

## **School Practitioner Community of Practice**

(A network for sharing & exchange)

**September 12, 2018**

### **Topic for Discussion:**

**>Students positive experiences and attitudes sharply drop over their years in school. *What can be done to reverse this trend?***

### **Links to some Center resources on what schools can do to:**

- >Assess and plan ways to enhance student/learning supports**
- >Enhance healthy development and protective factors**
- >Be cautious in screening for problems**

### **Invitation to listserv participants to share perspectives**

### **Learning from School Leaders:**

**>About *how* engagement in learning reduces student problems**

### **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).***

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**For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**For previous postings of community of practice discussions, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>**

## Topic for Discussion

>Students positive experiences and attitudes sharply decline over their years in school. What can be done to reverse this trend?

**H**ere's what students are saying about themselves and others at school:

The following excerpts from recent surveys/reports are intended to stimulate discussion.

(1) A sample of responses from the *Iowa youth survey 2016*

[http://www.iowayouthsurvey.iowa.gov/images/2016\\_State/YYS%202016%20State%20Report.pdf](http://www.iowayouthsurvey.iowa.gov/images/2016_State/YYS%202016%20State%20Report.pdf)

Item	Percent responding they strongly agree		
	6th grade	8th grade	11th grade
>Students in this school respect each other's differences (for example, gender, race, culture, learning differences, sexual orientation, etc.).	51%	36%	24%
>My teachers care about me.	56%	36%	23%
>My teachers notice when I am doing a good job and lets me know about it.	49%	35%	22%
>Adults who work in my school treat students with respect.	64%	44%	27%

(2) From the *California Healthy Kids Survey*

[https://data.calschls.org/resources/Biennial\\_State\\_1517.pdf](https://data.calschls.org/resources/Biennial_State_1517.pdf)

- Research has linked school connectedness with multiple positive academic, social-emotional, and health outcomes. The average percentage of students indicating “strongly agree” across the five School Connectedness items steadily declines as students age, at 28% in 7th grade, 17% in 9th, and 15% in 11<sup>th</sup>....
- Research has shown that when schools (or families or communities) provide three developmental supports—caring adult relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation—students are more likely to report more positive academic, social-emotional, and health outcomes. The overall results suggest that the great majority of students, particularly in high school, do not receive sufficient levels of support. The supports received are lower in high school than in middle school even though the student need for them is arguably higher based on the survey results for connectedness, academic performance, truancy, safety, substance use, and mental health.
  - >Among 7th graders, an average of 32% of students reported “very much true” on the Caring Adult Relationships items ....
  - >Among 9th and 11th graders, the percentages for Caring Adult Relationships was lower than in 7th grade, at 23% and 28%....
- No improvement in Opportunities for Meaningful Participation was evident in any grade and percentages were even lower, at 19% in 7th and 15% in 9th and 11th grades....”

- (3) From *Tracking social emotional development as a district effectiveness measure*  
<http://laschoolreport.com/californias-core-districts-joined-forces-to-bolster-social-emotional-development-but-a-study-of-400000-kids-reveals-gaps-in-learning-a-confidence-crisis-among-middle-school-girls/>

The study ... looked at how social-emotional learning developed from fourth to 12<sup>th</sup> grade....

[Among the findings:]

- Girls' self-confidence plummets as they enter middle school, while white students consistently report higher social emotional learning than their non-white peers....
- While growth-mindset increased, researchers found that social awareness, self-efficacy, and to a smaller extent self-management, decreased as students progressed through school....

One expert reacted to these data by saying "It's important for schools to see if there's anything systemic that could be causing certain subgroups to lag behind their peers in these social-emotional skills.... Some students might internalize biases from their teachers that could cause them to feel like they don't belong or aren't understood. Or those students could be in need of more support in certain social emotional areas...."

### **Related to all this: Students report feeling unhappy**

From the *Center for Disease Control and Prevention Trends in the Youth Risk Assessment Survey* <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/trendsreport.pdf>

In 2017, 31.5% of students had experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in the past year. A significantly higher percentage of female students (41.1%) experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness than male students (21.4%). A significantly higher percentage of Hispanic students (33.7%) experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness than white students (30.2%) or black students (29.2%)....

From *A personal perspective on depression in Latino students*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/latdep.pdf>

It is essential for policy makers to think beyond discrete interventions if they are to ensure equity of opportunity for every student to succeed at school. Given sparse resources, schools must embed their focus on all learning, behavior, and emotional problems into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. And in doing so, they must outreach to the community and weave school and community resources together.

Whatever the problem, schools must include improvements that enhance:

- understanding the nature and scope of the problems manifested by students in terms of the transaction of environmental and personal factors (e.g., both cultural and personal diversity)
- understanding the ways that many problems manifested by different students overlap
- outreach to re-engage those who have disconnected from learning at school
- a comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching that provides personalized instruction and special assistance and does so in ways that are culturally sensitive and that enhance a positive school climate
- sustained engagement by providing a learning environment that maximizes feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to significant others and minimizes threats to such feelings...

