

School Practitioner Community of Practice

(A network for sharing & exchange)

August 22, 2018

Discussion: Addressing underlying causes of attendance problems

Links to some Center resources on the topic:

- >**School Attendance: Focusing on Engagement and Re-engagement**
- >**School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies & Practices Going in the Right Direction?**
- >**Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families**
- >**Home involvement, engagement and re-engagement in schools**
- >**Enhancing Home Involvement to Address Barriers to Learning: A Collaborative Process**

Learning from others:

- >**Reducing Chronic Absenteeism under the Every Student Succeeds Act**
- >**One aspect of school attendance is feeling safe at school**
- >**Report of one district's school safety commission recommendations**

Invitation to listserv participants to share perspectives

Links to a few other relevant resources & other topics of concern

Note: Go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla> for links to other Center 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

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).

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>

Discussion topic for exchange

>Addressing underlying causes of attendance problems

To start the exchange, here is an excerpt from a blog by a school social worker.

From: *Using ESSA accountability and school attendance to help students get across the finish line* by Jarod Anderson, Gainesville City Schools, GA

<http://edublog.scholastic.com/post/using-essa-accountability-and-school-attendance-help-students-get-across-finish-line>

According to a report from Future Ed at Georgetown University, "36 states and the District of Columbia are using some form of chronic absenteeism in their accountability formulas." ...

As a school social worker, this was great news for me seeing that I spend a large amount of my time addressing the issues that keep students from coming to school. It just always seemed like common sense to me that school attendance had to be a top priority before focusing on student achievement and success. After all, nothing happens until they show up

Making school attendance an option as an ESSA accountability measure is definitely a step in the right direction. However, now we must go a little deeper to ensure we are providing students with the adequate support they need to make it across the finish line.

Overcoming Barriers to Getting To School

This may surprise many, but chronic absenteeism is not the real issue we are facing. Attendance is only a symptom of a deeper issue. And until you take the time to discover what these "root issues" are that your students are dealing with, you will continue to have attendance issues. Absences simply let you know that a problem exists, but they don't tell you why. It is incumbent that we not only identify the students who are missing school, we must also identify the barriers that are keeping them from getting to school.

From the inception of their school journey in pre-K to crossing the stage graduation night, students will undoubtedly encounter a host of barriers and challenges that if not addressed could often prevent them from achieving in school. Some of those barriers include poverty, homelessness, abuse, bullying, lack of motivation, low reading levels, or a bad relationship with a teacher. ...

The painful reality is that millions of students drop out of school each year because no one knew that they were silently suffering every day.

If we expect to get students across the finish line to graduation, we must find ways to:

- >Quickly identify student barriers encountered in K -12*
- >Provide timely supports and interventions that help address and remove these barriers*
- >Build meaningful and trusting relationships with students*

Getting to the Root of the Matter

Before doctors prescribe medication, they must first try to accurately diagnose the problem. ...

If I encounter three students who all have excessive absences, do I address them all the same? Of course not! It would depend upon the root cause. For example, one student may be homeless, another may be getting bullied at school, and the third may just enjoy skipping with friends. Without discovering the root causes to these students' reasons for missing school, I may take actions that could prove more harmful than helpful. The student missing school due to being bullied needs something totally different than the one who is missing school simply because he or she enjoys skipping with friends.

The point is, a student could be experiencing any number of barriers that cause them to miss school. Not only must we give attention to providing an academic educational experience to our students, we must also identify, address, and ultimately remove the barriers that interfere with them getting that education and making it across the finish line. School attendance has been and always will be one of the best indicators that something is not right with our students. Now that it is officially on the radar, we must transition our conversation from simply identifying who is missing school to understanding why they are missing school and deciding what to do about it.

Once we do this, we will be in the best position to provide our students the support they need to overcome any barrier and make it across the finish line.

Links to some Center resources on the topic

[Besides the following, other relevant resources from the Center and from other sources can be accessed from our Quick Find on attendance at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/attendance.html>]

- >*School Attendance: Focusing on Engagement and Re-engagement*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schoolattend.pdf>
- >*School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies & Practices Going in the Right Direction?*
Reducing school absences is one of the most challenging matters facing schools. In addressing the problem, it is important to begin by exploring two questions: What factors lead to student absences? How can schools more effectively address the problem? This brief provides a quick overview of issues related to school attendance problems and then frames directions for policy and practice.
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/school attendance problems.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/school%20attendance%20problems.pdf)
- >*Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/welcome/welcome.pdf>
- >*Home Involvement, Engagement and Re-engagement in Schools*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/ch6home.pdf>
- >*Enhancing Home Involvement to Address Barriers to Learning: A Collaborative Process*
For schools to significantly enhance home involvement will require (1) broadening the focus beyond thinking only in terms of parents and (2) enhancing the range of ways in which schools connect with primary caretakers. Particular attention must be given to outreaching to those who are reluctant to engage with the school, especially if they have a child who is not doing well. Also, to avoid marginalization and minimize fragmentation, it is essential to embed home involvement interventions into an overall approach for addressing factors interfering with school learning and performance and fully integrate the work into school improvement policy and practice. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/homeinv.pdf>

Learning from others

>Excerpt From: *Reducing Chronic Absenteeism under the Every Student Succeeds Act* (April, 2018)
http://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/files/reducing_chronic_absenteeism_under_the_every_student_succeeds_act.pdf

The scope of attendance problems that schools encounter and the depth and diversity of student needs recommend tailoring intervention strategies. Understanding what is likely to make a child chronically absent or a school likely to have high levels of chronic absenteeism is an essential input to school policies and practices....

