use too many acronyms and professional terms that confuse parents and they are too afraid to ask questions. Preview the report over the phone, use graphs or pictures to explain results. Keep it simple.

This year we are sending ... meeting invitations 10 -15 days early. We are sending 3 to 4 notices in every way we can. I have sent them to parent's emails and even texted a few to remind them about the meetings.

Distrust. Many parents (minorities especially, I am Black) do not trust the schools. So, do what you say you are going to do. If they feel teachers, administrators are fair and truly concerned....they will come"

(3) "... there's a newish book *Motivational Interviewing in Schools* that can be helpful with ideas for applying the well-regarded motivation interviewing approach to engaging parents with schools. ... I've found using the same essential approach that has worked well with some high risk populations translates well to bringing parents to the school, and bringing them in a more cooperative, less defensive fashion.

... if a school or a teacher has not contacted parents until there is a problem, then over half the battle is lost. Schools can too easily put parents on the defensive, even when they are trying not to do this. Michigan, for example, has a nice questionnaire provided to schools to send out to parents to get them thinking about (and being more positive about) school involvement - but the first section of the questionnaire is off-putting, in that it focuses on training parents in parenting. The remaining sections of that questionnaire are very good, but I have seen parents reject the questionnaire on the basis of the first section. It's a great strategy to survey parents before problems occur, but things have to be carefully thought out to not be considered insulting. ...

I can recall a parent saying '*You better not try to tell me how to raise my child. . .*' That same parent, I learned, had a background of school difficulties herself, which no doubt started her down the road of avoiding school interaction related to her child. A home visit, and several positive notes sent home when her child did things well, or just ordinarily, improved the relationship. There were a lot of obstacles present: poverty, terrible work schedules, and a general assumption that the schools had it in for her kid on her part, and a fair degree of cultural ignorance on my part. Later, I asked her to talk to a class I taught for pre-service teachers, sort of a 'here's what not to do and what you should have said instead.'

I can't emphasize enough that a long term relationship with a school is a great asset, if properly used. Principals have a key role to play in keeping a good, helpful culture that attracts parents. Unfortunately, in today's take-down of neighborhood schools and the splintering of schools that used to serve as a community's 'glue', those longer, deeper trust-building relationships are going. ..."

(4) "Some ideas . . .

- Provide the name and number of a Community School Engagement (CSE) parent member to the family
- Establish a relationship with the family prior to CSE meetings, i.e., calls with 'good information', invite in for an informal meeting to get to know family concerns. This is probably the most important goal, as so many families have trust issues with the school and if they have a relationship with someone they feel they trust, they are more likely to be involved. Also helps with the intimidation factor, when parents come to the table and there are so many people there.
- Have preCSE meetings so parents are not taken by surprise with anything at CSE meetings
- Regular communication during the year, so parents feel like they are part of the team
- Being sensitive to the fact that families with children with special needs are often under a lot of stressors, extra appts, financial and time constraints and often are only contacted by the school when there is bad news.
- Providing outside resources to families to help them know you share the best interests of their child, i.e., Family Support Services, parent groups, etc.
- Remembering the student is their child and the emotional connect
- Reminding parents they can bring someone to the meeting with them, a friend, a professional etc, to help with comfort level".

(5) "...here are a few ideas: Make sure you have free child care, have a supervised study area for older kids so they can do homework and offer a meal. If your families need it, offer transportation assistance. In other words, remove any possible objection. Offer incentives to attend: door prize drawings if you only want them at one meeting, or an incentive they can earn by attending 2 out of 3 or whatever your goal is. If your population is "school shy" have meetings in community centers or churches instead of school buildings. Make sure the meeting topics meet the needs of your audience. Tie the meetings to something parents want- a report card or next year's class schedule.

Most of this comes from Joyce Epstein's work, and *Beyond The Bake Sale*. Take a look at what Boston and Philadelphia are doing to engage parents, too. You might also want to take a look at some of the Asset Based Community Development work to learn more about building community, or try reading *A Cord of Three Strands* by Soo Hong to learn about the work in Logan Square, Chicago."

(6) "As a counselor/ parent coordinator I have found the following may be obstacles for parental involvement:

- >Language barriers
- >Lack of childcare
- >Topics parents feel are not applicable to them
- > School atmosphere is perceived as uninviting
- > Time activity/meeting is scheduled is not convenient (due to work, afterschool activities.....)

