



**School Practitioner
Listserv**



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

October 26, 2015

Request from a Colleague:

- >About student support staff working in classrooms**
- >Center Response**
- >Initial Responses from the Field**
- >Request to listserv participants**

Featured Center Resources:

- >Learning supports in the classroom: Enabling 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**

**For previous recent postings of this community of practice, see
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>**

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Note: In keeping with the 2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports,* this community of practice network has expanded in number of participants and topics discussed.* The thematic emphasis is 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.

Rrequest: “I am a social worker for a large urban school district. There is a strong push this year for all related service providers to provide direct services to our students in the general education classroom ‘whenever appropriate’ through whole-group instruction. It appears that your Center supports this same model of service delivery. I was not trained as an educator in the traditional sense. I was trained to provide direct service to students, to consult and collaborate with teachers and other staff to support student achievement, and to connect families and students with resources in the community. Of course I do much more than this, but what I do not do, have not done, and do not feel prepared to do, is to co-teach or tie social and emotional goals to an existing curriculum. I think the students on my case load would be horrified if I were in their classroom. I certainly feel I have much to offer all students but until we are appropriately staffed and the schedule changes to provide a class period for social and emotional learning that is not tied to a core content subject, this seems unfeasible. I would be interested to hear your thoughts about this. “

Center Response: Our thanks for sharing these concerns. Such concerns are on the minds of many student and learning support staff who feel generally (a) overwhelmed by the number of students referred for one-to-one and small group assistance and (b) underappreciated for the variety of things they do.

What we have learned in working with support staffers is that they recognize the importance of preventing problems and intervening early after problems arise so that so many learning, behavior, and emotional problems don’t end up being referred for special assistance. Given inevitably sparse resources, they want to help the many in need, not just the few who can be served as part of an individual case load. They also want to enhance a positive classroom climate. And they are concerned about whether RtI will be implemented effectively. These all are major reasons for increasing ways for student support staff to work more collaboratively with teachers in classrooms.

We understand that the professional training of most student support staff has not prepared them to move directly into co-teaching and integrating social and emotional goals into a existing curriculum. Given that reality, as support staff expand their roles at schools, such activity is best thought of as an eventual goal, rather than the starting point.

What support staff have been taught, however, is to consult with teachers about how to handle certain problems. Our experience is that teachers do not savor such consultation. While the polite ones tend to act appreciative, most tend to think to themselves: “This suggestion is coming from someone who has never taught in a classroom. If I only had the one student being discussed, I wouldn’t be having problems. What do I do with the rest while I do what is being suggested?”)

To change the dynamics, a reasonable next step is for support staff to risk asking to enter the classroom *part of the time* in order to play a greater role in assisting with implementation of the advice and new practices being discussed with teachers. This is critical in helping expand practices for preventing, intervening early, and providing ongoing supports. This will better enable teachers to learn not only how to address a referred student’s needs, but to generalize what they learn. And being in the classroom will enable support staff to learn more about classroom teaching. In addition, inservice for support staff can advance such learning and provide a template for preparing the next generation of professionals so they are prepared to play a more direct role in classrooms.

We hasten to emphasize that this is not a call for support staff to work full time in classrooms. It is about ensuring that what support staff can contribute directly to classroom practices involves more than offering recommendations that teachers regularly have difficulty implementing. See:

> *Framing New Directions for School Counselors, Psychologists, & Social Workers* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/report/framingnewdir.pdf>

> *New Directions for Student Support: Rethinking Student Support to Enable Students to Learn and Schools to Teach* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentssupport/Toolkit/rethinkingstudsupport.pdf>

As teachers and administrators see support staff playing a greater role in with respect to what goes on in the classroom, a greater appreciation will emerge related to what such staff can contribute to school improvement. This will help end the marginalization of student and learning supports.

Clearly, collaborating with teachers in classrooms is a major and important shift in the work of student support staff. We are eager to support efforts to make it happen and to learn from these efforts. Here are some ideas for getting started; let us hear what is happening.

