



**29 years**

**& counting**

**School Practitioner  
Listserv**

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



**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.**

**February 9, 2015**

**Request from a Colleague**

**>Telling families students need counseling –  
without endangering working relationships**

**For your information**

**>Impact of poverty on school and  
student success**

**Featured Center Resource**

**>Resources to address the challenges of  
supporting low income students**

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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)**

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**Request:** "Many teachers are resistant to referring a student for counseling services, as they feel it will put a wedge between them and the parent...." What is the best way to alleviate such concerns?

**Center Response:** Let's back-up and start with a focus on reducing the number of unneeded referrals for out-of-classroom assistance. This can be accomplished by strengthening the integration of learning supports into the daily activity of classrooms and schools. Integrating learning supports into the classroom can stem the flow of unnecessary referrals and help teachers feel better when referrals are needed.

Here are some points to consider. In general:

(1) the more that student support staff are enabled to come into classrooms to work along side teachers as colleagues, the more teachers will be open to changes in practice that can ameliorate the need for some students to be referred. And in the process, they can learn how to help students and families appreciate how the added help will benefit the student. For more on this, see

>*Classroom-based Learning Supports to Enable Learning and Teaching* –  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/intropt2ch4.pdf>

(2) With respect to school-family working relationships, the primary caretakers in a home are essential partners in addressing the learning, behavior, and emotional problems of many students. Thus, it is important to validate teachers' understanding that building a strong, trusting relationship with students' primary caretakers is invaluable and to support teachers in developing and maintaining such relationships. As a resource for this, see

>*Building Parent-Teacher Relationships* –  
<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/building-parent-teacher-relationships>

(3) Teachers concerned about making referrals for counseling provide a window of opportunity to ask for time at a staff meeting to engage in a broad ranging discussion about (a) the role of mental health in schools in addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students and (b) the various ways student and learning support staff can work with teachers.

A special emphasis in this discussion could be on how student support staff can work with students in the classroom to reduce the necessity for referral. For example, teachers could be encouraged to invite learning support staff into the classroom to both observe and model ways to work with challenging students in the classroom. In many cases, this turns out to be a mutual learning experience for support staff and teachers (e.g., each learning by applying new strategies in a context of a classroom setting).

Other benefits are that students can be experience support staff as familiar and helpful adults, and stigma that might be associated with being taken out of class for counseling can be reduced.

(4) Teachers' concern about making referrals also provides a window for asking for presentation and discussion time at open houses (school wide or classroom by classroom), at PTA meetings, and at some teacher-parent conferences.

(5) Another set of venues to think about are the various school media/communication mechanisms (e.g. newsletters, websites). These allow for normalizing the school's role in helping address common/mild student problems (e.g., how to make friends, what to do about

a bully, who at the school can help with problems, etc). This provides an ongoing link to families and school staff that highlights the value of the work of student support staff and makes folks more receptive when the situation becomes serious and calls for referral. Moreover, letting families know about the range of resources and programs in the school (academic, social/emotional, recreational, etc.) and encouraging families to use the resources may promote their seeking out beneficial supports including making self-referrals when necessary.

(6) When a referral or request for services is made, we recommend including the family in appropriate ways: See

>*Enlisting Appropriate Parental Cooperation and Involvement in Children's Mental Health Treatment* –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/29%20enlisting%20appropriate%20parental%20cooperation%20and%20involvement.pdf>

**L**istserv Participants: How do local schools integrate learning supports into classrooms to reduce the need for out-of-classroom referrals? Please share so we can let others know. [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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**F**or your information

>*Impact of poverty on school and student success*

Three recent reports look in-depth at poverty and its impact on students, families, schools, and communities. Each suggests ways to address the problem.

(1) *A Better Picture of Poverty* (2014) –

[http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/5480ab38e4b0eccc3c188ca0/1417718584534/Better+Picture+of+Poverty\\_PA\\_FINAL.pdf](http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/5480ab38e4b0eccc3c188ca0/1417718584534/Better+Picture+of+Poverty_PA_FINAL.pdf)

Excerpt:

"...The fact that family and neighborhood poverty can have an adverse effect on school performance is well known. But typical measures, like free and reduced lunch or even community poverty data, fail to capture the volume and nature of the challenges that many schools...face. To dig deeper, this report looked at a variety of neighborhood and school-level risk factors commonly mentioned in the academic literature.... We found that the following 18 variables were strong predictors of both Common Core test scores and chronic absenteeism.

SCHOOL FACTORS:

1. Students eligible for free lunch (2012-13)
2. Students known to be in temporary housing (2012-13)
3. Students eligible for welfare benefits from the Human Resources Administration (2012-13)
4. Special education students (2012-13)
5. Black or Hispanic students (2012-13)
6. Principal turnover (2008-2013)
7. Teacher turnover (2011-12)
8. Student turnover (2010-11)
9. Student suspensions (2011-12)
10. Safety score on the Learning Environment Survey (2012-13)
11. Engagement score on the Learning Environment Survey (2012-13)

## NEIGHBORHOOD FACTORS:

12. Involvement with the Administration for Children's Services (2010)
13. Poverty rate (2010)
14. Adult education levels (2010)
15. Professional employment (2010)
16. Male unemployment (2010)
17. Presence of public housing in a school's catchment (2011)
18. Presence of a homeless shelter in a school's catchment (2011)...

