

**School Practitioner Community of Practice**  
(A network for sharing & exchange)

**November 8, 2017**

**Topic: *As screening of students “at risk” expands, the discussion includes analyzing internet & social media use***

**Center Response**  
**Comments Elicited from**  
    >Colleagues in the Field  
    >College Students

**Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives**

**Featured Center Resources**

*>for supporting students and preventing problems*

**Note:** Go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla> for links to other resources including  
    >Upcoming initiatives, conferences & workshops  
    >Calls for grant proposals, presentations, and papers  
    >Training and job opportunities  
    >Upcoming webcasts & other professional development opportunities

This resource is from the  
    Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports, UCLA

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**Given shrinking education budgets, we have been asked to increase our outreach to make our free resources more available (e.g., for planning, professional development, etc.).**

**So please feel free to share with anyone you think might benefit (e.g., forward our resources to individuals and share on listservs and websites).**

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**For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

**For previous postings of community of practice discussions, 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 is being sent to and forwarded by over 100,000 school and community stakeholders concerned about (1) daily matters confronting schools, (2) promoting whole child development and positive school climate, and (3) the transformation of student and learning supports.

## As screening of students “at risk” expands, the discussion includes analyzing internet & social media use

**T**opic for this week: A recent approach to student screening involves gathering and analyzing student online behavior. This week, we were informed about a project that looked at “browsing, search results, and student generated and online content related to methods of self-harm and suicide.” As described to us, “one school district of 20,000 students received 67 alerts in its first three weeks, later confirming that 61 of those students had ‘real’ intent to self-harm.” We were asked for expert views about this approach and, more generally, about schools doing universal screening of students’ mental health.

**C**enter Response: Over the years, the interest in screening students for mental health problems has generated considerable debate. Often, the emphasis is on universal, first-level MH screening. Clearly, there are good reasons for early identification of problems. However, what often is proposed raises enormous ethical, practical, legal, and financial concerns for schools.

Few argue against the *intent* of efforts to find, treat, and prevent. Issues arise related to the appropriateness of large-scale screening for mental health problems. For example, do the costs of such large-scale screening outweigh the benefits? Are schools an appropriate venue for such activity? Embedded in the issues are arguments about rights to privacy and informed consent, how good first-level mental health screens are, how likely good follow-up assessments will be used to identify errors, how available treatment will be for most who are identified, how negative the consequences will be with respect to stigmatization and self-fulfilling prophecies, and the role of schools related to public health concerns.

Here are some excerpts from recent articles that have specific relevance to mining students’ internet and social media data in general and for MH screening purposes:

(1) From a discussion of the topic on NPR –

<http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/12/23/504709648/when-a-schools-online-eavesdropping-can-prevent-a-suicide>

...these software programs are identifying students in distress, but they do so by effectively thrusting school IT directors into the role of eavesdroppers. That can be problematic, says Elana Zeide, a research fellow at NYU's Information Law Institute and an expert on student privacy and data. "This is a growing trend where schools are monitoring students more and more for safety reasons," she says. "I think student safety and saving lives is obviously important, and I don't want to discount that. But I also think there's a real possibility that this well-meaning attempt to protect students from themselves will result in overreach." She points out that low-income students may be disproportionately subject to surveillance, as school-owned devices are more likely to provide their only access to the Internet. And she worries about the broader message: "Are we conditioning children to accept constant monitoring as the normal state of affairs in everyday life."

Carolyn Stone, ethics chair of the American School Counselor Association, says that she was "taken aback" to hear that student Web searches done at home were triggering interventions by school staff. "It's so intrusive," she says. On the one hand, she says, the issue of students thinking about suicide needs to be taken very seriously and treated differently from other types of disclosures. When guidance counselors hear anything about potential self-harm, even secondhand, she says, "We're on it. We're calling home. Privacy and confidentiality go out the window." On the other hand, she says, she worries about school staffers without mental health training having access to what are, essentially, students' private thoughts. "On the surface, it sounds like a very good idea to err on the side of caution when it comes to student suicide," Stone says. "But this is something that sounds like it could spin out of control. ... It's a slippery slope."

(2) From *The Guardian's* article entitled: "This oversteps a boundary': teenagers perturbed by Facebook surveillance"

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/02/facebook-surveillance-tech-ethics>

In 2014, Facebook published a study detailing a huge psychological experiment it secretly conducted on almost 700,000 users to see how manipulations of the news feed altered their emotional state. The study was widely criticized as unethical, and Facebook announced a new set of guidelines for how the company would approach research in the future, including a more rigorous ethical review process. However, the study provided a window into Facebook's ability to mine the data of its almost 2 billion users.... When users do find out, as happened with the teen research, they experience something web psychologist Nathalie Nahai refers to as "psychological reactance": the "aversive emotional state we experience in response to perceived threats to our freedom and autonomy.

