29 years
& counting

School Practitioner Listserv

A Weekly Community of Practice Network for Sharing and Interchange

Mental Health in Schools
UCLA
Center
Program and Policy Analysis*

May 11, 2015

Request from a Colleague

>**How to better connect school & community supports to work together**

Perspectives of Colleagues Related to this Request

Featured Set of Center Resources

>**Collaboration for better results**

For Your Information

>**Paths out of Poverty**

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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.

Request: "I'm a licensed therapist who has done some work in schools. I find therapists don't understand education and working with staff on their turf. I also find that educators are not attuned to the mental health issues of youngsters either. Any suggestions on how to merge the two domains?"

Center Response: What makes this such a complex concern is that it involves much more than just enhancing mutual understanding. At its roots the problem is that of establishing effective school-community collaboration. Foundationally, this is best approached at an institutional policy level (e.g., to establish and support a school-community collaborative infrastructure). However, given that this can't be done quickly, there are several ways to enhance collaboration and understanding through ongoing regular contacts and exchanges among community providers and school staff. Given that each of these stakeholders brings special expertise to exchanges, the need is to ensure that all contacts are facilitated in ways that are experienced as transactions among equals and with expressions of mutual respect.

Here are places where such exchanges can occur:

>*At team meetings focused on individual students* – Whenever school staff and community providers come together to discuss a specific student, it is an opportunity to share perspectives and understanding of learning, behavior, and emotional problems related to the case presented, what might be the best way to help the student, and how similar problems might be ameliorated for other students.

>*At designated school staff meetings & special professional development sessions* – Many of these are opportunities to work together on enhancing how the school helps students in general. Through cooperative efforts, working relationships are enhanced. School staff members share what is currently provided and what more is needed to support students; community providers offer ideas on what more might be done to support teachers/students in classrooms and school-wide and to engage families and other community resources. The school's student support staff and community providers might plan a joint presentation to clarify how their roles and expertise complement each other and how the collaboration enhances the continuum of interventions available at the school and in the community.

Here are a few of the various resources we have developed to speak to this concern:

>"Community Outreach and Collaborative Engagement" Chapter 7 in *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf

>*School-Community Partnerships from the School's Perspective* -- http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/winter99.pdf

>*Want to Work With Schools? What is Involved in Successful Linkages?* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/54 want to work with schools.pdf

>*Integrating Mental Health in Schools: Schools, School-Based Centers, and Community Programs Working Together* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/integratingbrief.pdf

For more on this, see the section of this Practitioner featuring resources on *Collaboration*.

Listserv Participants: How would you answer this concern? What would you suggest related to promoting school-community collaboration to enhance student and learning support? Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu .

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Perspectives from colleagues related to this request

As we regularly do, we reached out to some colleagues to gain their perspectives. Here are two responses:

(1) From a state department director for mental/behavioral health:
"THIS IS MY LIFE!! This question sums up a good portion of what I do: merging those 2 domains. So I could go on for DAYS about this but my quick answer is... I have used the SAMHSA Eliminating Barriers for Learning curriculum (easily found via google and a free download) for teacher/staff trainings I do in schools (approx. 2400 teachers in our state so far). This helps teachers understand the role of MH in schools and the importance of working with MH professionals. I haven't done much work on the flip side, helping community based mental health professionals understand the 'turf' of educators. I have had to help community based MH professionals learn to work with school based MH professionals. That's pretty tricky at times. I find that the school MH professionals can help the community based MH professionals 'get' the school setting and how to work effectively in it once they have a partnership established. The two worlds when merged thoughtfully and intentionally with clear lines of communication and boundaries, with established roles and responsibilities can be a beautiful thing.... Hope this helps...."

(2) From a school psychologist:
"It's a common complaint; the idea that educators don't understand mental health and therapists don't understand pedagogy. Even if the two groups were equally attuned to each other, by training backgrounds and state and federal regulations there are different systems for labeling conditions, different funding mechanisms, different rules for handling confidentiality, different technical jargon vocabularies, and also different cultures. No wonder it's so difficult!

So let's start by putting the focus on several key areas of overlap. Both educators and therapists want to see the youth assigned to them learn to overcome their obstacles and thrive. Both want to select effective, efficient, evidence-based treatments for whatever ails people. Both want to be heard and understood when they speak in their unique professional tongues.

Merging the gap between two domains is the profession known as 'school psychology.' School psychologists typically train to at least the Educational Specialist level and serve at least a 1200 hr. internship. This provides pre-service academic instruction and supervised experience in 10 major areas of study, including education and mental health. As one wag put it, 'School Psychologists know more about mental health than most educators, and more about instruction than most mental health therapists.'

School psychologists are assigned to most public schools, if not full-time then at least on an itinerant basis. I suggest contacting the school psychologist(s) who work in the schools where you provide therapy. The two of you collaborating can be a powerful force. You may have different philosophical basis for and use different technical words to describe your understanding of situations, but you will be in great agreement much of the time.

