



**School Practitioner
Listserv**



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

May 9, 2016

Concerns from the Field:

>What’s the best way to prepare new teachers to address behavioral and mental health concerns?

- Center Response
- Responses from Colleagues in the Field

Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

For Your Information:

>A few suggestions made from the field about enhancing teachers’ ability to address behavioral and mental health concerns

Featured Set of Center Resources:

>Continuing education related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching not only for teachers, but for all school staff

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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 *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 from the Field: New teachers chronically find they are ill-prepared to deal with “behavior problems.” So it is not surprising that we regularly are asked: *What’s the best way to prepare new teachers to address behavioral and mental health concerns?*

Center Response: We are always amazed by the growing list of items suggested for the preservice, certification, and inservice of teachers (e.g., preparation for Common Core, training to enhance social-emotional learning, training for what to watch for related to specific learning, behavior, and emotional problems, training to improve school climate, and on and on). To avoid adding yet another item to the ad hoc and fragmented agenda for teacher training/certification, we suggest reframing the above question to ask: *What’s the best way for a school to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students and families?*

This moves the emphasis from teachers to the whole school and reflects the reality that, in so many schools, the onus for student outcomes cannot and should not fall so heavily on teachers alone. In particular, improving how schools address barriers to learning and teaching involves *all* personnel at a school, not just teachers – see *Teachers Can't Do it Alone!*

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

Given this, when it comes to personnel development, the focus needs to be on *all*. Moreover, personnel development needs to be planned and implemented in the context of overall capacity building for school improvement.

That said: Our response to the question is as follows:

First and foremost, focus on improving classroom and school-wide policies and practices. For example, review and, as necessary, revise current policies and practices to ensure:

- (a) all newcomers (personnel, volunteers, students, families) are “inducted” into a school with welcoming and supportive processes;
- (b) all personnel, volunteers, students, families are provided ongoing support and guidance (e.g., mentoring, peer buddies, collaborative working relationships);
- (c) instruction for personnel, volunteers, students, families is personalized;
- (d) student support staff are able to play a collaborative role working alongside teachers to design classroom and school-wide practices for preventing and correcting problems and improving outcomes for all student;
- (e) schools are developing a unified system of student and learning supports that is designed to promote healthy development, prevent problems, intervene quickly and effectively as soon as problems are noted, and play an effective role related to chronic and severe problems.

Second, with specific respect to enhancing the focus on mental health in schools, mental health and psychosocial concerns need to

- (a) reflect understanding that mental *health* in schools is about promoting social-emotional development as well as addressing social-emotional problems; (Mental *health* is not just concerned with mental *illness*.)
- (b) be embedded into a school’s current formal curriculum and the many natural learning opportunities (“teachable moments”) that arise each day.

Third, with specific respect to personnel development, it is essential to plan with an appreciation that there are limits to how much can be learned in a given period of time, and the best learning requires personalization. *As aids for such personnel development, see the featured resources section below.*

Responses from Colleagues in the Field: When we reached out to a few colleagues about the best way to help new teachers address behavioral and mental health concerns, the general reaction was to stress that pre- and inservice “fall short of meeting the needs

for children and youth who have conditions that are exhibited in the classroom. Pre-service teachers need classes that provide knowledge about appropriate responses and interventions for these students.” “Teachers’ need training on MH issues including trauma and how to respond to students in their classrooms.”

At the same time, there was recognition that the impact of current pressures on teachers contributes to the negative way student problems are addressed: “Teachers have so many issues competing for their attention (e.g. Common Core, Teacher Evaluation etc), that student behavioral and emotional problems widely are dealt with using punitive measures rather than proactive classroom management that empowers teachers.” In this context, it was noted that: “a teacher would never think of sending a student to the office because they can’t do a math problem. What they do is sit with the student and give that extra assistance to get the math done. The same applies to behavior. It only takes a few seconds to validate positive behavior, and only a few seconds to reteach, rather than do something punitive. At some point, there has to be a focus on social emotional literacy embedded in the curriculum to make learning relevant. Teachers teach students not content.”