(3) From the *Markkula Center for Applied Ethics'* article "Unauthorized Transmission and Use of Personal Data"

<https://www.scu.edu/ethics/focus-areas/internet-ethics/resources/unauthorized-transmission-and-use-of-personal-data/>

MIT scholar Sherry Turkle, in a thorough and thoughtful study of how teenagers use and are affected by social networks, found that those she studied were very careful and intentional about how they crafted their online identities. These young people cared a great deal about their privacy, but were often naïve about the rules under which they were operating and about how their personal information could be used. Their age and lack of experience and wisdom leaves them very vulnerable to exploitation.

Furthermore, they are at an age when they are discovering and defining their identities. They need room to experiment, explore and, inevitably, make mistakes. It is essential that they have a safe, protected space in which to do this. That is why privacy is especially important for adolescents. Their participation in social networks and other online activities should not be taken as permission to collect, use and broadcast their personal information....

(4) From researchers at McGill University on "Depression screening in children and adolescents"

<https://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/channels/news/depression-screening-children-and-adolescents-261911>

Depression in children is a disabling condition associated with behavioral problems and poor school performance. But routine screening for the disease in this age group is controversial.... given the inaccuracy of the tools currently being used, some children could end up mislabeled as depressed. This could lead to the unnecessary prescription of potentially harmful psychiatric medications and negative messages about the mental health of some children who do not have mental health disorders. Moreover, a potentially massive amount of resources would be needed to sort out which children may really be depressed. Research suggests relatively few would meet the criteria. The researchers say that to properly assess the accuracy of depression screening tools in children, large, well-designed studies that present results across a range of cut-off scores are needed.

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Our Center's analysis of the pros and cons of school screening of mental health problems is provided in the following brief:

>*Screening Mental Health Problems in Schools*

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

Also see:

>*Thinking Cautiously About Screening for Major Depressive Disorder in Adolescents: The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommendations and Implications for Schools*

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

In general, we suggest that schools not expend their limited resources on universal screening for MH problems; a more cost-effective approach is to strengthen interventions to promote healthy development and prevent learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

For more on this perspective, see

- >*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>
- >*Promoting Mental Health and Preventing Problems at School* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/promotingmh.pdf>
- >*Mental Health in Schools: Opportunities and Challenges* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/mentalhealthinschoolsoportunitiesandchallenges.pdf>
- >*Mental Health in Schools: Moving in New Directions* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/contschpsych.pdf>

Moreover, as the above resources note, we suggest that this is best accomplished by transforming existing student/learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. For the latest on this, see:

- >*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide* – available at this time as a free resource – download by going to the Center homepage (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>) and clicking on the title.
- >*Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*. From Cognella (<https://titles.cognella.com/transforming-student-and-learning-supports-9781516512782.html>)

## **C**omments Elicited from Colleagues in the Field

- (1) ... Several years ago, I found a survey that focused on suicide ideation. Some well-intentioned districts used it to collect data. Unfortunately, once they learned that there were students experiencing problems, there were no resources available to follow up with students. This approach puts me in mind of that survey — with nothing to follow. Are they looking for resources? Do they want to develop resources? Do they have suggestions for schools to follow?

I have a hard time seeing how their approach fits into Learning Supports, unless a district *already has* a system of supports in place. ... The focus on suicide (a very important topic — that also requires lots of resources) could create more competition for limited resources than help to build a comprehensive system.

- (2) This could be a slippery slope. If they were just doing browser history in general and its anonymous then that's one thing but to link it to students individually could cause some liability issues with parents (if they didn't give consent for that sort of tracking/information linking). However it is good information to have (although it's questionable if they should have it). I guess my thought is after they "c.y.a" they/someone needs to provide some resources around self-harming behaviors to the schools/staff/students. Sometimes there is an alarm that goes off around self-harming that may or may not be warranted. I think self-harming behaviors are absolutely something that needs to be addressed BUT don't necessarily mean the person doing the self-harming is suicidal. I've noticed in recent years that students (majority girls) are doing these behaviors as part of "status" or because it's an "in" thing to do. It's almost like a "club" in some cases. Not to say that it shouldn't be addressed because it should always be addressed and taken seriously, but some kids I've known/heard of just do it because their friends are (so they say). And there seems to be a huge connection between cutting/self-harm and anxiety. Which I believe anxiety is the real issue that needs to be addressed.