Keep in mind that schools have been historically underfunded for decades, so there is a lot of accumulated work to do and not enough people to properly carry the load. This creates a condition where people will understandably be resistant to change. Ask a teacher who is already giving 110% to dig down deep and give 115% to layer in your new idea, and you may be asked 'What should I stop doing so I will have the time to do what you ask?' If staff do not appear to be sufficiently attuned to mental health issues, the reasons might be organizational and systemic, not based on personal values."

For school psychologist training standards: http://www.nasponline.org/standards/practice-model/
For MH services provided by school psychologists: http://www.nasponline.org/advocacy/mhbrochure.aspx

Related to all this, we were directed to the following online perspective from a teacher: http://www.loveteachblog.com/2015/04/what-i-wish-i-could-tell-them-about.html

"I'm in my fifth year of teaching English at a Title I middle school. Title I schools are public schools that receive special grants because of their high number of students who have been identified as at-risk. I adore my students and my teaching team. I love teaching. I'm really good at it. I respect my administration and feel valued by them.

But at the end of this year, I'm leaving. I'm not sure if I'll continue teaching elsewhere or start a new career. If I do leave, I'll be one of the 40-50% of teachers who leave during their first five years. A drop in the bucket....To other teachers, I'm sure this isn't surprising. Without knowing me or where I teach, they can probably easily guess why someone who loves her job and is good at it would be leaving.

But it's not teachers who need to know what it's like. It's everyone else. People who have no idea what it's like.... Some of these people are even making important decisions about education.

There are so many things I would tell them. ...
I would tell them about how I try to divide my time between everybody when my students are working in groups, but I almost always end up spending more time with my struggling students. I know that my students who are behind need me, but that doesn't mean that my advanced students don't need me just as much. I always feel torn. In an effort to not leave five students behind, I'm leaving behind 30 others.

I would tell them about my students' parents, and about the dreams they have for their children. I would tell them about the single mom whose husband died last year and left behind two children with learning disabilities, and how she's now working two jobs to make ends meet....

Last year our school had a higher number of office referrals and in-school suspensions, so this year teachers have been "strongly encouraged" to deal with discipline problems themselves. That means that unless the offense is severe or dangerous, students remain in class....

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I don't know what to do about it. I have some ideas, but I don't have nearly enough knowledge of policy to even know where to begin. All I know is what I and others see at the front lines every day, and I just know that it's not working, for students or their teachers.

This is what I would tell them. I may have burned out in the process, but I will never stop fighting for these kids, their families, or the teachers who care about them."

Response to the teacher from a mental health provider:
"I am a children's mental health therapist working in a low-income community mental health agency. I see many of these 'problem kids' individually and with their families. I realize, now, how many of these children living in poverty and in 'bad neighborhoods' who attend these Title 1 schools are living in instability and chaos, and so much of their behaviors are trauma reactions to their environment. There are so many factors that come to play that the whole community needs to step up and help these children and their families heal to have the foundational ability to sit and learn...."

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Featured Set of Center Resources:
>Collaboration for better results

Pulling together all the people and personnel who support students and schools doesn't just happen. It take collaborative planning, leadership, and ongoing mechanisms. For more on how to "merge" school and community resources, see our online clearinghouse Quick Find on *Collaboration: School, Community, Interagency*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1201_01.htm

There you will find links to resources from our Center and from others. For example, the Quick Find lists the following resources from our Center on this topic:

>*Community Outreach and Collaborative Engagement Self-study Survey*
>*School-Community Partnerships: A Guide*
>*Fostering School, Family, and Community Involvement.*
>*Sustaining School-Community Partnerships to Enhance Outcomes for Children and Youth: A Guidebook and Tool Kit*
>*Working Collaboratively: From School-Based Collaborative Teams to School-Community-Higher Education Connections*
>*Schools, Families, and Community Working Together: Building an Effective Collaborative*
>*Agencies Addressing Problems of Children and Youth: Pursuing a Continuum of Interventions and Working with Schools*

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For Your Information

>Paths out of poverty

From a May 4 article in the *New York Times* reporting on a study conducted by the Equality of Opportunity Project at Harvard. This article is online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/04/upshot/an-atlas-of-upward-mobility-shows-paths-out-of-poverty.html?_r=0&abt=0002&abg=0 ; the study is online at http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/ .

"Based on the earnings records of millions of families that moved with children, it finds that poor children who grow up in some cities and towns have sharply better odds of escaping poverty than similar poor children elsewhere. The feelings heard across Baltimore's recent protests — of being trapped in poverty — seem to be backed up by the new data. Among the nation's 100 largest counties, the one where children face the worst odds of escaping poverty is the city of Baltimore, the study found. ... Beyond Baltimore, economists say the study offers perhaps the most detailed portrait yet of upward mobility — and the lack of it. The findings suggest that geography does not merely separate rich from poor but also plays a large role in determining which poor children achieve the so-called American dream." *The study cites places most conducive to upward mobility and places where poor children face the worst odds.*

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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

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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/