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**School Practitioner
Listserv**

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



February 20, 2017

Request from a colleague
>About helping teachers improve classroom climate

- Center Comments
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Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Featured Set of Center Resources for
>Preventing staff burnout

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 is being sent to and forwarded by over 114,000 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.

Request: *>About helping teachers improve classroom climate*

“First of all, as a practicing principal, I must tell you that I have greatly benefitted from the Community of Practice resources you share in your regular emails. ...

I'm in need of some guidance from you or one of your colleagues. I'm the principal of a small preK-12 school. I have several teachers who do a good job of teaching the core classes, but who require more training in the development of a positive classroom climate. I recently met with them to provide explicit feedback and we all agreed that they will receive more training in this area and will begin teaching a social skills/team-building curricula.

I'd love your thoughts on the curriculum and training. I'm familiar with Responsive Classroom, but don't feel it's as effective in grades 5/6. I've looked at TRIBES and think that has possibilities, but would love to know if there's an evidence-based program that you feel we should look at. In addition, I'd appreciate any ideas you have about high quality training for the teachers.”

Center Comments: While everyone wants to create a positive school climate, how best to do this remains a matter of debate. This is especially so in schools where many students are struggling academically, acting out, and experiencing conflictual relationships with school staff and peers. We provide some perspective on this in a Center article entitled:

>Enhancing Classroom Climate for All Students –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/fall11.pdf>

In the context of school improvement, we stress that concern for enhancing classroom and school climate should be viewed as a quality that emerges from improving three primary and essential components of school improvement: (1) how instruction is facilitated, (2) how barriers to learning and teaching are addressed and disconnected students are re-engaged, and (3) how the school is governed and managed. With this in mind, the Center developed a set of continuing education modules entitled:

*>Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning:
Classroom-Focused Enabling –* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/contedu/cfe.pdf>

Critical to all this is the role teachers play, but teachers are not the only ones who determine what type of climate emerges throughout the school. See

>Opening the Classroom Door –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/spring01.pdf>

>Volunteers to Help Teachers and Schools Address Barriers to Learning –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/volunteer/volunt.pdf>

*>RTI and Classroom & Schoolwide Learning Supports: A Guide for Teachers and
Learning Supports Staff –* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtiguide.pdf>

As underscored in these resources, the reality is that considerable attention must be paid to enhancing collaborative working relationships among school staff, as well as with volunteers and any community partners working at the school -- and of course with and among students.

Now, about promoting student personal and social development as an essential element in enhancing a positive classroom and school climate:

>For info about specific programs and curriculum that have an evidence-base, see the evaluation done by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (go to <http://www.casel.org/guide/>)

>For a perspective that goes beyond specific programs, see the following:

>>Improving Working Relationships Inside the Classroom –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/relations.pdf>

>>Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/naturalopportunities.pdf>

>>Cross Age Peer Mentoring Programs – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mentoring.pdf>

For more resources on all this, see the Center's online clearinghouse menu of Quick Finds. For example, see the following topics:

>Classroom Climate – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/environments.htm>

>Peer Relationships – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/peersupport.htm>

>Volunteers in Schools – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/volunteers.html>

Comments from Colleagues in the Field:

(1) “While there are several good SEL programs around, even for upper elementary (what grades - 5, 6?), I don't believe classroom climate can be easily separated from overall school climate. Like you folks, I know that a systemic approach is needed for real success, both at the classroom and school level. District level as well of course! I am reading between the lines of this email and guessing that both PD and coaching are needed for improving classroom climate. The "evidence-based" programs are for the kids. The coaching is for the adults so the EBPs actually work. Also, is the concern about these teachers related to equity issues? In other words, is the climate ok for white, middle class not-differently-abled students, but less ok for others? Hard to read between the lines, but often this is the unasked, but actual question I get.”

(2) “Here's the link to our lessons learned and final report from our Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) grant which was focused on school/classroom climate.
<http://www.michigan.gov/schoolclimate>

We did numerous high quality trainings with school staff in the 22 high schools around school culture/climate including cultural competency and school mental health (using SAMHSA's Eliminating Barriers for Learning curriculum [easily found if googled AND has a piece re: positive school climate in it, which I bolstered]. WE/MDE developed pre/post tests for so it's "evidenced-based" for us here in Mich. I'm happy to share).

I would also recommend the (Nat'l Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments) NCSSLE website. They have great resources.

As far as curriculum for social skills/team-building, I know of therapy group curriculum around those topics but not necessarily classroom curriculum. I could do a search but they probably could too... maybe have them check the SAMHSA's NREPP list and or Edutopia or....??”

