## School Practitioner Community of Practice
### (A network for sharing & exchange)
**November 13, 2019**

**Topics for discussion –**

>**About strengthening student and staff connections at school**

**What colleagues are sharing**

**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 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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## Topic for Discussion –

>**About strengthening student and staff connections at school**

**Request from the field:** I am searching for something "different" with some nuance. Because the research is clear that connectedness to adults inside the schoolhouse can and does increase student well-being, academic performance, as well as decrease risk behaviors, I am searching for some examples of policies that encourage and perhaps even codify professional connections between students and teachers, and/or between adults? Do you have anything like this?

**Center Response:** This is a central concern in the discussion about enhancing school climate. While the adults at many elementary schools and small schools are relatively successful in connecting with students and each other, the challenges at middle/high and large schools can be quite challenging. While the essence of positive connections involves what is known about interpersonal relationships, the ultimate aim at schools is to establish and maintain appropriate *working* relationships and doing so with *all* staff, as well as between staff and students.

As with any interpersonal relationship, a positive working relationship requires mutual respect and open communication; a *warm* working relationship requires mutual caring and understanding. Providing valued options, a meaningful role in decision making, and a supportive infrastructure for collaboration are significant facets in developing working relationships. One key is finding enough time to engage in meaningful dialogues about the work.

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As Andy Hargreaves has cogently noted: In schools, the way to relieve *the uncertainty and open-endedness in teaching" is to create "communities of colleagues who work collaboratively [in cultures of shared learning and positive risk-taking] to set their own professional standards and limits, while still remaining committed to continuous improvement. Such communities can also bring together the professional and personal lives of teachers in a way that supports growth and allows problems to be discussed without fear of disapproval or punishment .*

Of course, this applies to student-staff relationships as well, especially with respect to students who are manifesting problems.

And more than teachers are involved. All the adults at a school need to feel connected to each other and to the students. In this respect, we have stressed that support staff often can play a role in establishing relationships with students who have difficulty connecting with or have disconnected from teachers. They can meet with such students and then facilitate class coverage to allow teacher one to one time with students. They also can help mediate staff conflicts.

Center resources cited below provide some recommendations for addressing these challenges.

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

>*Working Relationships* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/workrel.pdf

To see how students experience their relationships with adults at school, you might want to use the following questions from the California Healthy Kids Survey
https://calschls.org/docs/state_es_scrc_1819.pdf

*School Connectedness*
   • Do you feel close to people at school?
   • Are you happy to be at this school?
   • Do you feel like you are part of this school?
   • Do teachers treat students fairly at school?
   • Do you feel safe at school?

*Caring Relationships*
   • Do the teachers and other grown-ups at school care about you?

   • Do the teachers and other grown-ups at school listen when you have something to say?

   • Do the teachers and other grown-ups at school make an effort to get to know you?"

And here's a resource from our Center on *Interviewing to Obtain a Student's View* –
   http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/interviewtools.pdf

More comprehensively, we stress that working relationships need to be address within the context of school improvement. See:

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

>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
   http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

**For additional perspectives from around the country about *school connectiveness*, see the excerpts appended at the end of this Practitioner.**

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**Please let us hear from you!**

**Share your perspective about
promoting positive student/adult relationships in school.**

**And send them and any other comments to** Ltaylor@ucla.edu
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## Links to a few other relevant resources & other topics of concern

*The Economic Case for the Prevention of Mental Illness*
https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040617-013629

*Rethinking MTSS to Better Address Barriers to Learning*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/fall19.pdf

*Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence*
https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/usss-analysis-of-targeted-school-violence.pdf

*How Can We Help Kids With Transitions?*
https://childmind.org/article/how-can-we-help-kids-with-transitions/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Helping%20Kids%20With%20Transitions&utm_campaign=Weekly-11-05-19

*Preparing for floods at K12 schools and districts*
https://rems.ed.gov/docs/K12FloodFactSheet_508C.pdf

*To what degree is student engagement a problem?*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/oct19.pdf

*Teacher recruitment and retention*
https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-teacher-recruitment-and-retention/

*Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Leveraging the Best Available Evidence*
https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/preventingACES-508.pdf

*Education Could Help States Improve Educational Stability for Youth in Foster Care*
https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/701531.pdf

*About Mapping and Enhancing Learning Supports*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/november19.pdf

*Can We Measure Classroom Supports for Social-Emotional Learning?*
https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/can-we-measure-classroom-supports-sel?utm_source=PACE+All&utm_campaign=0ad6cf2202-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_08_29_05_32_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_9f1af6b121-0ad6cf2202-522725185

*How Well Do State Legislatures Focus on Improving School Efforts to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching & Re engage Disconnected Students?*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Legisanal.pdf

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


## A Few Upcoming Webinars:

11/14 - The Investment case for PD education, and equity
11/14 - Healthy Schools Toolkit
11/19 - Career Exploration and Development with a Focus on Implicit Bias
11/19 - Understanding Doubled up
11/21 - School Selection Rights
11/26 - Student and Families' Attitudes about Career Technical Education
12/3 -  Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Students Experiencing Homelessness
12/11 - Paving the Way to College for Students Experiencing Homelessness
12/18 -  Emotional Poverty in All Demographics: How to Reduce Anger, Anxiety, and Violence
            in the Classroom
12/19 - Determining Eligibility for Mckinney-Vento Rights and Services
1/8/20 - Absenteeism and Truancy: What Works in Schools and What Doesn't?