Depending upon the scope of a school or a student's needs, leaders can customize strategies and interventions to bolster attendance. Tier 1 strategies can be implemented schoolwide at relatively little cost. (including data programs and communicating about the impact of attendance on student performance.) Tier 2 strategies are more personalized to an individual student and may be more costly, in dedicated staff or staff time. (such as mentoring programs). Tier 3 strategies are for the most severe circumstances, for students who have missed more than 20 percent of school days. Strategies for these include working with social workers, service agencies, and the legal system. As part of the tiered approach, a school can incorporate a variety of programs to boost attendance. In the past several researchers have studied the impact of communication with parents regarding attendance, including parent-to-parent communications, two-way texting between parents and schools, and informational mailings to parents. Communicating the value of school attendance to parents was central to the strategy in each study....

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>Excerpt from: *One aspect of school attendance is feeling safe at school* in the 2017 Indicators of school crime and safety <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018036.pdf>

In 2015, about 5 percent of students ages 12–18 reported that they avoided at least one school activity or class or one or more places in school during the previous school year because they thought someone might attack or harm them.... “Avoided school activities or classes” includes avoiding any (extracurricular) activities, avoiding any classes, and staying home from school...”

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>Report of one district's school safety commission recommendations

City Attorney Mike Feuer released the final version of his School Safety report, with recommendations that the Los Angeles Unified School District upgrade some of its buildings and suspend the practice of using hand-held metal detectors to randomly search students – but not arm teachers or have more armed personnel on campus. The report was issued by the Los Angeles School Safety Blue Ribbon Panel, which Feuer formed in the aftermath of the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on Feb. 14....

The report recommends that the district suspend the practice of "wandering" students with a hand-held metal detector to search for weapons at all middle schools and high schools until it performs a full audit of the program...The report found that of the 385 knives and firearms confiscated at LAUSD schools in 2016-17, a metal detector wand was involved in only five confiscations, and most confiscations happened when students came forward to present information to adults on campus.

Aside from being ineffective, the report said some students found the searches caused a breakdown in trust between students and adults on campus, and that they would be less likely to share information with adults. ...

The report also calls for the establishment of a robust district-wide safe passage to school program; the creation of a high-level district position to coordinate all safety issues; coordination with law enforcement on gang and crime reduction in neighborhoods surrounding schools; creation of a comprehensive safe gun storage project that assures parents know of their legal obligations to keep weapons at home safely stored; an increase in the number of mental health resources on campus including social workers and peer counseling programs; and the creation of a single, easy to navigate, anonymous system of reporting threats, bullying and other dangers to schools.

Links to a few other relevant resources & other topics of concern

- >Writing the Rules: Ensuring Chronic Absenteeism Data Works for Students and Schools https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/REPORT_Ensuring_Chronic_Absenteeism_v6.pdf
- >Reentry Starts Here: A Guide for Youth in Long-Term Juvenile Corrections and Treatment Programs <https://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/251193.pdf>
- >Interventions to Improve Student Mental Health https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2012/RAND_TR1319.pdf
- >Recognizing and Responding to Mood Problems in the Classroom <https://smh-assist.ca/wp-content/uploads/Info-Sheets-Supporting-Minds-Anxiety.pdf>
- >Suicide & Bullying: Preventing Suicide through Collaborative Upstream Interventions http://suicideprevention-icrc-s.org/system/files/rti/18_7_24_CCSD%20BuLLying%20%20Suicide%20Prevention%20strategies.pdf
- >Empirical Studies on the Value of School Counseling <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Careers-Roles/Effectiveness.pdf>
- >Evaluating School Psychological Services <https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-practice-model/nasp-practice-model-implementation-guide/section-iv-evaluating-school-psychological-services-utilizing-the-nasp-practice-model/part-2-systems-level-evaluating-school-psychological-services-delivery-programs>
- >National Evaluation Framework for School Social Work Practice <https://www.sswaa.org/copy-of-school-social-worker-evalua-1>

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Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

What new plans are in place in your local schools to ensure student attendance and a quick response to absentees?

Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Take a couple of minutes to view the new free book:

Improving School Improvement
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

If you missed the following, you can access them and more from the Center's homepage –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

>**The quarterly ejournal for Summer 2018.**

Excerpts from a new, free book.

Online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/news.htm>

Contents:

Part I: Good Schools and Classrooms

Part II: Moving toward Personalized Instruction and Special Assistance

Part III: New Directions for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Part IV. Moving Forward

>**The August *ENEWS*' discussion of:**

Ways to proactively address regular concerns that arise over the school year

Also the 2017 free book on:

Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom & Schoolwide

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

For information about the

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

Recent publication related to the initiative:

>*Transforming Student and Learning Supports:*

Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System –

<https://titles.cognella.com/transforming-student-and-learning-supports-9781516512782.html>

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

For new sign-ups – 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/>)