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Invitation to listserv participants: *What’s your take on all this?* Comments? Recommendations? What’s happening locally? Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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For Your Information:

>A few suggestions made from the field about enhancing teachers’ ability to address behavioral and mental health concerns

(1) “I am working with U of Michigan to develop a curriculum for pre-service teachers that focuses on trauma and SEL. I’ve got contacts with several other state universities who are also interested in this. In the meantime, I would encourage the use of the SAMHSA Eliminating Barriers for Learning training for teachers (albeit only for secondary teachers, but I’ve modified it here for elementary level educators as well-have trained approx. 2500 teachers with that curriculum in this state. It’s been well received!!) It is a free downloadable training and can be done in 4 one-hour sessions or in 2 two hour sessions or in one 4 hour session. I have pre/post surveys I developed to go with it. I’m happy to share. We are about ready to have our statewide SEL Standards approved by the State Board of Ed. and in doing so hope to eventually have certification for current teachers around SEL and trauma/MH-fingers crossed! Regarding cutbacks, my recommendation on this it for districts to try to utilize community resources. Ideally re-locate them on school grounds to expedite access. We are working on this with several districts here in Michigan. The other project is training educators on CBT groups and providing them with coaching so they can do groups with students in school. This expands the reach-meeting the need of several students at one time.”

(2) “Teachers might look at the ‘Mind Up’ curriculum, as it is a strategy to help the entire class self calm, while also giving the teacher a moment to reflect. It is only \$40 from the Hawm Foundation, and provides lessons that increase the knowledge of why students might behave the way they do, as well as helping students themselves self-regulate.”

(3) “A counselor should keep track of the numbers of students s/he sees over the course of a week or two and note the situations where behavioral/mental health problems are involved and who is referring the student. The counselor and principal can use the information to decide how best to approach the problems — either from a student or teacher perspective, or both in an informal ‘sit-down’ with all the teachers involved. Teachers can try new strategies that may also

help other students. This kind of approach doesn't make change overnight, but it does begin to gradually sensitize the staff to the issues and gives them some ideas on what to do. And when teachers experience success, they talk about it with other teachers. Devoting 10 minutes at a staff meeting to discussing the issues could raise awareness and interest with staff. From time to time, they might even invite a social worker, school psychologist or other 'expert' to present strategies at a staff meeting — but I'd wait on that until the staff is sensitized to the needs of students and is open to hearing from others. They need to be ready to listen. There is no 'silver bullet.' This is more of a 'bloom where you grow' response. It takes hard work and a relentless attitude to make change in schools. But knowing that some students' lives are better makes all the difference."

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Featured Set of Center Resources

>Continuing education related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching not only for teachers, but for all school staff

The center has many resources that can be used for continuing education. They provide opportunities for self-study or a stimulus for teacher and school staff group study. Example are offered below. The "Resource Catalogue" section of our website provides links to all the following; see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/resources.htm> .

About Better Ways for a School to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching and Re-engage Disconnected Students and Families

- > *Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning*
- > *Engaging and Re-engaging Students and Families*
- > *Personalizing Learning and Addressing Barriers to Learning*
- > *RTI and Classroom & Schoolwide Learning Supports*
- > *Revisiting Learning & Behavior Problems: Moving Schools Forward*
- > *Enhancing School Staff Understanding of MH and Psychosocial Concerns: A Guide*
- > *Enhancing Classroom Teachers' Capacity to Successfully Engage All Students in Learning*

About Ending the Marginalization of Student and Learning Supports and Embedding Mental Health Concerns into School Improvement

- > *Addressing Barriers to Learning: A Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health in Schools*
- > *Addressing Barriers to Learning: New Directions for Mental Health in Schools*
- > *Leadership Training: Moving in New Directions for Student Support*
- > *Developing Resource-Oriented Mechanisms to Enhance Learning Supports*
- > *Embedding Mental Health into a Learning Supports Component*
- > *Rethinking District Budgets to Unify and Sustain Student and Learning Supports at Schools*
- > *Balancing Cut-backs at Schools is Essential to Ensuring Equity of Opportunity*

Also see the **Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds** for links to Center resources and to others accessible through the internet. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm>

*For information about the

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

***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/>