**For links to register to the above and for other relevant webinars, see**
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm

Additional perspectives from around the country re: School Connectiveness:

(1) Excerpts from

>*School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth* –
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness.pdf

Adult Support According to research by Blum and colleagues, children and adolescents' beliefs about themselves and their abilities are shaped by the extent to which they perceive that the adults in their lives care about them and are involved in their lives. Children and adolescents who feel supported by important adults in their lives are likely to be more engaged in school and learning. In the school setting, students feel supported and cared for when they see school staff dedicating their time, interest, attention, and emotional support to them. Students need to feel that adults care about them as individuals as well as about their academic achievement. Smaller schools may encourage more personal relationships among students and staff and allow for personalized learning. Schools can form schools within-a-school or create multidisciplinary teams of teachers in which a small number of teachers know each student and can ensure that every student has an identified advisor. ...

Create trusting and caring relationships that promote open communication among administrators, teachers, staff, students, families, and communities.

a. Consider structuring the school so that teachers stay with the same students for 3 years in elementary and middle school and 2 or more years in high school. This can provide better continuity in learning and might allow the development of stronger teacher—student relationships.

b. Allow students and their parents to use the school building and property outside of school hours for recreational or health promotion programs. This can increase their feeling of being part of the school community.

c. Apply reasonable and consistent disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon by students and staff and are fairly enforced.

d. Hold school-wide activities that give students opportunities to learn about different cultures, people with disabilities, and topics such as arts or sports. This will increase students'' respect for diversity and form connections among students. Increasing understanding of similarities and differences can engender respect.

e. Provide opportunities for students of all achievement levels to interact with one another and develop friendships, promote teamwork, and lessen hierarchical divisions between older and younger students.

f. Create opportunities for students to work in partnership with adults in helping roles. For example, service learning opportunities enable students to connect with adults in the community (e.g., field trips, community volunteer events, internships).60 Involve students in activities that traditionally involved only adults (e.g., parent—teacher conferences, curriculum selection committees, school health teams).

g. Have principals, teachers, and other school staff commit to and model respectful behavior toward each other.

h. Challenge staff to greet each student by name

i. Encourage school staff to make a concerted effort to reach out to students who may be experiencing academic or social issues and get to know them, opening up the possibility for stronger relationships with those students.

j. Ensure that school staff members have an expert (e.g., school counselor, school psychologist) they can consult with about student issues they feel are beyond their expertise, and to whom they can refer students who need assistance they are not qualified to provide.

k. Use a variety of methods to communicate and promote expectations, values, and group norms that support positive health and academic behaviors. Communications can be addressed to students, school staff, families, and members of the community through a variety of channels such as school assemblies, newsletters, or a school Web site...."

(2) From ***Best Practices of Effective Schools***

Studies have verified that when students feel connected to at least one significant adult in their education they experience greater engagement and satisfaction with school. Students report that they learn more, attend school more often, and perform better academically.  Adult support should come from parents, teachers, teachers' aides, counselors, and school principals, among others....

In order for teachers to better connect with their students, teachers must increase interpersonal connectedness in their classrooms. Connected teachers are welcoming, able to identify students' needs and potential, respectful of students'' input, and engaged in each student's successes. These teachers are fair and supportive and create a caring, structured environment with high and clear expectations.

## STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE STUDENT/TEACHER CONNECTEDNESS

•• Review students' cumulative files and use that information to support the students.

•• Assign academic work that encourages students to talk about themselves, such as creating an autobiography, developing portfolios, or writing essays or poems about topics that are important to them.

•• Have a regular time each day or week to share thoughts and concerns.

•• Ask questions only when you can devote time to listen to the answers.

•• Continually diagnose students' learning strengths and weaknesses.

•• Schedule times to be available to students and parents outside of class throughout the year.

•• Welcome new students and families and make a special effort to connect with them.

•• Treat students with respect by giving public compliments and private criticism.

•• Empathize with and coach students when they face problems.

•• Elicit and act on students' recommendations for activities that occur in class.

•• Maintain avenues for private communication, such as the "student to teacher mailbox" where students can send confidential notes to the teacher.

•• During class, minimize "teacher talk" time and increase "student talk" time by incorporating peer review, group work and student-to-student discussions.

•• Set a goal to highlight positive student contributions daily so that students know you notice their positive attributes.

