



**School Practitioner  
Listserv**



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

**November 9, 2015**

**Request from a Colleague:**

**>Need suggestions for promoting systemic changes to  
enhance equity of opportunity for all students to succeed**

**>Center Response**

**>Request to listserv participants**

**Featured Center Resources:**

**>Aids for creating changes in education systems**

**Perspective from a teacher on climate for learning in schools**

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**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](mailto: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 2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports,\* this community of practice network has expanded in number of participants and topics discussed.\* The thematic emphasis is on (1) daily concerns confronting those working in and with schools, (2) the transformation of student and learning supports, and (3) promoting whole child development and positive school climate.**

**R**equ<sup>est</sup>: “We are working on strategies for schools to become more cohesive and collaborative in their approach to educating students, particularly those with disabilities. Our hope is to give educators in other districts ideas for how they might start changing their systems and approaches to better serve all students. What is your advice for initiating a change of hearts and minds; essentially, how to you get people on board for this kind of long, sustained effort when there is no immediate consequence to not changing? For these kinds of changes to happen, a school system must change from the traditional culture of independence to one of interdependence, with everyone redefining him and herself as a team player. What can be done to encourage this kind of shift in culture/climate? Often school leaders have to work with staff and community members who are not happy about the direction they’re being asked to take. In many cases, these leaders have to make a decision that they know will displease someone they’re trying to serve—whether parents or teachers. What advice do you give for holding onto a vision and staying the course, even in the face of resistance and anger.”

### **C**enter Response:

What you are describing in the first of four phases of systemic change: a phase for *creating readiness, commitment, and engagement* – increasing a climate/culture for change through enhancing the motivation and capability of a critical mass of all involved.

New initiatives often spend too little time creating readiness for change. All those involved must perceive proposed changes in ways that make them feel they are valued contributors to a collective identity, destiny, and vision.

From the perspective of intrinsic motivation theory, change must be facilitated in ways that enhance participants’ feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness with and commitment to each other.

Specific planning for creating readiness, commitment, and engagement is critical. With this in mind, the system change literature stresses the following as fundamental conditions to focus on in enhancing readiness:

- a high level of policy commitment that is translated into appropriate resources, including space, budget, time, dedicated, respected, and accountable leadership and champions, and social marketing;
- open and effective communication about goals and procedures, including processes for countering uninformed gossip;
- incentives for change, such as intrinsically valued outcomes, expectations for success, recognition, and rewards and protections for when problems arise;
- procedural options from which those expected to implement change can select the ones they see as most workable;
- systemic change mechanisms that are perceived as likely to improve organizational health, enhance a sense of community, and empower stakeholders;
- change agents who are perceived as pragmatic – maintaining ideals while embracing practical solutions;
- formal and flexible plans for accomplishing change in stages and with realistic timelines;
- development of formal agreements (with provision for revisions);
- procedures for engaging stakeholders who enter the system after the efforts are underway

In our experience, the complexity of communication means it is almost always the case that initial introductory presentations are only partially understood. This interferes with creating informed readiness. Planning for creating readiness, commitment, and engagement must account for a variety of strategies to deepen understanding and counter misinterpretations of intended changes. It is essential to do this early to minimize the problems that will arise from uninformed “grape vine” gossip. Of particular importance is ensuring understanding and commitment to the essential elements

that must be implemented and sustained if substantive, rather than cosmetic, change is to emerge. Furthermore, given the inevitability of staff changes, a plan for bringing newcomers up to speed is vital.

A re-cultured school system is not a beginning step, it is an end product. Positive or negative culture/climate shifts result from the way systemic change is carried out and how effective the changes are in producing changes that are valued by the majority at the affected schools. To these ends, it takes leadership that

- >lays out a positive vision,
- >operationalizes the vision into a prototype design,
- >works with key leaders in ways that engage them as champions for the proposed changes,
- >ensures a high level of policy commitment that is translated into appropriate resources, including space, budget, time,
- >openly and effectively communicates about goals and procedures using social marketing processes and actively countering uninformed gossip,
- >ensures incentives for change, emphasizing intrinsically valued outcomes, expectations for success, recognition, and rewards and protections for when problems arise,
- >offers procedural options from which those expected to implement change can select the ones they see as most workable,
- >develops systemic change mechanisms that are perceived as likely to improve organizational health, enhance a sense of community, and empower all involved,
- >introduces change agents in ways that they will be perceived as pragmatic – maintaining ideals while embracing practical solutions,
- >provides formal and flexible plans for accomplishing change in stages and with realistic timelines,
- >ensures that all who enter the system after the efforts are underway are informed and engaged.

**R** **quest to listserv participants:** What is your experience and suggestions with respect to promoting transformative and substantive systemic change at schools, districts, and state departments to improve equity of opportunity for all students to succeed? Send your comments and ideas to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu) .