## Links to some resources from the UCLA Center on improving what schools can do immediately to reverse these trends

From the perspective of enhancing school climate, we stress that positive school climate emerges, not only from promoting the well-being of students, their families, and staff but also from effectively and efficiently addressing factors interfering with learning and teaching. So, as schools plan ways to do this, we recommend doing more than mainly investing limited resources in programs and initiatives that focus on specific and narrowly defined problems and relatively few students. Continuing along these lines is to pursue a failed strategy. The need is to move toward developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system that promotes healthy development and addresses a wide range of barriers to learning and teaching and re-engages disconnected students and families.

The following sample of resources provides a perspective on and some aides for addressing these matters.

### **(1) Assessing and planning ways to enhance student/learning supports –**

see: *Addressing Barriers to Learning: A Set of Surveys to Map What a School Has and What It Needs* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/surveys/set1.pdf>

This set of surveys covers in-classroom and schoolwide approaches, including: (a) enhancing regular classroom strategies to enable learning, (b) supporting transitions, (c) increasing home and school connections, (d) responding to, and where feasible, preventing school and personal crises, (e) increasing community involvement and support, and (f) facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed. These are conceived along a continuum designed to promote healthy development and prevent problems, respond quickly when problems arise, and assist in treating chronic conditions.

### **(2) Enhancing healthy development and protective factors –**

see, for example, the Quick Finds:

>*Social and Emotional Development* – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102\\_05.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102_05.htm)

>*Motivation, Engagement, Re-engagement* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

>*Resilience and Protective Factors* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/resilience.html>

A note about the concept of resilience – Michael Rutter stresses that the concept

*has as its starting point the recognition that there is huge heterogeneity in people's responses to all manner of environmental adversities. Resilience is an inference based on evidence that some individuals have a better outcome than others who have experienced a comparable level of adversity; moreover, the negative experience may have either a sensitizing effect or a strengthening "steeling" effect in relation to the response to later stress or adversity.*

**You aren't paying attention to me.**

**Are you having trouble hearing?**

**I hear O.K.**

**I'm having trouble listening!**



For a resilience oriented perspective on students' unhappiness, see the discussion of protective factors in *Affect and Mood Related to School Aged Youth* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/affect/affect.pdf>

This resource includes the following excerpt from a literature review and theoretical framework on *Protective Factors for Populations Served by the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families*.

**Protective factors at the *Individual level* are presented as including:**

>*Relational skills*: Relational skills encompass two main components: 1) a youth's ability to form positive bonds and connections (e.g., social competence, being caring, forming positive attachments and prosocial relationships); and 2) interpersonal skills such as communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and self-efficacy in conflict situations.

>*Self-regulation skills*: a youth's ability to manage or control emotions and behaviors. This skill set can include self-mastery, anger management, character, long-term self-control, and emotional intelligence.

>*Problem-solving skills*: Includes general problem-solving skills, self-efficacy in conflict situations, higher daily living scores, decision-making skills, planning skills, adaptive functioning skills and task-oriented coping skills.

>*Involvement in positive activities*: Refers to engagement in and/or achievement in school, extra-curricular activities, employment, training, apprenticeships or military.

**Protective factors at the *Relationship level* are presented as including:**

>*Parenting competencies*: refers to two broad categories of parenting: 1) parenting skills (e.g., parental monitoring and discipline, prenatal care, setting clear standards and developmentally appropriate limits) and 2) positive parent-child interactions (e.g., close relationship between parent and child, sensitive parenting, support, caring).

>*Positive peers*: Refers to friendships with peers, support from friends, or positive peer norms.

>*Caring adult(s)*: This factor most often refers to caring adults beyond the nuclear family, such as mentors, home visitors (especially for pregnant and parenting teens), older extended family members, or individuals in the community.

**Protective factors at the *Community level* are presented as including:**

>Positive community environment: refers to neighborhood advantage or quality, religious service attendance, living in a safe and higher quality environment, a caring community, social cohesion, and positive community norms.

>Positive school environment: defined as the existence of supportive programming in schools.

>Economic opportunities: Refers to household income and socioeconomic status; a youth's self-perceived resources; employment, apprenticeship, coursework and/or military involvement; and placement in a foster care setting (from a poor setting). ...”

**(3) Being cautious in screening for problems**

Schools want to play a responsible role in identifying students who need special assistance. As the data cited above suggest, many student express negative feelings about school and themselves. The danger in screening for problems is that commonplace (and widespread) feelings of unhappiness, sadness, anxiety, etc. are seen as an indication of psychopathology (e.g., clinical depression, anxiety disorders).