•• Give students chances to correct their mistakes to show that you have faith in their capabilities

•• Develop family ties. Communicate regularly with families regarding students' successes and challenges. Solicit shared problem-solving and celebration. ..."

(3) from the Appleton Area School District

School Connectedness is the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. Students are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors and succeed academically when they feel connected to school.

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health looked at the impact of protective factors on adolescent health and well-being among more than 36,000 7th—12th grade students. The study found that family, school, and individual factors such as school connectedness, parent-family connectedness, high parental expectations for academic achievement, and the adolescent''s level of involvement in religious activities and perceived importance of religion and prayer were protective against a range of adverse behaviors.

Research has also demonstrated a strong relationship between school connectedness and educational outcomes, including school attendance; staying in school longer; and higher grades and classroom test scores. In turn, students who do well academically are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.

### What are the factors that can increase School Connectedness?

*Adult Support* – School staff can dedicate their time, interest, attention, and emotional support to students.

*Belonging to a Positive Peer Group* – A stable network of peers can improve student perceptions of school.

*Commitment to Education* – Believing that school is important to their future, and perceiving that the adults in school are invested in their education, can get students engaged in their own learning and involved in school activities.

*School Environment* – The physical environment and psychosocial climate can set the stage for positive student perceptions of school.

## What do AASD schools and staff do to encourage and foster School Connectedness?

> *DOTS - Depending On Teachers and Staff* – The DOTS interactive process gives school staff a visual picture of the relationships they have with the students in their school. This staff development opportunity builds community among building staff and offers an opportunity to ensure every student feels connected and can learn in an environment of safety and trust.

>*Kindergarten/New Family Orientation Night* – Many of our schools host a night for parents of incoming Kindergarten students and new families to learn more about our school, our routines, and opportunities for involvement with our PTO. All families tour the school inside and out with a special emphasis on the routines in each of the areas.

>*Link Crew* – Link Crew is a program that provides freshmen students a safe and welcoming transition into high school introduced and led by Junior and Senior year students. Link Crew provides the freshmen on outlet for "how things are done" from a student's perspective. Older students are able to create relationships and shape the culture that all are accepted into the school family. All Link Crew activities support the smaller learning communities as well as helping the freshman students adjust to the new larger environment.

>*Northward Bound* – The Northward Bound program at Appleton North is targeted primarily at Sophomore students that have struggled in the regular academic setting for their core courses. The goal of the program is to help students find the best pathway for their success by working in smaller classes on academics and community connections.

>*School Counselor Connections with New Students* – AASD guidance counselors provide ongoing support for new students by meeting with them and talking about how their transition is going.

>*Smaller Learning Community (SLC)* – One of the cornerstones to the continuous school improvement efforts at Appleton North is to continue developing more personal connections within their large high school. Five years ago, they piloted a Smaller Learning Community (SLC) at the freshmen level. The premise of SLC's is to create a team structure in which a group of students share the same teachers. Each team of content teachers will have a structured, common planning time in order to better address the academic, developmental, social, and personal needs of freshmen students. This is especially critical during transition periods, such as going from middle to high school.

>*Staff Mentoring Program* – Students who are both behind grade level in reading and who are in need of social/emotional support have been identified to pair up with interested staff members to build positive relationships within the school environment in various AASD schools.

>*Student Ambassador Program* – Students are identified in each of the classrooms to serve as ambassadors for new students. Ambassadors meet with the new students on their first day and are responsible for touring them around the school, showing them the routines for recess/lunch/etc. and to sit with or play with them during lunch and recess.

>*Terror Time* – Terror Time is an opportunity for Highlands/Odyssey students to have lunch with several Appleton West High School students who have experienced some of the challenges our students face. The West students offer our elementary students friendship and acceptance, while they provide positive role models for resiliency and grit. Highlands/Odyssey students are recommended to Terror Time by Highlands/Odyssey teaching staff and administrators. Terror Time is held two days per month and is supervised a District Culturally Responsive Practices Coordinator."

(4) ***Improving Students' Relationships with Teachers to Provide Essential Supports for Learning***
https://www.apa.org/education/k12/relationships
An interactive resource from the American Psychological Association

(5) ***Boundary Training: Promoting Healthy Adult-Student Relationships***
https://www.aassa.com/uploaded/Educational_Research/Child_Protection/UE_ISN_boundary_training_tm.pdf

> *Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;*
> *transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to*
> *enabling equity of opportunity, promoting whole child development,*
> *and enhancing school climate.*

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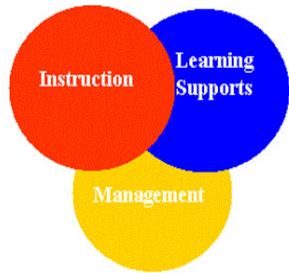
For information about the

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

Also online are two related free books

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

*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

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**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/ )**