

## **School Practitioner Community of Practice**

(A network for sharing & exchange)

July 24, 2019

Topics for discussion – Colleagues are asking:

**>Why are so many students anxious at school?**

**>More re. the discussion of accommodations**

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 shrinking 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 – A student asked:

**“Why are so many students feeling anxious? How can we reduce anxiety?”**

**Center Comments:**

(1) As starting point for the discussion, here’s an excerpt from

>*Students and anxiety problems* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/anxiety.pdf>

“*Ways in Which Schools Contribute to Student Anxiety*. Common sources of anxiety at school are interpersonal and academic related stressors. All students experience pressures to both conform and change (e.g., as a result of enforcement of rules, norms, and standards by peers, family, school staff).

Daily interpersonal interactions with teachers and other staff and peers are especially difficult for some students. Differences in background, appearance, language, social and emotional development, all can affect whether a student fits in or not. Not fitting in can lead to being isolated, rejected, and even bullied and coming to school each day fearful and anxious.

Relationships with peers are always on a student's mind. Concerns arise from such matters as not having enough friends, not having the right friends, not being in the same class as friends, experiencing peer pressure and interpersonal conflicts. And, there is the problem of bullying, which now has gone high tech (e.g., using the internet, cell phones) making the behavior easier, anonymous, and more prevalent.

While personal factors can affect relationships with teachers, classroom demands are more frequent sources of stress and anxiety (e.g., assignments, schedules, tasks). With test scores so heavily weighted and publicized, teachers are under great pressure to produce high test scores and that pressure is passed on to their students. The emphasis on enhancing school readiness and performance has filtered down to pre-school and kindergarten. A decade ago, kindergarten was a much more leisurely transition to first grade. And, of course, anxiety about being evaluated (e.g., tested and graded) is commonplace among students and can hinder performance.

Pressures in meeting academic demands also can be exacerbated by too many extracurricular activities. And for high school students, there is the added stress of college and career preparation. The overload of activities and demands can cut students off from essential supports, hamper sleep, interfere with learning and development, and affect physical and mental health.

Schools that do too little to address interpersonal and academic related stressors can expect a great many anxiety-related learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

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....

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 also can help parents learn how to work collaboratively with the school to nurture and provide academic and social supports. ..."

(2) Here are two additional resources that highlight addressing barriers to learning and teaching:

> *The Relationship Between School Climate and Mental and Emotional Well-being Over the Transition from Primary to Secondary School*  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4615665/>

Excerpt

"...School climate is not only important for promoting mental and emotional well-being among adolescents but also positive behavioral change. School climate factors of feeling safe at school, feeling connected to school, and peer support are all protective of mental and emotional well-being over the transition period while connectedness to teachers is protective of emotional well-being. Primary school appears to be an important time to establish quality connections to peers who have a powerful role in providing support for one another before the transition to secondary school. However, school policies and practices promoting safety and encouraging and enabling connectedness are important during the first years of secondary school. Regular review and assessment of school policies and practice is recommended to improve school climate and student outcomes."

> *Educating the whole child: Improving school climate to support student success.*  
[https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Educating\\_Whole\\_Child\\_REPO\\_RT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Educating_Whole_Child_REPO_RT.pdf)

Excerpt

"*Building Positive Classroom and School Environments.* Warm, caring, supportive student-teacher relationships, as well as other child-adult relationships, are linked to better school performance and engagement, greater social competence, and willingness to take on challenges. Students who are at higher levels of risk for poor outcomes can benefit from nurturing relationships with teachers and other adults, which can increase student learning and support their development and wellness, especially when these relationships are culturally sensitive and responsive. Such relationships help develop the emotional, social, behavioral, and cognitive competencies foundational to learning.

In addition, students need a sense of physical and psychological safety for learning to occur because fear and anxiety undermine cognitive capacity and short-circuit the learning process. Students learn best when they can connect what happens in school to their cultural contexts and experiences, when their teachers are responsive to their strengths and needs....

*Creating schools that support strong attachments and relationships.* Personalizing the educational setting so that it responds to individual students’ interests and needs, as well as their home and community contexts, is one of the most powerful levers to change the trajectories for children’s lives....”

**The beginning of a new school year is a great time to make changes so students will feel less anxious at school. Think in terms of enhancing feelings of being welcomed and supported by peers and staff; plan ways to help students feel more self-determining, competent, and positively connected to peers and staff over the course of the school year.**

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*Now is the time to review and improve ways to address barriers to learning and teaching with a view to reducing anxiety of students and staff.*

**Let us know how local schools approach this matter???????**

**Send to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

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**Topic for Discussion –**

**>More re. the discussion of accommodations**

(Comment from the field re. topic in the July 10 practitioner)

“As a past teacher, current trainer of educators, parent of a child with various mental health diagnoses including anxiety, I wonder if we need to add to the accommodations conversation the problem with over accommodating and, thus disempowering students.

After my daughter finally got treatment — not more drugs- for her anxiety, she and I had a chance to speak to student services staff in our region. Her school social worker and psychologist were in the audience. She thanked them for supporting her need to have various accommodations in high school and also shared that she now understands that what was missing was a plan to lessen the need for the accommodations over time. She had learned how the accommodating that I did as her mom and the school staff did might have been training her brain to a new normal versus gently allowing her to challenge her brain’s response to anxiety with the support of a plan and staff to assist her to take the risk and challenge her (and our) assumptions about what was possible for her.

One example: She had such social phobia that she was allowed to leave classes three minutes early to avoid the pressure of the hallways. This allowed her to stay more focused in class rather than ruminating over what would happen between classes. It worked like a dream! And, it was my daughter who told the school staff, “I needed to eventually learn that I could handle the ‘hallways’ of life.”

Of course, this approach requires the involvement and approval of the parents, the student and any outside treatment providers. It also is not the right approach for all students or all barriers. It is an approach that is based on my belief in our need to focus much more on resilience and recovery than we currently do. Just another perspective on the accommodations conversation.”

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**Any other comments about this or other relevant matters???????**

**Send to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

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

- > *Coping with trauma, grief, and loss*  
<https://uhs.berkeley.edu/coping-trauma-grief-loss-and-tragic-news-and-events>
- > *What Goes Into Improving School Climate?*  
<https://ednote.ecs.org/what-goes-into-improving-school-climate/>
- > *Designing School Improvement to Enhance Classroom Climate for All Students*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schoolclimate.pdf>
- > *Let's Talk: Protecting Immigrant Families*  
[http://cshca-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Lets-Talk-Protecting-Immigrant-Families\\_12-5-18-FINAL.pdf?mc\\_cid=cc443f8ddd&mc\\_eid=d55e45642a](http://cshca-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Lets-Talk-Protecting-Immigrant-Families_12-5-18-FINAL.pdf?mc_cid=cc443f8ddd&mc_eid=d55e45642a)
- > *Investing in successful summer programs*  
<https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/investing-in-successful-summer-program-s-essa-review.aspx>
- > *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>

### A Few Upcoming Webinars:

- 7/25/19 – *Improving School Safety: Policy Trends, Assessment, & Prevention*
- 7/25/19 – *Emerging Tech: What Are the Current Trends for Teens and Kids?*
- 7/29/19 – *Promote Safety, Inclusion and Well-being for LGBTQ Students*
- 7/31/19 – *Understanding the Rights of Students Experiencing Homelessness*

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



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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>  
*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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**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/>)**