



**29 years  
& counting**

**School Practitioner  
Listserv**

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



**In keeping with the 2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports, this community of practice network is being expanded in number of participants and topics discussed. The thematic emphasis will be on (1) daily concerns confronting those working in and with schools, (2) the transformation of student and learning supports, and (3) promoting whole child development and positive school climate.**

**January 12, 2015**

**Request from a Colleague**

**>Addressing the many complex learning, behavior, and emotional problems at schools**

**Follow-up**

**>Working with students with low motivation**

**Featured Center Resources**

**>Focus on intrinsic motivation: A fundamental concern in promoting whole child development and positive school climate**

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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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**R** **request from a Colleague:** "I am a high school counselor. We are a Title I school about 90% African American, 1100 students. Gang violence is becoming an issue at the school. Lack of motivation, possibly lack of direction is causing the apparent lack of motivation. There is a huge proportion of single parent homes. We are just starting an LGBT group, which has few people of color in it. Anything that resonates with your work that might assist me being a better counselor would be appreciated. We have an onsite drug rehab counselor about 30 hours a week who sees all students in need. Our local hospice does one grief group a year."

**C** **enter Response:** While there are no easy answers to these pervasive problems, there are resources related to each. There is also a growing recognition that such problems overlap and that schools need to develop a unified, comprehensive, equitable system for addressing such barriers to learning and teaching.

### Addressing the Many Specific Problems

With respect to the indicated problems, here are some resources that may be helpful:

- (1) On gang violence, take a look at our online clearinghouse Quick Find on

> *Gangs* – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3009\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3009_01.htm) .

The Quick Find has links to our Center resources, other online resources, and to other centers that focus specifically on the topic. We recommend starting with

> *Youth Gangs and Schools* –  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/policyissues/youth gangs & schools.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/policyissues/youth%20gangs%20&%20schools.pdf)

- (2) About motivation, go to the Quick Find on

> *Engagement and Re-engagement in Learning* –  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>.

To begin a conversation with teachers and school staff about re-engaging students, we recommend sharing the following resource

> *School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate* –  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schooleng.pdf>

- (3) On single parent homes, the school has an opportunity to enhance home involvement and engagement through outreach and providing support to families, especially single parents. Go to the Quick Find on

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

For an overview on the topic, click on

> *Enhancing Home Involvement to Address Barriers to Learning: A Collaborative Process* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/homeinv.pdf>

- (4) On the LGBT group, see the resources on the Quick Find entitled:

> *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Issues* – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3017\\_02.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3017_02.htm) .

Click, for example, on the resource entitled:

> *About Sexual Minority (LGBT) Youth Subculture* –  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youth/lgbt.pdf>

(5) On substance abuse, go to the Quick Find:

>*Substance Abuse Prevention* –  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3001\\_03.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3001_03.htm).

Click, for example, on

>*Youth Substance Use Interventions: Where Do they Fit into a School's Mission?*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/subintervent.pdf>

(6) On addressing grief, go to the Quick Find on

>*Grief* – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3003\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3003_01.htm) .

See, for example, the resource entitled:

>*Grief and Loss* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/grief.pdf>

## **Making Essential Systemic Changes**

From the perspective of school improvement, school climate, and promoting whole child development, the need is not just for student support staff members to do better in dealing with specific problems; the imperative is for transforming student and learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing such barriers to learning and teaching (see information about the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html> ).

The aim is to mobilize and weave together all resources that the school and district deploy for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and to collaborate with the community to fill gaps in the system of student and learning supports. Ultimately, such systemic changes are essential for dealing with many of the underlying factors that produce problems so that some can be prevented and a school's problem-solving capacity can be enhanced.

For those who appreciate the imperative for systemic changes, we recommend pulling together a workgroup to map and analyze what currently is being done with a view to proposing systemic changes for inclusion in school improvement policy and planning. (See the following mapping tools:

>*Mapping and Analyzing Learning Supports* –  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf>

>*An Aid for Initial Listing of Current Resources Used at a School for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/listingresources.pdf> .)

We recommend that such a workgroup become the school's "Learning Supports Leadership Team." (See *What is a Learning Supports Leadership Team?* – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resource\\_coord\\_team.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resource_coord_team.pdf) .)

When a school's policy leaders are ready to make major systemic changes related to student and learning supports, there are many aids in the Center's *System Change Toolkit for Transforming Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm> . See, for example, *Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School: Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf> .

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**Note to policy makers:** We know that the daily pressures of addressing specific problems can be all-consuming. We also know that there usually are too many learning, behavior, and emotional problems to address one student at a time. To effectively address the major barriers interfering with school success, it is imperative to enable student and learning support staff to have time to work together to proactively develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. And to this end, the Center provides free online technical assistance and coaching on request.

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**L**istserv Participants: What can you add to help respond to the above request? Send to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu) for sharing.