- (3) The research on suicide that I've read has been somewhat discouraging in that it's been relatively difficult to create a screening process that catches "real" intent to harm without over-identifying. Giving treatment to people who really don't need it can cause harm. Maybe in this BIG DATA era, things will turn around. Following up to learn that 61 of the 67 alerts were on-target is good. Has the company also followed up to find out how many real intents to harm did not generate an alert? Confirming and comparing the rates for true non-alert, true alert, false non-alert, and false alert will help us to judge the adequacy of the tool.

As for what to do, the National Association of School Psychologists has some good links. I'd contact the NASP office to see if they have any more recent info that hasn't been posted to the web site yet, and to connect you with school psychologists who have deep experience with youth suicide.

Many schools have problem-solving teams that meet regularly. In my work with these teams I've noticed that students intending self-harm sometimes "leak" hints to important people in their lives. But they tend to leak only once to each person. So, educators need to learn to call the team together on the occasion of a single leak. If teachers wait for a string of leaks to hit their desks before worrying, it will be too late. There could be a lot of leaks already at the school, but each teacher would be aware of a single event. We need to talk to each other.

In addition to a focus on suicide itself, I think it might be profitable to look into what factors help people to be resilient. We all have tough times. How can we make good decisions that preserve our lives, help us reach our goals, and be happy despite it all?

## **C**omments Elicited from Two College Students

- (1) I think that with the expansion of social media and technology, students now have new avenues to disclose very personal information. By the same token, it can also be an advantage to have these online systems as a way to help students. It is interesting that I get this question now, because just this week one of our readings for our higher education class discussed mental health among students and the role of student affairs professionals. What was interesting, was that the reading made a clear distinction between students who thought of self-harm/suicide and those who actually attempted. There was a large difference in the percentages, with actual attempts being much lower in comparison. It then becomes this grey area for educators to try and figure out how to best help a student who may have thoughts or be contemplating self-harm because you never really know the extent of a student's intentions, and it is always best to be safe than sorry in these types of situations. It is concerning that districts have found large amounts of online student searches related to self-harm and suicide. Unfortunately, based on experience of working in a Middle School, schools that are low-income do not really address these issues because of lack of resources; they really just cover themselves by telling the students to reach out if they need help. However, I feel like these schools can be doing more such as really making the students understand what it means to feel distressed and the options they have for getting help. It can be something as simple as having wellness workshops in schools where students learn of healthy coping techniques in dealing with stress in hopes of diverting them from self-harm. In this way not only are you helping the students who are potentially self-harming, but can prevent other students from turning to self-harm. For the more serious cases, where administration does come across online evidence of self-harm, the school counselor should immediately intervene. I find that students may sometimes be reluctant to open up to their counselor since they may be a person that they rarely talk to or see around campus. Therefore, it is important for school counselors to establish relationships with all their students, even just a simple one-to-one check up every once in a while to help build that rapport and trustworthy relationship. Lastly, I would recommend making the parents part of the mental health conversation. Many students do go through rough situations at home aside from their school lives, so making sure that parents know how life at home can affect their child, what they can do help their child, how to recognize any signs of self-harm/suicidal thoughts, and inform them about affordable/free/accessible/local resources they can turn to if they believe their child needs mental health services.

(2) The results of the company's experiment is very concerning to me. I want to bring up Netflix's show, *13 Reasons Why*, because I believe it relates to this topic of students looking towards the internet and media for information regarding suicide. It is a show created with good intentions, as it aims to spread more awareness of those who may be depressed and are thinking about ending their own lives. And I do believe that it achieved the goal of sparking conversations about a traditionally stigmatized subject. But I am also aware that it became a controversial show as it inspired imitators and may not have addressed certain issues regarding suicides properly.

One question I have to ask about the study is ... on what those searches were. I think that, compared to the past, suicide is getting more awareness than before. It appears that people are more open to talking about it, and want to learn more about it as well. ... Some questions to consider are: for students that google methods of self-harm, do they also look up reasons against killing themselves? What are the sites they are going to? Do those sites solely offer a one-sided point of view about suicide and only the positive, rather than negative consequences of making this decision? What kinds of questions are students posting on forums? Are they communicating with anyone online about their thoughts? Friends? Strangers across a message board going through similar situations?

... one positive thing I'll mention about social media is that, more younger people nowadays are sharing their stories about suicide. Just the other day, I had a friend share a long post on Instagram, revealing that she had attempted suicide last year, but then, SHE WENT ON to explain why she did not. It was important to read about her mentality and the reasons why she changed her mind. Not only did she receive a lot of support, but she let others who were suffering know that they were not alone, and that it's possible to get out of that negative spiral.