(3) “For this request, 3 things came to mind. First, I have to explain that I'm not aware of any evidence-based program that is specific to classroom climate. Of course, my definition for evidence-based involves at least one RCT. That said, there is much research about the 3 options that came to mind.

First, since this is a K-12 school, mentoring younger students by older students could be a fun way to engage students and refocus them on learning. I used to run a program where high school students received a little “training” to prepare them, and then were matched with elementary students to help them read, complete assignments, etc. Their weekly visits by Big Buddies only lasted about 30 minutes but were very helpful to the students (Little Buddies), the elementary teachers and for the mentors themselves. It was an opportunity for older students to help little ones with their behavior, value a job well done, to study hard, etc. The other benefit was that the high school students signed a ‘role model’ pledge that said they would not engage in any behaviors that would compromise their status as a mentor — meaning, don't go to any drinking parties. We set up a high school council to deal with infringements but never had to use them in the 7 years we had that program. There are several other options for mentoring students by athletes, by individual classes, etc. and the emphasis can be on building relationships, improving school performance, whatever is needed to create a welcoming classroom climate. Here

is some of the latest research on mentoring: <http://chronicle.umbmentoring.org/category/new-mentoring-research/>

The second thought was about adopting some type of service learning component. In my experience, the strength of adopting a service learning approach in the classroom is that students develop empathy for others and become much more tolerant of their classmates. I also think it's difficult for a teacher to use service learning strategies without modeling these values and creating a climate of sharing and caring.

And finally, is Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. While this process is focused on behaviors, it can be a first step to helping teachers agree upon what will be expected in their school environment — as well as what will happen when there are infringements.

There are some evidence-based programs that help with social skills but are often focused on substance abuse prevention. One excellent program (that requires training and materials that can be expensive) is LifeSkills Training. I don't recommend using the program without training since it is an evidence-based program.

My suggestion is for the principal to investigate the 3 options I pose here to see if one might fit their needs — or perhaps, this information can lead her/him to other options. While the question is about teacher training, all three of these ideas are 'processes' where teachers learn together and make decisions about how their school should look and feel. Hopefully, they become invested and help to make it work."

- (4) "I recommend Second Step. There are also guidelines to integrating Second Step with common core. But that is only a start. At some point over the course of about two years of teaching it is best if Second Step is more integrated into the curriculum. But sometimes it helps to have the curriculum at first for content purposes and then weave Second Step principles into language arts social studies advisories.

As far as having some coaching, I'm a fan of team oriented problem solving because teachers tend to own their answers. Make it a PLC priority and ongoing discussion to build it into the school day!"

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Invitation to listserv participants:

So now let's hear from you!

What do your local schools do to promote the emergence of a positive school and classroom climate?

Share lessons learned. Comments. Recommendations.

Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Featured Set of Center Resources for **>Preventing staff burnout**

Anyone who works in schools knows about burnout. Staggering workloads, major problems, and endless hassles are the name of the game. The many frustrations, large and small, affect staff (and student) morale and mental health. Teachers (and all school personnel) can provide a more positive experience for students, when they feel positive about their own experience (feel valued, feel successful, feel positively related to other staff/students/families).

As with so many problems, if ignored, burnout takes a severe toll. Rather than suffering through it all or just responding with a couple of interventions, efforts to counter staff burnout should be guided by the full range of factors that enable the emergence of a positive school climate (see the resources cited above).

For a sense of the Center's take on understanding and countering staff burnout, see

>*Understanding and Minimizing Staff Burnout* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/burnout/burn1.pdf>

For links to a range of other resources on the topic, see

>*Burnout Prevention* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/burnout.htm>



"... while having too much to do can cause stress, it doesn't necessarily cause burnout... More often, burnout happens when people feel out of control. If employees are working in a chaotic environment where it's not clear who is in control, they can burn out.... Other critical factors that contribute to burnout are a lack of recognition and reward, a lack of community and support in the workplace, or an absence of fairness.... The biggest contributing factor in burnout, however, is a mismatch in values. When there are value problems or conflicts, you see greater instances of burnout...." (Christina Maslach)

THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THE INTERCHANGES BECOME!
Sign-up for the Listserv mailings – email 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/>)



*For information about the

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

See report from the National Summit on the ***Every Student Succeeds Act and Learning Supports: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching to Enhance Equity of Opportunity*** – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/summitreport.pdf> .

And note that our new book detailing the prototypes and related resources is now available.