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**F**ollow up: **Working with students with low motivation**

In an previous practitioner we shared a brief set of guides on motivating adolescents in school. We recently received a follow-up request about how to increase the motivation of students who “struggle with motivation.” Our Response follows:

Given that student engagement is key to student success, we continue to add to our online clearinghouse Quick Find on this topic. See

>Motivation, Engagement, Re-engagement – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

Of the many resources accessible from there, we usually suggest beginning with

>Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School – <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagingandre-engagingstudents.pdf>

This guide briefly highlights the following fundamental matters:

- >>Disengaged students and social control
- >>Intrinsic motivation
- >>Two key components of motivation: valuing and expectations
- >>Over-reliance on extrinsics: a bad match
- >>Focusing on intrinsic motivation to re-engage students

Also see:

>Engaging and Re-engaging Students and Families: Four Units for Continuing Education – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engageii.pdf>

Here is an excerpt from Unit II, page 8 of that resource:

"...The best classroom designs offer variety to mesh with student interests. A great deal of variety seems necessary to engage some students – especially those with low motivation for or negative attitudes about school. For such individuals, few currently available options may be appealing. How much greater the range of options must be depends primarily on the strength of their avoidance tendencies. Determining what

will engage them is a major teaching challenge and an immediate focus for special interventions.

Besides adding options, there is a need to accommodate a wider range of individual differences. For example, environments are changed to better account for very active and/or distractable students. Accommodations may include reducing levels of abstraction, intensifying the way stimuli are presented and acted upon, and increasing the amount and consistency of guidance and support. For some students, some behavioral expectations and standards initially must be relaxed. This usually involves widening limits for a time so that certain behaviors of a given student will not be designated as infringing the rules.

Accommodative strategies are intended to affect students' motivation by involving them in activities they value and using processes they believe make outcomes attainable with appropriate effort.

Remember that, in general, the initial focus in working with a student with low motivation or negative attitudes is on ensuring interventions are perceived by the student as a good fit for learning at school. This requires dialoguing with them and facilitating their efforts to

- identify a range of learning options they perceive as of considerable personal value and as attainable with an appropriate amount of effort (including, as necessary, alternatives to established curriculum content and processes)
- make personal and active decisions...."

Page 12 and 13 of the above resource outlines the following as the focus for one-on-one discussions with low motivation students before working with them in groups.

- (a) Through enhanced personal contacts, build a positive working relationship with the youngster.
- (b) Focus first on assets (e.g. positive attributes, outside interests, hobbies, what the youngster likes at school and in class).
- (c) Ask about what the youngster doesn't like at school.
- (d) Explore the reasons for "dislikes" (e.g., Are assignments seen as too hard? as uninteresting? Is the youngster embarrassed because others will think s/he does not have the ability to do assignments? Is the youngster picked on? rejected? alienated?)
- (e) Explore other possible causal factors.
- (f) Explore what the youngster ... thinks can be done to make things better (including extra support from a volunteer, a peer, friend, etc.).
- (g) Discuss some new things the youngster ... would be willing to try to make the situation better.

Then, using the best information about what is causing the problem, we recommend the following:

- Make changes to (a) improve the match between a youngster's program and his/her interests and capabilities and (b) try to find ways for her/him to have a special, positive status in class, at the school, and in the community. (This helps counter a negative image students may have created among peers and negative

feelings about themselves which, in turn, helps work against students' tendencies to pursue negative behaviors.) Talk and work with other staff in developing ideas along these lines.

- Add resources for extra support (aide, volunteers, peer tutors/coaches, mentors) not only to help support student efforts to learn and perform, but to enhance students' social support networks. Create time to interact and relate with the youngster as an individual.
- Discuss with the youngster (and those in the home) why the problems are occurring.
- Specifically focus on exploring matters with the youngster that will suggest ways to enhance positive motivation.
- Change aspects of the program (e.g., materials, environment) to provide a better match with his/her interests and skills.
- Provide enrichment options (in and out of class).
- Use resources such as volunteers, aides, and peers to enhance the youngster's social support network.
- Specifically focus on exploring ways those in the home can enhance their problem-solving efforts.
- If necessary include other staff (e.g., counselor, principal) in a special discussion with the youngster exploring reasons for the problem and ways to enhance positive involvement at school and in class

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**C**enter Featured Resource: Addressing intrinsic motivation as a fundamental concern in promoting whole child development and positive school climate

Besides the above references to motivation, engagement, and re-engagement, go to the new online resource: *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*

–<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf> and see our enhanced presentation of

>*Classroom-based Learning Supports* (see Chapter 4)

>the related revised *classroom self-study survey* (see Appendix C).

These resources can be used in working with teachers, student support staff, volunteers, etc. to clarify specific strategies for enabling learning and teaching with a focus on whole child development.

And, as equity of opportunity for all students to succeed in the classroom is significantly enhanced, a more positive classroom climate will emerge.

***Please share relevant resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences! Send 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 *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>**

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