

## School Practitioner Community of Practice

(A network for sharing & exchange)

December 11, 2019

### Topics for discussion –

>**Should legislation for mental health in schools emphasize using school staff or community mental health providers?**

### 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](mailto: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 –

>**Should legislation for mental health in schools emphasize using school staff or community mental health providers?**

We received the following comment in response to our Center's focus on how state legislators address concerns related to mental health in schools.

The term Mental Health in Schools leaves lots of questions. I have been in education as a SPED teacher and administrator for over 50 years and also on a Mental Health Center Board for 40 years. I would hope any legislation would emphasize agreements with area Mental Health Centers rather than Schools hiring mental health staff. Staff hired by schools tend to get lost in the school environment. Staff hired by Mental Health Centers continue to have supervision by the Center staff and maintain a professional status. Schools in my area have limited understanding of why a therapist can't "fix" clients and in a very short time. However, the Center in our 7 Counties does have staff in each of our Districts and a very good relationship with school staff. We have worked on that all of the years I have been on the Board.

**Center Comments:** From our perspective, the central question about mental health in schools is how to embed it into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system at schools for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students. And the central policy question is how to stop all the ad hoc and piecemeal approaches and establish such a system as a primary component of school improvement.

Over the last 25 years, we have discussed the implications for enhancing the roles and functions of all student/learning support staff as they strive to create equity of opportunity for all students and improve school climate.. Here are a few examples:

- >*Rethinking School Psychology*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/41%20rethinking%20school%20psychology.pdf>
- >*School Counselors and School Reform: New Directions*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/37%20school%20counselors%20and%20school%20reform.pdf>
- >*Restructuring Education Support Services and Integrating Community Resources: Beyond the Full Service School Model*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/04%20restricturing%20education%20support%20services%20and%20integrating%20community.pdf>
- >*Why School-owned Student Support Staff are So Important*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/school-ownedstudentsupportstaff.pdf>
- >*New Directions for Student Support: Rethinking Student Support to Enable Students to Learn and Schools to Teach*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentsupport/Toolkit/rethinkingstudsupport.pdf>
- >*Framing New Directions for School Counselors, Psychologists, & Social Workers*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/report/framingnewdir.pdf>
- >*Call to Action: Student Support Staff: Moving in New Directions through School Improvement* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/calltoactionreport.pdf>
- >*Mental Health in Schools: New Roles for School Nurses*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/nurses/unit1.pdf>
- >*School-Community Partnerships: A Guide*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/guides/schoolcomm.pdf>

**We sent the comment to a number of colleagues working in schools and here is a sample of what they said:**

- (1) The main concern I have for legislation is creating another "stand-alone" requirement for schools. When that occurs, implementation of quality services is difficult at best. As this person rightly pointed out, many times school staff don't understand what mental health professionals do and have unrealistic expectations of how students can be helped in the short term. (And, this is with positive relationships that currently exist in their districts.) Understanding can be enhanced when mental health supports are integrated into a comprehensive system of learning supports. More school staff are involved and can become more sensitive to the general well-being of students. They tend to develop a better understanding of what is needed to support learning and how supports can be woven together to maximize benefits for students.

I'm glad to hear that relationships between mental health services and districts in this person's area are positive. It sounds like this is the result of many years of hard work. Unfortunately, many districts have not taken such a view of mental health while others think it's not their job, to say nothing of those rural areas that have no services at all. These relationships are critical to providing quality services.

My belief is that any legislation must include or allow for such positive relationships to collaborate effectively for the benefit of students- not just co-exist in the same building/district. The best way I know to do this is to integrate mental health into a comprehensive system of learning supports.