... So one more question I have to ask is, when students are looking up self-harm methods, if they do not discuss it with anyone else, do they at least look to celebrities they might look up to? In their social media network, are they exposed to friends and peers who do openly share and discuss these topics? When looking up content and search results online, what kinds of information about suicide are being shared? The healthy kind of the unhealthy kind? Which sites promote which sort of information? Getting more positive information out on the internet, specifically through social and mainstream media, about those who went through these situations, but what steps they took to seek help can hopefully present an alternative path to students who may be currently struggling.

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## Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

*What can you share about using internet activity to identify "at risk" students??*

Send your responses to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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## Featured Center Resources

*>>for supporting students and preventing problems*

*>Youth Participation: Making It Real* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/youthpartic.pdf>

Thanks to advocacy for and by youth leaders, it is now commonplace at meetings across the country for several folks to stress "If we are going to plan for young people, we need their voices at this table." However, reasons for bringing young people to the table vary. Advocates range from those who appreciate the importance of understanding the perspective of youth, on through those who also are dedicated to promoting youth development and empowerment, and on to those who stress that youth participation benefits families, adults, organizations, planners, policy makers, communities, and society in general.

>About Supporting Those Who Seem Depressed <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/dep.pdf>

For someone who is depressed (perhaps even thinking about suicide) having valued support can be critical and potentially life-saving. Friends, family, school staff who are alert to warning signs can offer support and facilitate the individual's efforts to connect with appropriate help.

>Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH

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

In some form or another, every school has goals that emphasize a desire to enhance students' personal and social functioning. Such goals can be seen as reflecting views that social and emotional growth has an important role of play in enhancing the daily smooth functioning, facilitating students' holistic development, enabling student motivation, and optimizing life beyond schooling.

>About Positive Psychology <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/positivepsychology.pdf>

Psychotherapy has for some time focused on an individual's troubles with a view to helping the person deal with weaknesses. In general, too little attention has been given to the idea that increasing an individual's strengths with a view to helping the person find happiness may be beneficial. (The emphasis on happiness stresses more than just feeling good. Happiness is associated with wellbeing ? health, success, extroversion.) This focus is a major concern of positive psychology.

>Prevention and Schools <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/prevention.pdf>

Prevention of learning, behavior, and emotional problems, although a long-standing concern, clearly is not a high priority in school improvement policy and practice. This resource highlights where prevention fits in the continuum of school-community interventions and suggests how to raise prevention efforts to a high priority.

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**Upcoming Webinar – Featuring How Scholastic, Inc. is Using the Center’s Work**

**Ensuring All Students Succeed: The Imperative for a Learning Supports Framework**

<http://dropoutprevention.org/webcast/ensuring-all-students-succeed/>  
Tuesday, Nov. 14, 2017,

Presenter: Rhonda Neal Waltman, EdD, senior director of Consultancy Services -- Learning Supports, Scholastic, Inc.

“For all students to have the opportunity to succeed, what has to be done in schools to reduce student barriers to learning and to re-engage them in the learning process? The Learning Supports Framework demonstrates how the provision of a wide range of learning supports, coupled with effective instruction, is the recipe for ensuring all students succeed.

Informed by the research of Drs. Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor from the UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools, this webcast will feature Scholastic Education’s Learning Supports staff who will share the school improvement model that has significant results in schools and districts across the nation.

This Solutions to the Dropout Crisis webcast will look at

- Why a system of learning supports is an imperative for advancing school improvement and re-engaging students.
- What are learning supports and how are they typically deployed in school?
- How can learning supports be delivered in an organized comprehensive manner?
- The importance of building a school improvement plan that includes learning supports, along with instruction and management.
- Key results that indicate a systems approach can directly impact positive outcomes for students.

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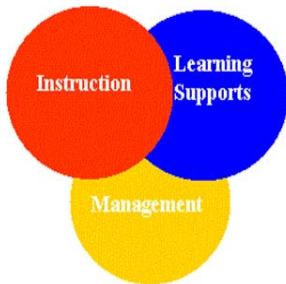
**Did you miss the quarterly ejournal for fall 2017? It had articles on:**

**E**XPANDING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT UNDER ESSA  
>Revitalizing Local Control: Transforming Student/Learning Supports  
and Enhancing Equity of Opportunity  
>Escaping Old Ideas to More Effectively Address Barriers to  
Learning and Teaching  
>Saving Starfish Is Not Enough!

**Did you miss the monthly ENEWS?**

You can access both these resources and more from the Center's homepage  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

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Information is online about the  
**National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports**  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

**THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!**

**For new sign-ups – email [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**  
**Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.**  
**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 on *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/> )**