It's practical and helpful to survey parents regarding what they want/need in terms of topics and scheduling, although we cannot accommodate everyone all of the time, it would give us a better idea about what our parents need or want."

(7) "... On an personal level, when psychologists and social workers aren't successful making contact and getting meetings to take place, it takes a team approach and to seek out a teacher

or other staff who has a relationship with the family. And, as always, reaching out for positive things before and during difficult times helps ease the parents anxiety and stress. I've found that parents who didn't have supportive or successful experiences in school themselves, regardless of how much they love and care for their children, don't have the comfort or skill set to engage (especially in times of difficulty). And, social workers and psychologists can be especially intimidating as their role/involvement/position has so many assumptions attached to them.

On a district level, we are implementing ... Parent Institute for Quality Education. It's goal is to help parents understand how to navigate the school system, be active with their child, support their child, and have a voice and presence. It focuses on parents who don't know how to become engaged or who may feel uncomfortable doing so. We are integrating it into our Early Childhood efforts and also have a cohort of Latino parents just beginning the training. Cohorts get trained and work to connect with other parents and assist them in supporting their student."

Listserv Participants: What do you think about these suggestions and ideas?
Do you have something you can add?
Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu for follow-up.

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Center Featured Resource **Analyses of Matters that Affect School Improvement** **Policy and Practice**

A major function of our center is to conduct analyses of the implications of various efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. These analyses use the lens of the impact on school improvement policy and practice with a particular emphasis on ramifications for enhancing equity of opportunity. We use our analyses to stimulate discussion of issues and to circulate reactions from the field.

A current example is provided by the just released report on "Integrated Student Supports" from Child Trends.*

About the Report: It states that integrated student supports (ISS) is sometimes referred to as integrated student services and then defines ISS “an emerging field of practice that aims to address persistent disparities in educational achievement and attainment. ISS is a school-based approach to promoting students academic achievement and educational attainment by coordinating a seamless system of wraparound supports for the child, the family, and schools, to target students academic and non-academic barriers to learning. ”

That report focuses on nine programs:

- >Beacon Initiative
- >Children’s Aid Society Community Schools
- >City Connects
- >Comer School Development Program
- >Communities In Schools
- >CoZi Initiative
- >Say Yes to Education
- >School of the 21st Century
- >University Assisted Community Schools.

Our Concern: We have a high regard for Child Trends, and clearly, the Child Trends report is well-meaning and was designed with a limited focus.

However, while all of the above are interesting programs, they reflect efforts that involve much more than integrated student services, and, more importantly, *they do not effectively address the fundamental policy and practice concerns about the consequences of pursuing the limited approach that the concept of integrated student supports engenders with respect to enhancing equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school and beyond.*

Unfortunately, the report doesn't consider the implications of the fact that in most schools student support is primarily provided by school and district-based student support personnel (e.g., school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, school nurses, school dropout/graduation support, special educators, and many more school personnel who play a role in prevention, early intervention, and treatment of students with severe and chronic problems). It is noteworthy that those contributing to the report do not include representatives of national organizations representing such personnel.

As we have stressed in highlighting this on our website as a *Hot Issue*, the field needs to move beyond the concept of integrated student supports (see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/movingbeyond.pdf>).

The concerns we raise are not just in reaction to the Child Trends' report. We have been addressing the topic of integrated student supports for over 25 years and have done analyses, reports, and published on the matter. (See, for example, the following early publication):

>Adelman, H.S. & Taylor, L. (1997). Addressing barriers to learning: Beyond school linked services and full service schools. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 67, 408-421. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1037/h0080243/pdf>

Abstract: To enhance services in the schools, there are calls for coordination, integration, comprehensiveness, and other systemic reforms. These topics are explored from the perspective of the role of school and community in addressing barriers to learning. Current approaches are critiqued, and new directions for policy and practice are outlined.

Our emphasis, of course, continues to be on moving toward policy and practice for addressing barriers to student development and learning via transforming the role schools play and weaving together the broadest range of school and community resources to facilitate all this.

An Invitation: We think responses to the report can stimulate greater attention to the importance of expanding school improvement policy for developing a unified and comprehensive system of student and learning supports. With this in mind, we are considering preparing a formal response to the Child Trends' white paper and report.* Before doing so, we are inviting comments from the field. If we include the comments you share, we will not make personal attributions unless you so indicate. Send comments to Ltaylor@ucla.edu.