Digging into poor attendance can be used to dramatically improve a student's school experience. 'There is no one thing that is 'attendance', 'Is it transportation? Is it health? Is it housing? Is it school climate? Is it being bullied? Is it academic performance?' Principals should take this detective work seriously...It is a good way to identify students who are at risk academically. Also, finding out why students don't come to school regularly in the elementary years can help avert problems down the road. Too often...school staffers call parents to let them know about their child's absenteeism and leave it at that. Principals could be using this opportunity to ask parents what kind of help their child might need to get to school regularly and succeed....But the intent is to connect with the family—to learn the reasons for the absence—not just fulfill an obligation....

Robert Balfanz says it is that the relationship-building work that is useful and potentially important. 'As any parent knows, you can't solve a problem or change a behavior unless you have a relationship with that person....' He cautions, though, that improving attendance is just one step to improve a school's performance.... There were students who didn't see gains by coming to school more frequently. 'This isn't magic,' he says. 'There are going to be some kids who come back but don't pay attention. Or they won't have a good teacher. Just being in school alone isn't going to drive their skills up....'

Balfanz notes schools with very low-income students rarely receive the attention and credit they deserve.... 'I like to talk about the 'degree of educational difficulty'. I use the Olympic diving example. You can do a perfect swan dive off the high board, but no matter how beautiful and flawless it is, it will get beat by a triple back flip, even if there are a few errors in it. People recognize it is much harder to do a triple back flip than the perfect swan dive. If you are in an affluent neighborhood, you can essentially turn on the lights and the kids will learn. That is a swan dive. If all of your kids are agency involved, if they are chronically absent, if they are in the middle of gang warfare, that's a triple back flip. Here, we do not resource, fund or hold schools accountable based on the degree of difficulty.'"

### (2) *Ending child poverty now.* (2015)..

<http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/PovertyReport/EndingChildPovertyNow.html>

It states: "For the first time, this report shows that by investing an additional 2 percent of the federal budget into existing programs and policies that increase employment, make work pay, and ensure children's basic needs are met, the nation could reduce child poverty by 60 percent and lift 6.6 million children out of poverty."

### (3) *Cognitive ability at kindergarten entry and socioeconomic status* (2014) –

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2015/01/13/peds.2014-0434>

#### Abstract

**OBJECTIVE:** To examine how gradients in socioeconomic status (SES) impact US children's reading and math ability at kindergarten entry and determine the contributions of family background, health, home learning, parenting, and early education factors to those gradients.

**METHODS:** Analysis of 6600 children with cognitive assessments at

kindergarten entry from the US Early Childhood Longitudinal Birth Cohort Study. A composite SES measure based on parent's occupation, education, and income was divided into quintiles. Wald F tests assessed bivariate associations between SES and child's cognitive ability and candidate explanatory variables. A decomposition methodology examined mediators of early cognitive gradients.

*RESULTS:* Average reading percentile rankings increased from 34 to 67 across SES quintiles and math from 33 to 70. Children in lower SES quintiles had younger mothers, less frequent parent reading, less home computer use (27%-84%), and fewer books at home (26-114). Parent's supportive interactions, expectations for their child to earn a college degree (57%-96%), and child's preschool attendance (64%-89%) increased across quintiles. Candidate explanatory factors explained just over half the gradients, with family background factors explaining 8% to 13%, health factors 4% to 6%, home learning environment 18%, parenting style/beliefs 14% to 15%, and early education 6% to 7% of the gaps between the lowest versus highest quintiles in reading and math.

*CONCLUSIONS:* Steep social gradients in cognitive outcomes at kindergarten are due to many factors. Findings suggest policies targeting levels of socioeconomic inequality and a range of early childhood interventions are needed to address these disparities.

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## **F**eatured Center Resources

### **>Resources to address the challenges of supporting low income students**

We continue to develop the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on

>*Children and Poverty* – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1102\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1102_01.htm) .

It provides links to Center resources and to a variety of other online resources, including Centers focusing on this fundamental concern.

Also take a look at the Hot Topic entitled:

>*What's the school's role in addressing the impact of poverty?* – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/hottopic/hottopic\(poverty\).htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/hottopic/hottopic(poverty).htm)

Here's an excerpt:

“While schools cannot be expected to address all the problems arising from poverty, as the Carnegie Task Force on Education has stated, when the impact affects learning, the school must meet the challenge. That is, it is necessary to do whatever can be done to address the impact of poverty both in the classroom and school-wide.

For those concerned about ensuring that all children and youth have an equal opportunity to succeed, it is clear, however, that prevailing school improvement designs are too limited in nature and scope to counter factors that interfere with effective school learning and teaching. The need is not

for additional piecemeal and ad hoc initiatives; the need is for fundamental transformation of how schools provide equity of opportunity and how schools and communities weave resources to achieve this result.

In recent years, there has been a remarkable disconnect between what is planned and what is needed. A significant shift in policy and practice is essential to promote development of a comprehensive system of student and learning supports through first and foremost a rethinking and redeployment of existing school resources allocated for student and learning supports followed by well-conceived enhanced outreach to a wide range of community resources designed to fill high priority gaps.."

You can add your comments, suggestions, concerns to any of the Center's *Hot Topics* and *Hot Issues* or write a *Commentary* for consideration. See

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/hottopic.htm> .

And please let us know about other resources or Centers we should add to our

>*Quick Finds* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm>

>*Gateway to a World of Resources* –

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/gateway/gateway\\_sites.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/gateway/gateway_sites.htm) .

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

**Note: Responses come only to the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA for possible inclusion in the next week's message.**

**We also 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/>

**For Recent Previous Postings, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>**

*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.*

See information about the 2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>