Initial Steps in Moving Forward

- (1) Identify a few colleagues to form a work group to clarify the opportunities for and the concerns about student support staff working in the classroom.
- (2) Identify several teachers who are receptive and ask to come in as an observer/helper to get familiar with classroom practices and dynamics.
- (3) Discuss with these teachers ideas for ways to collaborate in the classroom to prevent problems from occurring and for responding quickly when problems arise.
- (4) If students being seen individually are in the class, propose that they act as guides/assistants in identifying ways to improve classrooms to better address their needs.
- (5) Plan ways to learn more about what is involved in providing learning supports in the classroom (e.g., continuing professional development).*
- (6) Plan ways to play a greater role in classroom efforts to enhance social-emotional development and learning.
- (7) Propose and work toward changing job descriptions, accountability, and capacity building in ways that enable student support staff to carry out expanded roles and functions.

*With respect to learning more about providing learning supports in the classroom, see the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on *Classroom interventions to enable learning* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/classenable.htm> . Included there are direct links to:

- > *Classroom based learning supports* (a chapter in *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*)
- > *Classroom-Based Learning Supports: Self-study Survey*
- > *Engaging and Re-engaging Students and Families* (Continuing Education modules)
- > "Practice Notes" –
 - >> *Improving Working Relationships Inside the Classroom*
 - >> *Learning Supports: Enabling Learning in the Classroom*
 - >> *Response to Intervention*
 - >> *Turning Big Classes into Smaller Units*
 - >> *Volunteers as an Invaluable Resource*
 - >> *Working with Disengaged Students*

Initial Responses from the Field: To stimulate initial discussion, we sent the request to a range of student support staff. Here is a sample of responses we have received so far:

(1) "We are constantly reminded that we work for the superintendent of our district and that the student is not our client. So, if the superintendent has decided that we have to go into classes to teach whatever it is, we do it, at least until we figure out how to reach the 'stakeholders' and allies about what we are not doing because of the time in classrooms. The year that our new superintendent decided to close schools and move the 5th graders up to middle school, he proposed that the school social workers, guidance counselors and psychologists at the middle schools teach periods built into the cycle for the first year. They did what they were told and

each one spent 3-4 periods per day teaching skills, social and otherwise to help with the transition. They co-taught so that one had coverage if there was a crisis. At the end of the year, the superintendent met his goal of having appeased the community and parents and they stopped doing it the following year because mandated counseling goals were not met, as well as other instances of non compliance with regards to special ed. There were many complaints by parents. And, this may also be a union issue. They might argue that the district is taking away teaching positions or using people out of title. Our union did argue against utilizing us for class instruction. In our state, they are trying to extend the mandate to have guidance counselors/school counselors in elementary schools. One argument is that they are needed to go into classrooms to teach social emotional skills. If we take a hard line and refuse to do so when asked or pursue ways of doing it that makes sense to us, then the fear is that we may lose positions to school counselors at the elementary level. We work in school settings and I think we need to find ways to 'perform' in a school setting and that includes presenting or engaging a whole class occasionally. We do it when there is a tragedy that impacts the whole school. We have done it to educate students on bullying and the various forms of discrimination. I think the balance could be to offer to 'co-teach' at the high school level with perhaps the health teacher on particular units, ie suicide and self harm because we are using it as an opportunity to introduce ourselves as experts and a resource to the students. In terms of social skills, there is a great deal of research and from what I read, best practice is when the classroom teacher teaches the skills and not someone outside of the classroom. But, we know that decisions are not always based on what the research says. I would want to know who was driving the Social Emotional Learning train and get on whatever committee oversees it and offer solutions that make sense. I wasn't trained to do this is definitely what we say to each other but probably not something we want to emphasize in a school setting. I obviously don't have an answer for this person. In my district, small urban community with only 6500 students, we have the opportunity to know the board members, our principals and establish our value as support staff."

(2) "My first thought is YIKES! That sounds like a precarious situation for this person. My second thought is what are the expectations? Is it to actually co-teach or is it to do some sort of SEL/prevention/skill building activities in a classroom. I know some of our schools offer advisory periods once a week or once a month depending, for like 30 mins. Teachers actually facilitate them (they are provided with a 'curriculum' developed by the school health/wellness/student support team) referrals are made to the student support staff as indicated. It sounds like they are wanting this person to do more preventative/mental health education group work in a classroom. I believe there are evidenced based curriculum available for something like that. So my third thought is if that's the case this could be an exciting opportunity for this person (albeit daunting) if they have the right materials to use... Second Step? Life Skills? Michigan Model for Health? Teaching Kids to Cope? Fourth R? etc. "

(3) "We believe in the research around embedding Social Emotional Learning standards within the core instruction as the most significant way to teach these skills on a continual basis to all students. We are currently adopting a set of Social Emotional standards aligned to CASEL's 5 areas which we will work with teachers to embed into content area instruction K-12. Our Social Workers are only funded via sped funds, we do not currently have supports for students outside of that. To use any additional social worker we might be lucky enough to someday get to teach a social skills class to general education would be an ineffective use of resources. The power is in preventative/proactive supports within the and throughout the school day."