- (2) While we are not opposed to LEAs contracting with community mental health agencies we certainly would not promote that model as a legislative priority like the commenter suggested. Adequately staffed schools is the first step and then definitely embedding services into a unified, comprehensive & equitable system to ensure the disjointed, piecemeal practices are at a minimum or eliminated would be the goal. That's not to say there is no role for the community providers but it would need to address the specific needs of specific schools and ideally be done with solid coordination from a school-based employer and not the colocation of services that we see in many short-cycled, grant-funded scenarios.
- (3) I agree that the term "mental health in schools" is often a misleading term. Certainly there are many students who are in need of therapeutic services to address such issues as depression, thoughts of suicide, intense anxiety, etc. We are all aware that only a small percentage of children and youth are getting the the mental health and behavioral health services that they need ... somewhere between 6-13%. I have always believed that a student with mental health or behavioral health concerns will be helped at the school, through the school, or not at all. But it is the totality of experience that a student has in school can have either a "therapeutic" or "counter therapeutic" effect. Therefore, in my work, I have always tried to keep my eye on the bigger picture of how the opportunities, services and supports that the school offers can be of assistance to the student, those daily experiences and interactions that the student has throughout the school day, in the classroom, in the lunch room, in the yard, etc..It is the milieu of the school, the climate and culture of the school, much like the Center has said many times, that can support or detract from the assistance a student might need.

Being employed by a school district can allow pupil personnel workers to become fully integrated into the school where they can influence the entire school community, and help to make the school a "therapeutic" tool to support the overall growth and development of all of the students. Of course this perspective is held by special people with a broad vision of their role. A good school psychologist, school social worker or school counselor can have a profound influence on the entire school environment. My experience with school mental or behavioral health personnel either based at or coming into the school on a regular basis is that they are often marginalized and rarely become integrated into the entire fabric of the school

There are some students who need intensive outpatient treatment, day treatment, longer term therapy and maybe even hospitalization, often with medication monitoring. These simply cannot be provided in a school setting. If the student has insurance or some other way to obtain needed services, I work to "bridge them" to those services. If they do not have access to services for whatever reason, our CARE team (or multi-disciplinary team) can work together to create a full package of services that may well include individual clinical work with a student, but not in isolation. It is usually best if an intern or clinician keep this work relatively short until that full package of care can be designed and implemented, using the milieu of the school, the teachers, staff and other students to the maximum degree possible.

I have concerns that many "mental health" agencies and clinicians coming into our schools only want to work with Medi-cal eligible students so they can bill for their services. While we all have to earn our nickel somehow, I feel this is discriminatory and unfair to other students who do not have such eligibility but who might profit from the services.

In any case, I don't think it is an either/or, and in the best of worlds, school employed personnel are working as a team with others from outside agencies. We all have a perspective based on our training and experience that, when joined with others, can be very powerful, and can avoid duplication of very limited resources. ...mental health in schools is a very complex and multifaceted undertaking....

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**Please let us hear from you**

**Share your perspective about this issue!**

**And send them and any other comments to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

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

*10 Tips for Teaching the Psychological First Aid Model for K-12 Education Agencies*  
[https://rems.ed.gov/Docs/PFA\\_10\\_Tips\\_508C.pdf?utm\\_content=&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_name=&utm\\_source=govdelivery&utm\\_term=](https://rems.ed.gov/Docs/PFA_10_Tips_508C.pdf?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=)

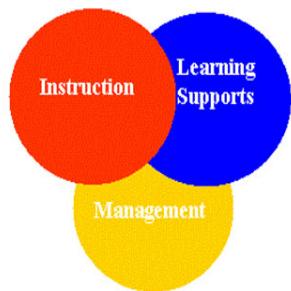
*Connecting Students to Mental Health Care Through Telehealth Technology*  
<https://ednote.ecs.org/connecting-students-to-mental-health-care-through-telehealth-technology/>

*Virtual Healthy School* – apps for mobile devices from CDC  
[https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/vhs/index.html?utm\\_content=&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_name=&utm\\_source=govdelivery&utm\\_term=&deliveryName=USCDC\\_1009-DM12451#/scene/1](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/vhs/index.html?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=&deliveryName=USCDC_1009-DM12451#/scene/1)

*Strengthening the Road to College: California's College Readiness Standards and Lessons from District Leaders*  
[https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/strengthening-road-college?utm\\_source=PACE+All&utm\\_campaign=75c0972655-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2019\\_08\\_29\\_05\\_32\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_9f1af6b121-75c0972655-522725185](https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/strengthening-road-college?utm_source=PACE+All&utm_campaign=75c0972655-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_08_29_05_32_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_9f1af6b121-75c0972655-522725185)

*Highest-priority Challenges in Education*  
<https://challengemap.digitalpromise.org/priority-challenges/>

*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](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](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](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/>)**