***White Paper:** "Integrated Student Supports: A Summary of the Evidence Base for Policymakers"
Full Report: "Making the Grade: Assessing the Evidence for Integrated Student Supports"
<http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-07ISSPaper.pdf>

Comments so Far:

Field Response # 1: "Thanks for bringing this report to our attention. I read it and share your concern. I think that they are missing the big picture message of the importance of building off of existing supports and services provided by specialized instructional support personnel and can't help but think that it continues to promote the marginalization that you all have long been trying to bring to people's attention. It certainly didn't escape my attention that their bullets on pg. 2 that describe the common characteristics of these programs missed entirely the need to work collaboratively with school personnel and yet prioritized developing and locating needed supports in the community."

Response #2:

>My first concern is the lack of input from SCHOOL organizations. I look at the list of groups that provided input for this paper, and they are largely groups who support the idea of communities coming into schools and "taking over" so to speak. I find it concerning that school principals, school superintendents, school psychologists etc. were not consulted for this paper.

>This sentence concerns me " *This focus on the non-academic factors that influence educational outcomes arises from practitioner's experiences working in the community and also reflects a research base that clearly indicates that academic achievement and attainment are affected by numerous factors outside the academic domain.*" As you know, NASP fully supports collaboration with community partners to help supplement services for children and families. However, professionals trained to work in the community are not the optimal person to deliver services within the context of learning. We need to focus first on ensuring that these supports are readily available in the school setting- not simply contracting with community professionals.

> Regarding this quote from the report: " While collaboration is a common and important component, the level of collaboration with community partners varied among the models; they often varied based on the capacity of the school or the program itself to deliver the needed supports. For example, one model has the capacity to deliver physical and mental health services; as a result, they do not rely on community partnerships to provide those specific supports. That capacity seems to be the exception rather than the rule, though, and the majority of the models that we reviewed did not have the organizational resources *or infrastructure to provide supports on their own*" This is the problem we should be focusing our efforts on. All children, regardless of where they live, should have access to these services in school. > This report assumes that schools do not address non-academic barriers to learning, which is not the case. this report focused on what communities can do to support students and families- largely outside of the school day. these supports are essential for some populations, but simply providing additional services outside of the school setting is not the answer.

>I agree with you wholeheartedly that the intentions of this report were good; but I think they have missed the boat. I also think that they did not examine the appropriate models. Most models they examined are partners of the Coalition for Community Schools (NASP is also a partner). We have made great improvements in working with this coalition to educate them about the important role of school professionals in any partnership. this report did not highlight those models where the school was already providing critical supports and they relied on the community to help meet the needs of the students with the most severe needs."

Response # 3: "You are right that ISS is really not an emerging trend. It simply relabels strategies we, in schools, have been implementing. As long as schools are expected to (1) show ever-increasing test scores, (2) prepare all students for college, (3) ensure health services for all students, (4) and on and on, we will not have the resources to do any of it well. There are so many external pressures on schools now that I question if we have lost the vision of what public education is. Is our primary role to educate students? If yes, how is that defined? Or, are we also to be the provider of all fundamental services for children? Yesterday I met with a small group of experienced teachers to revise the school's RTI process. I expected the meeting to end in under an hour. Instead, two teachers broke down. They were inconsolable about all they were expected to do and felt that, as a result, they were not serving any of their children well. Although leadership is an issue in this situation (a whole other story), multiple state mandates are forcing the emotions. Perhaps it is ISS for teachers that is needed!

Your 6 ideas to discard are generally correct. What is not addressed is the lack of time and money for professional development. To truly make reforms in schools, the professional and paraprofessional staff need time to learn together, to apply learning, to reflect on the changes, and to make revisions. We try to do this in a few workshop days and some after-school meetings. Needless to say, this is not an effective way to make sustainable, meaningful change. Regardless of what model we use for school improvement, without a change in how we view the school year and staff time we will not make systemic change. I do not normally like the comparison of schools to businesses. It does work in this example. When private business needs to make significant change, how do they do it? In a very different way than those very same taxpayers expect schools to achieve changes."

Please share! Send in relevant resources ideas, requests, comments and experiences to 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/>