(4) Overall, my initial response is that School Social Workers should absolutely provide more whole-class, universal/preventative interventions as much as possible. Ideally, this will reduce the number groups and individual students/families that need to be seen — because we cannot possibly see them all in a given day/week/year. This basic 3-Tier model (complemented of course by a comprehensive family, community in an ecological framework as the SMHP) call for School Social Workers to use whole class interventions as we ask all our MSW interns to engage in this as part of their internships Also, if her/his students would be 'horrified' to see her in the classroom, does this mean 'counseling' or social and emotional and mental health services

are stigmatizing? I am not trying to be holier-than-thou because I have been in the position that s/he finds themselves.....but it seems more cost- and time-effective to provide whole class interventions.

Of course, there are many resources providing direction to integrating SEL into the whole classroom: (Second Step – <http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step>, CASEL – <http://www.casel.org/>), and specifically we can look at the support to integrate SEL into education and even alignment with the dreaded common core.”

(5) If I understand the situation correctly, the writer notes that s/he is not prepared to co-teach in a classroom setting, but is feeling a push (from administration? A supervisor?) to do so. Other than reading the individual works for a large, urban district, there are not many details. This could play out a variety of different way.

Some support staff, for example, school psychologists, speech and language therapists, school social workers, etc., may belong to professional associations. Often these associations will have published standards for training and services. These documents may have some guidance regarding what types of service could be provided in an open classroom and which require a confidential setting. I suspect those documents would also require members to provide only those services for which they have received sufficient training and supervised experience to achieve an officially recognized level of competence. Being forced to work beyond one’s level of competence is not a good idea under any circumstances. Having written support from a professional association standards documents may help the writer to explain why s/he refuses to be ‘pushed’.

Sometimes support staff are covered in a contract with the school district. There may be specific language in the contract that deals with how the district may change working condition. The contract as well as the job description should be consulted to see if this new way is allowed within the agreements. If the writer is a member of a union, one’s representative should be involved in the discussion regarding options.

If the support staff are actually hired by a third party, and then assigned to public school buildings, the lines of authority can be more complicated but the appropriate documents for the different levels of supervision should be scrutinized. The third party may have an entirely different set of rules regarding standards of preparation, ethics, and confidentiality, perhaps set by the county or the state, that the service provider would be expected to uphold over those required of public school employees. (For example, school district confidentiality rules would likely not be the same as county mental health or state juvenile justice confidentiality rules.)

When providing services to students who have disabilities, there are Federal rules regarding eligibility, confidentiality, parental consent, and record-keeping that must be obeyed. Simply changing the room in which service is provided may not adequately deal with these complicated rules. Furthermore, if the school-based service is eligible for Medicare reimbursement, there are probably many other layers of regulation to consider!

In a perfect world, the professional service provider would be the best judge of the most appropriate way to provide the services s/he knows how to perform. If asked to work outside the bounds of one’s professional standards, ethical standards, or competence, the professional should be able to say ‘no’ and have it stick. I hope your situation is not too far from that.

If the writer is ultimately required to co-teach and link social/emotional goals to the curriculum, it may be the case that the employee would have to meet these standards or else seek other employment. I think it would be fair to ask the school district to provide the training necessary to acquire these skills. For example, with a few good examples and some coaching I suspect the writer could begin to translate the jargon of her/his particular support service into the ‘educationese’ that links that service to the curriculum. With a little extra study, one could sort which interventions have a strong research base for effectiveness, and which may have good face validity but not much empirical support.

Best of luck to you as you work to sort out this situation. Here’s hoping you can ultimately guide things to produce the best solution for the students!”

