



**School Practitioner
Listserv**



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

February 23, 2015

Common Request from Colleagues

>Need tools to identify & monitor at risk students

Center Response

>New ways to address concerns re. “at risk” students

Featured Set of Center Resources

>Understanding concerns about misdiagnoses

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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.

Common Request from Colleagues:

“Looking for an assessment tool to identify K-6 at-risk students. Want to simplify the process of identifying these children. Also looking for a form to use in monitoring intervention processes and outcomes.”

Center Response:

We have a set of aids that can be adapted for school staff to describe concerns about student learning and behavior and for monitoring a student’s progress. See

>*Interviewing and monitoring tools*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/interviewtools.pdf>

However: Schools are using many new ways to address concerns about “at risk” students. New approaches focus on the importance of first using personalized teaching to minimize learning and behavior problems and using classroom-based learning supports to add special assistance as necessary. The special assistance is guided by a comprehensive response to intervention approach that is used as soon as problems are noted. That is, the focus is first on enhancing good teaching; then, where this is not sufficient, learning supports are provided in the classroom. Where personalized teaching is done effectively, special assistance usually is needed only for a few students, and referrals for more specialized supports are reduced substantially. See:

>Part II in *Transforming student and learning supports: Developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf>

Some districts are using a set of indicators as an "early warning system" (e.g., problems with attendance, behavior, academics) along with data from response to intervention strategies and interviews. These are most commonly used in middle and high schools. See:

>*A practitioner’s guide to implementing early warning systems* (January, 2015)
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2015056.pdf

Here is an excerpt from the guide:

"...Early warning systems use individual student data to generate indicators of on-track status for graduation, including attendance, behavior, and course performance (for more information, see box 3 on the ABCs later in this report). When a student falls below the on-track threshold, a team of school staff assigns the student to an intervention designed to help the student improve his or her performance. By systematically examining data, early warning systems can empower districts and schools to:

- Identify struggling students earlier in their school career.
- Direct students to appropriate interventions.
- Examine and address on-track patterns among groups of students regularly....

The early warning system team may investigate a student’s needs by talking to the student directly and conferring with the student’s family and other school staff (such as teachers, coaches, counselors, and administrators); all may be able to provide insights into why the student is off track. The team can then determine the appropriate interventions and monitor their frequency based on the student’s needs and the school context...."

With respect to monitoring, the focus is not just on recording intervention processes and changes in core behaviors (including strengths and positive attributes); it is essential to talk with students about whether they feel the processes are working, problems are decreasing, and positive growth is occurring. All such monitoring requires interveners working and communicating collaboratively with each other and establishing the type of working relationship with students that results in open dialogues.

For more on responding as soon as problems are noted, see our Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on:

>*Early Intervention* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2305_01.htm

(Center Quick Finds provide links to resources from our Center and from other relevant sources.) Here is a sample of our Center resources listed there:

>*Prereferral interventions* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/prereferral.pdf>

>*Enhancing classroom approaches for addressing barriers to learning:*

Classroom-focused enabling – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/contedu/cfe.pdf>

>*Relationship of response to interventions and a system of learning supports* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rti.pdf>

Also see the Quick Find on:

>*Response to Intervention* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/responsetointervention.htm>

Here is a sample of Center resources listed there:

>*RTI and classroom & schoolwide learning supports: A guide for teachers and Learning supports staff* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtiguide.pdf>

>*RTI and classroom & schoolwide learning supports* (4 continuing educ. modules)

Unit I: Response to intervention: improving conditions for learning in the classroom – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtii.pdf>

Unit II: Implementing Response to Intervention sequentially & effectively – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtiii.pdf>

Unit III. Response to Intervention: Beyond personalization – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtiiii.pdf>

Unit IV: Pursuing Response to Intervention as one strategy in a comprehensive system of student and learning supports – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtiiv.pdf>

Note of caution about identifying students as “at risk”: The shifts in approach highlighted above are meant to minimize premature identification of a student as "at risk" and minimize misdiagnoses. Concerns about misdiagnoses are a fundamental consideration in efforts to transform student and learning supports and in discussions related to reauthorization of the federal education acts (i.e., *ESEA*, *IDEA*). The implications for embedding a broad perspective of mental health in schools are evident. (For more on the problem of misdiagnoses, see the following section on the Featured Set of Center Resources.)

We all want to identify, as early as feasible, students who are at risk for learning, behavior, and emotional problems so we can counter such problems. Note, however, that the point is not just about identification and not just about fixing students; the focus always needs to be on addressing a wide range of factors that cause problems. Sometimes it is about addressing factors internal to a student; more often, the focus should be on addressing barriers to learning and teaching that are *external* to students and are the source of the problems. When external factors need addressing, special care must be taken to avoid “blaming the victim”.

Note about Prevention: Prevention of learning and teaching problems is facilitated by engagement in learning and promoted by healthy social-emotional development.

Here are a few brief resources on these considerations:

>About motivation – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/motivation.pdf>

>About school engagement and re-engagement –
<http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/reengagestudents.pdf>

>Natural opportunities to promote social-emotional learning and MH –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/naturalopportunities.pdf>

Listserv Participants: Please share new approaches for reducing the number of “at risk” students. Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Featured Set of Center Resources:

>Understanding concerns about misdiagnoses

As noted above, efforts to promote healthy development and prevent problems include guarding against premature identification and labeling of students. Diagnoses often are premature when environmental factors are the primary cause of a learning, behavior, and/or emotional problem but are de-emphasized or ignored. Furthermore, use of a diagnostic label sometimes can be avoided when essential learning and student supports are in place.

To enhance understanding of all this, we have developed a new Quick Find entitled:

>Misdiagnosis – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/misdiagnosis.htm>

It provides links to resources from our Center and from other online and library resources. Below is a sample of Center developed resources on this topic:

>Arguments about whether overdiagnosis of adhd is a significant problem –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/overdiag.pdf>

>Schools and the challenge of LD and ADHD misdiagnoses –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/ldmisdiagnoses.pdf>

- > *Labeling troubled and troubling youth: The name game* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/labeling.htm>
- > *Countering the over-pathologizing of students' feelings & behavior:
A growing concern related to mh in schools* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/pathology.pdf>
- > *Determinants of students' problems* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/determinants.pdf>
- > *Minimizing referrals out of the classroom* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/referralspn.pdf>
- > *Response to Intervention* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/responsetointervention.pdf>
- > *Common Behavior problems at school: A natural opportunity for social and
Emotional learning* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/behaviorsocialemot.pdf>

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***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.***

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

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

***Please share relevant resources ideas, requests, comments, and
experiences! Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu***

***Note: Responses come only to our Center 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/>