See:

>*Screening Mental Health Problems in Schools*

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

>*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>

Below is an excerpt from this last document:

Depression differs from just experiencing commonplace, temporary, emotional states such as feelings of sadness or “the blues.” The reality is that many people are unhappy and emotionally upset for significant periods of time; this is certainly the case for a large proportion of adolescents. But only a small percent of individuals are clinically depressed.

...In discussing screening in general, the Task Force cautions about positive findings stemming from first level screening. They state: “A positive result on an initial screening test does not necessarily indicate the need for treatment.”...

Continuous policy conflicts arise over whether schools should play a formal, institutionalized role in screening for mental health problems. Issues arise around:

- >Is universal first level screening for behavior and emotional problems an appropriate role for schools to play?
- >If schools do first level screening, what procedures are appropriate and who should do it?
- >Given the screening will produce false positives, won't this collude with practices that label commonplace adolescent problems as mental illness?
- >By focusing mainly on screening individuals, are schools avoiding the reality that some students' problems are the product of bad environmental conditions (at school, home, in the neighborhood).
- >Given the various costs of school-wide screening, what is the evidence that the benefits will outweigh costs? Will school screening do more harm than good?
- >Concerns also arise about parental consent, privacy and confidentiality protections, staff qualifications, negative consequences of monitoring (especially for false positive identifications), and access and availability of appropriate assistance....

For schools to play a role in supporting students who manifest warning signs schools must be alert to students who are not doing well. And there are many resources available to guide school staff in monitoring for warning signs as part of their regular encounters with students...

However, schools must do more than identify problems. They must have an intervention system in place to address learning, behavior, and emotional problems in ways that enhance equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond. Such a system includes pursuing changes in the school environment that create unhappy students as well as providing a comprehensive set of student and learning supports.

That intervention system needs to encompass (a) personalized instruction, accommodations, and special assistance in regular classrooms, (b) supports that facilitate transitions, (c) practices that increase connections with families, (d) strategies for responding to and, where feasible, preventing school and personal crisis and traumatic events, (e) outreach to increase community involvement, and (f) a focus on facilitating student and family access to effective services and specialized assistance as needed....

## Invitation to Listserv Participants

***Let us hear whatever you want to share  
about the above or other related matters!!***

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

## Learning from School Leaders:

### >About how engagement in learning reduces student problems

Excerpt from: *The relationship between student behavior and engagement*

<http://exclusive.multibriefs.com/content/the-relationship-between-student-behavior-and-engagement/education>

*Over the last 10 years as a school administrator, I have seen a dramatic decline in classroom disruptions and general student misbehavior that I believe is correlated to increased student engagement in school.... My staff quickly discovered that the more we engaged in student-centered, project-based, and hands-on activities in the classroom, the more students would be engaged and less likely to act out. Additionally, we discovered that adding choice and voice options for students continued to reverse the trend of student disengagement.*

*We stopped offering students the choice to stay in class or leave when there was a behavior problem. We found other ways to support them when they were disengaged. Instead of asking teachers to send disruptive students out to receive supports, we brought the supports to the student in the classroom. We call these supports "push ins," and they were adults who didn't have teaching roles such as social workers, deans, and academic advisers. A new cycle was formed where students stayed in class and found ways to re-engage in their learning. The model shows promise and may serve as inspiration for other school leaders looking to change the culture at their school.*

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

>*Examining the Unanticipated Adverse Consequences of Youth Suicide Prevention Strategies: A Literature Review with Recommendations for Prevention Programs*

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/sltb.12492>

>*School Safety Task Force Report (PA)*

<https://www.governor.pa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/20180827-Gov-Office-School-Safety-Report-2018.pdf>

>*Substance Abuse and Mental Health: What's a School to Do?*

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

>*Behavioral Health Conditions in Children and Youth Exposed to Natural Disasters*

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/srb-childrenyouth-8-22-18.pdf>

>*Evidence Based Practices Resource Center* <https://www.samhsa.gov/ebp-resource-center>

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For information about the

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

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## **Moving Forward with School Improvement this Year**

Our Center at UCLA has had many requests from across the country for updated, in-depth resources to help schools move forward in addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

In response, over the past year we have pulled together three small books to be shared with state and district superintendents; principals; board members; state, district and school staff; and all other concerned parties. To ensure free and immediate access, two of the books can be downloaded from our Center's website. See

>Improving School Improvement

>Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide

Both can be readily accessed at:

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving\\_school\\_improvement.html](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)

The third book has been published by Cognella. See

>Transforming Student and Learning Supports:

Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System

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

Please take steps to share this information with everyone you think is concerned about moving school improvement forward.

And please let us know about anything you see happening to transform student and learning supports.

Finally, if anyone is thinking about increasing the capacity of a district or school with respect to developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, let them know we offer free distance coaching  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/coach.pdf> .

**Send all comments, info, and requests to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**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/> )**