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**F** **eatured set of center resources:**

**>Aids for creating changes in education systems**

For resources and ideas about creating the conditions to move educational systems forward, see our online clearinghouse Quick Find on System Change – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/systemicchange.html>

Center Quick Finds provide direct links to resources from a range of organizations. Below are some of Center resources that focus specifically on the problem of systemic change for transforming student and learning supports and are listed in the above Quick Find:

- >*Making It Happen* -- Part III of the book "Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System" – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf>

- >Enhancing readiness, commitment, and engagement for transforming learning supports, an ongoing process – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/readiness.pdf>
- >First Steps in Transforming Student and Learning Supports into a Unified and Comprehensive System to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/1ststeps.pdf>
- >Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School: Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf>
- >Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, & Equitable System of Learning Supports: First Steps for Superintendents Who Want to Get Started – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/superstart.pdf>

Also, see the Center’s System Change Toolkit – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

Because of the increasing focus on the “implementation problem,” there is a rapidly growing body of resources. For example, among the many resources from others that can be linked to from the Quick Find are:

- >The National Implementation Research Network – <http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/project-portfolio>
- >Willing, Able -> Ready: Basics and Policy Implications of Readiness as a Key Component for Scaling up Implementation of Evidence-Based Interventions – <http://aspe.hhs.gov/report/willing-able-ready-basics-and-policy-implications-readiness-key-component-scaling-implementation-evidence-based-interventions/about-issue-brief>

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## **P**erspective from a teacher on climate for learning in schools

Excerpt from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2015/10/12/what-the-increasingly-oppressive-e-climate-in-many-schools-is-doing-to-kids/>

In a blog, a former teacher who now trains and coaches teachers, wrote:

### ***What the increasingly oppressive climate in many schools is doing to kids***

“...I was a classroom teacher for eight years before taking a break to stay home with my children. When I returned to the education field a couple of years later, it was in a different capacity than before. I began training and coaching teachers, as well as working with administrators to promote best practices on their campuses. This role shift has given me a different perspective on an environment which was as familiar to me as my own skin, and it continues to be eye-opening in a number of ways

Out of this experience, a question began to bubble up inside of me and has continued to swell so that I can no longer ignore it. That question is this: *When did we start running elementary schools like prisons?*

When did it become both accepted and routine to address 5-year-olds (and 6- and 7-year-olds) with barking orders instead of kind, encouraging words? Was it really that long ago that our own kindergarten and first-grade classrooms were filled with the sounds of nursery rhymes, laughter and children at play? Is the world today really so different than it was 20 or even 15 years ago that it warrants a new, harsher brand of education?...

I suspect that one culprit, among others, is the increased importance placed on standardized testing in recent years. It is undeniable that teachers at all grade levels feel mounting pressure due to high-stakes testing, even if they do not teach in a testing grade. Time spent in transitions to and from the cafeteria, on bathroom breaks, and at recess is seen as precious, wasted minutes that could have been used in classroom instruction. There is no time for niceties or even, in some cases, common courtesy. The clock is ticking. The pressure is on.

And the truth is that the business of teaching young children “soft skills” like cooperation, empathy and time management, is a slow business, one that cannot be rushed and commanded to spring forth on demand. And one that, for better or worse, cannot be quantified on a Scantron form....

But another question must then be asked: *What is this increasingly oppressive climate doing to our kids?*

What are the lasting effects of students who are expected to walk the hallways with their hands clasped behind their backs, their mouths filled with a “bubble” of air to prevent them from making the slightest of sounds? What becomes of 4-year-olds who are forced to sit with their elbows on their knees and their eyes on the ground as they wait for their classmates to use the restroom? What do we really teach our children when we punish them for speaking back to us, or for speaking at all? When they are shamed in front of their classmates for not being able to follow directions that are inappropriate for their age group to begin with? When we admonish them for not knowing how ... I can tell you what the answer is as I see it, as a teacher, a mentor, an administrator and a mother.

The simple answer is that their spirits are crushed. Their innate love for learning is stomped out at the first sign that they have fallen out of step, or colored outside the lines, or raised their voice.

So they learn not to fall out of step, even if a magical discovery is just around the corner.

They don't color outside the lines, even if it means they fail to explore a world that exists beyond thin, black borders.

They can't raise their voice, even if an injustice is happening right before their eyes, not even if it is happening to them.

Why? Because the cost is too high. The need for approval by their teachers and peers is too strong. The punishment, for even the most minor of infractions, is so severe that they will do anything to avoid it, at the cost of shutting down curiosity and creativity and a sense of justice....

Some of them will succeed in spite of this, while others will believe it as truth and begin to live it as a result. And our society ultimately pays the price of order and conformity at all cost.

But at least our children will have learned to walk the halls quietly.”

***THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE BECOMES!***

**Send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**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 to *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>)**

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\*For information about the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

***Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to enabling equity of opportunity and promoting whole child development***

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