(6) “I think that this person would be very skilled at working with the teachers to co-conduct a universal social-emotional curriculum and that she should understand that this will benefit her

subset of students but indirectly (in other words she does not need to single them out which I agree would make them uncomfortable). I think it is ideal when students ar greater need receive SEL programming in the classroom along with their classmates and then this can be built upon in any individual service they receive. In this case this social worker would know exactly what had been delivered in the classroom and she could reinforce and individualize that with the subset of students she works more in-depth with. I would suggest that she consult the CASEL program guide to pick a universal approach that includes free-standing lessons and she considers getting trained in that along with the teacher. Then she can use those same materials and her expertise to work individually with the students as well.”

(7) Credentialed school counselors have competencies based on the American School Counselor Association National Model through which school counselors DO go into classrooms to present preventative lessons to all students to support academic, college and career, and social/emotional development. Unfortunately not all school counselors have been trained to plan, implement, and assess the outcomes of a classroom lesson based on school counseling student development domains which, if this is the case for this person, I can understand his/her hesitancy. However, I do believe ALL students should receive preventative information such as can be taught through a general education class and this is an appropriate use of school counselor time. If the school counselors/support staff needs additional training to properly implement class lessons this can hopefully provided by the district or outside trainings. For example, I'm actually presenting on this specific topic at the California Association of School Counselors' Annual Conference in two weeks. I hope this helps and please let me know if you need additional information.”

(8) This is a great question and one that I expect to see more of in the near future. There are some social-emotional program/curriculums that are incorporated right into the regular academic curriculum and therefore would be taught by the regular teacher (‘The Reading Edge’ by Success for All). I think this would be the best case scenario. Another option would be for the school counselor to be doing large-scale prevention work in the classrooms (at least that has been my experience in Ohio). I agree with the writer that it could be problematic to be in multiple roles however if anyone would be able to handle that appropriately it would be student support staff! I think in this specific scenario, as long as the support staff explored and discussed this with the student-client ahead of time that he/she would be doing presentations/activities in their class, making sure to help the student process any worries about it, it could be an opportunity to create positive social situations for the client. One thing to consider though would be how to manage any behavioral issues that arise from that particular client—that could be tricky.”

(9) “I think it is a unique opportunity to reach students in the classroom from a prevention standpoint. If the individual is familiar with the Learning Supports framework, I think what she is being asked to do fits in perfectly with the classroom-based content arena and bringing resources into the classroom. I know in my district, we only have a set 40 minute block of time to see students each day at our high school. Pullouts are becoming increasingly guarded to protect instruction time. I think we will have to utilize every opportunity made available to address student needs independent of pulling them out of class for each instance. I know their is a level of discomfort for the social worker where whole-group instruction is concerned, but I believe a golden opportunity lays within if she could find a way to meet the district half way and provide social and emotional interventions for larger groups, from a prevention standpoint, and without pulling students out in smaller numbers.”

R **request to listserv participants:** We are sure you have thoughts about all this.

Should student support staff collaborate with teachers in the classroom? What can you share about efforts to and lessons learned with respect to classroom-based learning supports? Send your comments and ideas to Ltaylor@ucla.edu .

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Featured set of center resources:

> *Learning supports in the classroom: Enabling Learning*

The focus on expanding learning supports in classrooms emphasizes that effectively addressing the many students who manifest behavior, learning, and emotional problems requires greater attention to transforming what transpires in classrooms. To this end, student support staff and others who can help need to spend more time teaming with teachers in the classroom.

For student support staff to be most effective in collaborating with teachers, inservice and hopefully preservice professional preparation need to move beyond primarily emphasizing consultation. In addition to the resources already cited above, here are a few others from the Center relevant to this matter:

- > *Teachers Can't Do it Alone!* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/alone.pdf>
- > *Challenges and Opportunities in the Classroom* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/winter08.pdf>
- > *Student Engagement and Disengagement: An Intrinsic Motivation Perspective and a Mental Health Concern* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/intrinsic.pdf>
- > *Moving Beyond the Three Tier Intervention Pyramid Toward a Comprehensive Framework for Student and Learning Supports* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/threetier.pdf>

Also see the related resource links in the Quick Finds focusing on curriculum/content ideas for classroom instruction related to social and emotional content:

- > *Mental Health curriculum* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2311_01.htm
- > *Social Emotional Development and Skills* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102_05.htm

MORE ON REQUEST!

*For information about the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

***Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
enabling equity of opportunity and promoting whole child development.***

***THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND
INTERESTING THIS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE BECOMES!***
Send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences to ltaylor@ucla.edu

We 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/>)