



**School Practitioner
Listserv**



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

February 16, 2015

Continuing concern for schools

**>School problems that stem from factors
in the home environment**

Some responses & resources to address the concern

**>Enhancing family engagement and
supporting 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.

Concern: **School problems stemming from the home environment**

From a school administrator:

"I have been in education for 33 years. The truth is that a great many of the problems we have to deal with stem from factors in the home environment that we have little or no ability to change. Broken families, negative role models, abuse, poverty, lack of exemplary behavior, criminal behavior, and the list goes on and on. Schools are an easy target--homes and parents are not. Of course the government will target schools and expect schools to fix everything. They don't dare target parents. I like the way Will Daggett stated it: Schools are truly a mirror of our society. If you get up in the morning and don't like what you see in the mirror, its not the mirror's fault. Let's call a spade a spade. Until we solve the problem of parents not stepping up to the plate, schools' capacity to overcome societal problems will continue to be feeble at best. There are the rare individual teachers who can make a difference, but their unique abilities are the exception. The qualities and character traits that enable them to achieve are not something they learned in a college classroom or the government unlocked--these are values stemming from their own home-life and experience. Allocating more money to the schools does help to buy more band-aids, but it doesn't heal the wounds."

We asked him: How can schools play a greater role in working with parents and community to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students?

He responded:

"This is a far more complex question than it appears on the surface. There are many other questions that have to be asked--and answered in parallel. For younger students, one of the parallel questions is, 'can activities and events at a given schools change the behavior, attitudes, and core values of the parents who send student to the school?' A corollary question for older students is 'can activities and events at a given schools reverse the behavior, attitudes, and core values parents have modeled and taught to their children?' Schools are funded and evaluated exclusively as institutions of academic learning. Do we now want them to serve as an engines for social and behavioral reform? If the answer to this is yes, then the restructuring of American schools must go well beyond the current role and definition."

Some responses and resources to address the concern

We asked some student support staff for their thoughts; here are two responses:

"I work in a district where we are at a 94% free and reduced lunch rate, 35% of our students qualify as being homeless and then you add all the other things taking place in our students' lives. Daily there are students who cannot get work done because they are worried about having food to eat, a warm place to sleep, whether or not they will be living with their mom/dad, and mental health issues (eating disorders, suicide attempts, rape, etc.). I think it would be horrible to expect teachers to do all of this on their own, while having to teach state standards."

"Society has changed but education is still pretending it hasn't. With poverty, drug addiction, gang involvement, trauma, abuse...Teacher are expected to stay on topic (common core objectives) ignoring these problems. They are to put the objective on the board and never stray from it. And kids? They are expected to leave all their issues at the door and perform as well as students that have not been exposed to these issues. They are supposed to magically obtain social skills, do homework in the midst of chaos, etc. We don't have money for counselors, librarians, etc. So who is there to help them find services and even care in the first place to draw them out to see what the issues and needs might be? Crazy. Naive. It's living in the past where communities knew all the families that lived within and supported one another. Just not so any more. We are in the trenches. Teachers are discouraged and leaving the profession because their dreams of teaching children who are ready to learn are being stolen. We are in trouble. We need to wake up."

Our center response is as follows:

For many students, experiences in their homes and neighborhoods often are barriers to their engagement in learning. Understanding these barriers and effective ways to address them is a key facet of student and learning supports. Significantly enhancing home involvement requires (a) broadening the focus beyond thinking only in terms of parents and (b) enhancing the range of ways in which schools connect with primary caretakers. Particular attention must be given to outreaching to those who are reluctant to engage with the school, especially if they have a child who is not doing well. For a quick overview of this arena, see

>*Home Involvement, Engagement, and Re-engagement in Schooling* –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/ch6home.pdf>

To assist schools, families, and communities in working together on this, see:

>*Enhancing Home Involvement to Address Barriers to Learning:*

A Collaborative Process – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/homeinv.pdf>

For easy access to resources on this topic (from our Center and from others), see our online clearinghouse Quick Find entitled:

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

With a view to enhancing a school's strategic approach to engaging the home, in addition to the above, see and share with colleagues

Engaging and Re-engaging Families When Students Aren't Doing Well –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/winter12.pdf>

Excerpt:

Most efforts to involve parents with their child's school seem aimed at those who want and are able to come to the school. It's important to have activities for such parents. It's also important to remember that, at most schools, these represent a small percent of families.

How can schools address the rest? Especially those whose children are doing poorly at school. Ironically, efforts to involve families whose youngsters are doing poorly often result in parents becoming less involved. For example, a parent of such a youngster typically is called to school to explore the child's problems and leaves with a sense of frustration, anger, and guilt. It is not surprising, then, that the parent subsequently avoids school contact as much as feasible. If schools

really want to involve such families, they must outreach and offer a wide range of positive supports and interactions.

Home Involvement, Engagement, and Re-engagement in Schooling
An Addressing Barriers Self-Study Survey

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

Examples of what the survey covers include:

- Enhancing the learning and support needs of adults in the home
 - >Facilitating open-access to support programs for those in the home to assist them in addressing basic survival needs and obligations to the children
 - >Adult education classes to enhance literacy, job skills, English-as-a-second language, citizenship preparation
- Helping those in the home improve how basic student obligations are met
 - >enhancing caretaker literacy skills; guidance related to parenting and how to help with schoolwork; teaching family members to support and enrich student learning
- Improving basic communications with the home
 - >Opportunities at school for family networking and mutual support, learning, recreation, enrichment, and for family members to receive special assistance and to volunteer
 - >Phone calls from teacher and other staff with good news
 - >Frequent and balanced conferences (student-led when feasible)
 - >Outreach to attract hard-to-reach families (including student dropouts)
- Engaging participation by those in the home to help with student learning and in problem solving and making decisions
 - >Families prepared for involvement in program planning and problem-solving
 - >Family homework projects, family field trips
- Recruiting those at home to collaborate in strengthening school and community
 - >Volunteers to welcome and support new families and help in various capacities
 - >Families prepared for involvement in school governance
 - >Facilitating child care and transportation to reduce barriers to coming to school; language translation; phone calls and/or e-mail from teacher and other staff with good news; frequent and balanced conferences – student-led when feasible; outreach to attract and facilitate participation of hard-to-reach families – including student dropouts)

The above resources help expand concern for parent involvement to encompass anyone in the home who is influencing the student's life. In some cases, grandparents, aunts, or other siblings have assumed the parenting role. Older brothers and sisters often are the most significant influences on a youngster's life choices.

Listserv Participants: What do you suggest for addressing barriers related to the home environment? What is done in your schools/district/community? We look forward to sharing more on this frequent concern. Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu

Home Involvement and Transformation of Student and Learning Supports*

From the perspective of a unified and comprehensive system of student and learning supports, *Home involvement, Engagement, and Re-engagement* is one of the six content arenas of a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports. For a quick overview of how this arena fits into the broader system, see

>*Toward Next Steps in School Improvement: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/towardnextstep.pdf> .

For a more in-depth discussion of transforming student and learning supports, see

>*Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf>

*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.***

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