



**29 years  
& counting**

**School Practitioner  
Listserv**

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



**April 6, 2015**

**Request from a Colleague**

**>What MH concerns are on the rise with the  
move to common core standards and  
related high stakes testing?**

**Perspectives of Colleagues and the Center About the  
Above Matter**

**Featured Set of Center Resources**

**>Addressing student anxiety**

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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**quest: “I’m wondering if you and/or your colleagues are noticing any upticks in student mental health and health issues since the introduction of the Common Core Standards. I’m very concerned .... I’m seeing a lot of avoidance behavior, student anxiety, frustration, and disengagement... I have had parents inform me of serious anxiety reactions to the testing that is being done in the name of ‘preparation.’ ... I just wanted to check with [colleagues on this listserv] to see if you’ve been noticing the same things I’m noticing or making any efforts to address the developmental mismatches that seem to be occurring....”

## **P**erspectives of Colleagues and the Center About to the Above Matter

### **From the Field:**

(1) “We’ve seen some news articles in which district leadership has reported students completing the tests a lot sooner than they should. The implication is that students are either frustrated or don’t think the test results will impact them in the long run. I think a lot of the anxiety depends on how teachers are pitching the ‘test’ to the students. Also, with the implementation of a new testing system and teacher evaluations tied to them, there is going to be greater anxiety by the teachers. Their anxiety is likely to have a trickle-down effect on the students.”

(2) Excerpt from *Test stress and academic anxiety* by L. Frenette (NYSUT United 3/6/15)  
<http://www.nysut.org/news/nysut-united/issues/2015/march-2015/test-stress-and-academic-anxiety>

(Note: NY state is now in its third year of Common Core testing)

“As another round of standardized tests in English language arts and math rolls out in April, the stress season for students as young as 8 is a growing concern for educators.

A school psychologist with the Germantown Teachers Association, says overall student anxiety is on the rise, especially in the wake of new Common Core standards and the high-stakes tests attached to them. Like many other educators and school health care professionals, she is bringing new coping skills to students.

Last year's testing season was marked by widespread reports by teachers and parents of students getting physically sick and emotionally distraught over the standardized tests. It prompted many parents to exercise the option of refusing to let their children take tests.

Students, school psychologists say, are keenly aware of the high stakes attached to state exams. They spend an inordinate amount of class time preparing for them, and know that doing poorly could ultimately cause a school to close or a teacher to lose a job.

Students also can feel pressured by their inner drive to succeed, a quest for perfection or a fear of failure, especially if they may be unfamiliar with the English language or are not yet up to the reading or developmental level of the test in front of them....

A workshop on strategies for dealing with test anxiety drew a packed crowd at a recent conference of the New York Association of School Psychologists. Presenters ... referenced a 2013 study that showed students reported significantly greater levels of test anxiety for the high-stakes exams than for regular classroom tests, in both physiological and cognitive symptoms.

An oft-used practice of pulling individual students out of class to help them deal with stress often increases anxiety because they then miss classroom instruction.

So the presenters started a whole-class stress reduction project in three fourth- grade classrooms. The school psychologists used assessment and test anxiety scales to create a baseline, and then introduced 25 minutes of stress intervention once a week for seven weeks.

Their tools provided the youngsters with general knowledge about test anxiety, relaxation techniques, positive self-talk, note-taking strategies, study skills, test-taking strategies, and review and practice....

Before the intervention, 18 out of 38 fourth graders rated test anxiety levels in the high range. After the seven classroom sessions, only nine out of the 38 fourth graders reported abnormal levels of anxiety....

Educators can find solid information for helping with test anxiety by using a toolkit prepared for the New York Association of School Psychologists at [http://www.nyasp.bix/pdf\\_files/testing\\_anxiety\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.nyasp.bix/pdf_files/testing_anxiety_toolkit.pdf) “

### **Center Comment:**

Two facts of school life in most states are: (1) the Common Core curriculum standards movement and related testing are moving forward and (2) there is a steady stream of concern from many educators (e.g., administrators, teachers, student and learning support) about the high level of anxiety manifested by students and staff and the need for resources for reducing the anxiety.

Here is the abstract and an excerpt from a recently released report addressing the unintended effects of high stakes testing:

*Accountability pressure and non-achievement student behaviors* J. Holbein & H. Ladd -- <http://www.caldercenter.org/sites/default/files/WP%20122.pdf>

*Abstract:* In this paper we examine how failing to make adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and the accountability pressure that ensues, affects various non-achievement student behaviors. Using administrative data from North Carolina and leveraging a discontinuity in the determination of school failure, we examine the causal impact of accountability pressure both on student behaviors that are incentivized by NCLB and on those that are not. We find evidence that, as NCLB intends, pressure encourages students to show up at school and to do so on time. Accountability pressure also has the unintended effect, however, of increasing the number of student misbehaviors such as suspensions, fights, and offenses reportable to law enforcement. Further, this negative response is most pronounced among minorities and low performing students, who are the most likely to be left behind.

Excerpt from the paper:

... accountability pressure generates increases in anti-social behaviors on the part of students. Thus accountability pressure at the school level is transferred down to the student level, and not always in positive ways, presumably because schools devote time and resources to improving incentivized behaviors at the expense of ignoring other behaviors. Following school failure, schools experience noticeable increases in misbehaviors that lead to suspensions, sexual offenses, and reportable offenses that cannot be attributed to other aspects of the school. Further, we have

shown that changes in misbehavior are exacerbated among minority and low-performing students—those that supporters of No Child Left Behind explicitly hoped would not be left behind.

Future research on school accountability programs would do well to explore other behaviors not directly incentivized by such programs. While direct incentives may improve easy-to-monitor variables such as absences and tardies, this study shows that such programs may do harm by increasing student misbehavior in school. A more complete understanding of how performance-based accountability programs such as NCLB—the main goal of which is to raise student achievement—affect other student behaviors would help policymakers weigh any positive outcomes of such programs against the potential costs of damaging certain non-achievement behaviors vital for success in school and beyond. Our work shows that such policies deserve some hope but also some pause, given their potentially harmful effects on student attributes not captured by student test scores.”

**L**istserv Participants: What is the impact of high stakes testing on school staff and students in your locality? What learning supports are in place to reduce testing stress? We look forward to hearing from you and sharing the info. [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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## **F**eatured Set of Center Resources

### **>Addressing student anxiety**

Our online clearinghouse Quick Find on *Anxiety* has a range of resources not only related to test anxiety, but to other demand situations that tend to elicit anxiety at school. See the set of resources at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/anxiety.htm> – Here are few examples:

- >*Anxiety, Fears, Phobias, and Related Problems: Interventions and Resources for School-Aged Youth*
- >*Affect and Mood Problems related to School Aged Youth*
- >*Addressing Barriers to Learning: New Direction for Mental Health in Schools*
- >*School Avoidance Behavior: Motivational Bases and Implications for Intervention*
- >*Back-to-School Anxiety*
- >*Student and Anxiety Problems* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/anxiety.pdf>

*Student and Anxiety Problems* (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/anxiety.pdf>) underscores the range of anxiety problems manifested at schools and highlights the continuum of student and learning supports that are needed to address the problems. Here is a brief excerpt:

“*Prevention* – The first and often most important prevention strategies at a school are those that improve the environmental circumstances associated with anxiety. The focus on enhancing school climate highlights many facets of schools and schooling that need to be changed and are likely contributors to student anxiety. Relatedly, many student and learning supports are meant to address factors that are associated with student anxiety....

Schools can also help parents play a role in preventing anxiety at school. For instance, parents can help prepare their children for and adjust to transitions to the next grade and/or a new school (e.g., ensuring a good orientation and supporting first encounters with new surroundings and experiences, arranging for a peer buddy who can guide and support). Teachers can help parents learn how to work collaboratively with the school to and provide academic and social supports....

*Minimizing Anxiety at School* – From a psychological perspective, examples of what schools can do include minimizing threats to and maximizing strategies that enhance feelings of (a) competence, (b) self-determination, and (c) connections to significant others. Key in all this is a well-developed system of student and learning supports that helps to personalize instruction and provide special assistance (including accommodations) as needed. Such a system not only can provide a better instructional fit, it facilitates student transitions by providing academic and social supports and quickly addresses school adjustment problems. And it enhances home involvement and engagement in the student’s schooling....

*Corrective Interventions* – In addition to addressing improvements in the school environment, schools can help correct mild anxiety problems and play a role in addressing anxiety disorders. ...

*Mild Anxiety.* Given that addressing student problems involves mobilizing the student to play an active role, enhancing motivation, and especially intrinsic motivation, is a constant concern. Therefore, practices must be designed to account for motivation as an antecedent, process, and outcome consideration....”

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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>

Also see: *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* –  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf>

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

**Note: Responses come only to our Center 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/>