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& counting**

**School Practitioner
Listserv**

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



September 26, 2016

Frequent Question from the Field

**>What is the most pressing issue facing
the field of mental health in school?**

Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Follow-up from the Field

>Should we continue to give homework?

Featured Set of Center Resources

>Where's the Good Stuff Happening?

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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**

**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 *National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports*,* this is being sent to and forwarded by over 114,000 school and community stakeholders concerned about (1) daily matters confronting schools, (2) promoting whole child development and positive school climate, and (3) the transformation of student and learning supports.

Frequent question from the field:

>What is the most pressing issue facing the field of mental health in school?

Center Response: Most people expect us to indicate that the most pressing issue is a specific problem such as bullying or screening for mental health problems. This is not surprising given that the majority of those promoting mental health in schools advocate the matter in terms of a problem- and services-oriented agenda. That is, we find that advocates for school mental health mostly offer proposals for screening students for mental health and psychosocial problems and implementing interventions for identified individuals; they also frequently call for short-term initiatives that focus on such problems.

Certainly every item on the lengthy list of mental health and psychosocial problems seen at schools warrants attention. And schools do need to play a role in preventing psychological and psychosocial problems and responding appropriately when student manifest such problems.

However, the pathology and illness-focused image that permeates thinking about mental health in schools has produced problems. For example, there are places where suggesting that schools do more about mental health produces extremely negative reactions from school leaders and parents who feel dealing with students who have mental problems isn't an appropriate role for schools. Also, because the mental disorder image is so dominant, many school leaders are not thinking about the benefits of promoting positive mental health (e.g., on the success and well-being of all students and on improved outcomes for schools).

Furthermore, our research clarifies the degree to which all efforts to provide essential student and learning supports are marginalized, fragmented, counterproductively competitive, and lack the capacity to meet current needs,

With all this in mind, we embed our interest in mental health into terminology and an approach that fits much better with the mission of schools. That is, we focus on every school's need to enhance equity of opportunity for all students, facilitate whole child development, and enable learning and teaching. We particularly stress addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students and families.

Within this broader agenda, we embed mental health into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports. From a policy and practice perspective, we stress that such a system is key to retooling current student and learning supports and ending their marginalization and fragmentation.

Development of such a system requires the expansion of school improvement policy from a two- to a three-component approach (i.e., establishing a component for addressing barriers to learning as primary and essential and fully connected with the components for instruction and management/governance). It is this third component that provides the foundation for unifying existing student and learning supports and then moving on to develop a comprehensive, equitable system.

And we have developed prototypes that operationalize this third component in ways go beyond the limitations of the Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) model. It reframes MTSS into a multidimensional approach that (a) interconnects the overlapping levels of intervention, (b) weaves together school and community interventions and resources, and (c) delineates the arenas of supports.

So, for us, the most pressing matter for the field is ensure that school-based mental health efforts are embedded into a unified system for student and learning supports and that this is done in ways that

make such supports a primary component of school improvement policy and practice. At this critical juncture, the challenge is to influence states and districts as they develop their school improvement plans to fit with the legislative guidelines for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

For more on all this, see

- >ESSA, Equity of Opportunity, and Addressing Barriers to Learning – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essaanal.pdf>
- >Using ESSA to EMBED Mental Health into School Improvement – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/aasa.pdf>
- >Preparing for ESSA? Start by Reviewing Analyses of What's been Wrong with School Improvement Efforts – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/markrev.pdf>

As aids, we have developed frameworks and prototypes for schools to (1) unify student and learning supports and then (2) develop a comprehensive, equitable, and systemic approach.

For places such work is underway, see

- >National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

Obviously, there is much more to discuss about all this, See, for example:

- >Mental Health in Schools: An Overview – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aboutmh/mhinschools.html>
- >Embedding Mental Health into a Learning Supports Component: An Essential Step for the Field to Take Now – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/embeddingmh.pdf>
- >What is a Comprehensive Approach to Student Supports? – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/whatiscomp.pdf>

There also is a power point on: *Mental Health in Schools: Becoming an Integrated Part* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/mhpresentation.htm>

Note also that the renewed focus on enhancing a positive school climate fits well with all this. See

- >School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schooleng.pdf>

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Invitation to listserv participants: *What's your take on all this?*

What do you see as the most pressing issue facing the field of mental health in school?

Do you agree with the strategy to embed mental health in school?

If not, what do you suggest?

Share lessons learned. Comments.
Recommendations? What's happening locally?
Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Follow-up from the Field

>Should we continue to give homework?

Here's what colleagues have shared so far:

- (1) "No homework will do more for students and families than you'll ever know. Time to meet other life joys builds trusts, that we may engage."
- (2) "It is about time that educators are getting on board about not assigning homework. The charter school I work at has a 'no meaningless homework' policy in that teachers do not assign nightly homework, but there be occasions where students may need to do some research, practice math facts, etc. What we find is that children actually read more at home when we are not mandating what to read and for how long. In addition, we use our minimum day as 'Monday Make-Ups' for children who need extra support in completing their classroom assignments. Research has shown that homework does not equate to better grades in elementary and middle school. Homework creates nightly struggles for families and kids are BURNED OUT! Homework is busy work for students who understand the material and creates frustration for children who do not. The founder and director of my charter school uses a beautiful analogy when explaining one of the many reasons behind the no meaningless homework policy: 'Imagine that you just worked your 6 hour shift and on your way out of work, your boss stops you and says, 'I know that you just completed your work day, but I have this project that you need you to do tonight. It will only take 2 hours to complete it and you need to bring the finished product to me in the morning.' I ask you, as adults would we tolerate this demand? No, we would not, but yet this is what we expect our children to do each night. I did not have homework in elementary and middle school and somehow I managed to get a college degree. More downtime for play and relaxation is vital for our children!'"
- (3) "I think homework tends to be overemphasized. I'd be satisfied if students read each night. Children are overextended these days and they need downtime. They need time with friends and family."

A few more resources related to the homework debate:

- >*The Homework Pendulum: Teachers' Perspectives on the Costs and Benefits of Assigning Homework* – <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/72179>
- >*Homework and Family Stress: With Consideration of Parents' Self Confidence, Educational Level, and Cultural Background* – <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01926187.2015.1061407>
- >National Education Association. (2006). *Research spotlight on homework: NEA reviews of the research on best practices in education* – <http://www.nea.org/tools/16938.htm>

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Featured Set of Center Resources

>Where's the Good Stuff Happening?

As part of the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports**, we continuously compile and update information about places across the country where beginnings have been made that have relevance for developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports. See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>

We also want to do this with any and all other places that are making important, innovative moves to improve how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students and families.

So, as the new school year gets underway, we hope you will share the good stuff that is happening and any lessons learned that will be helpful to others as they move to improve student and learning supports.

Also, let us know about anything that you think we might do to be helpful.

Remember that this weekly Community of Practice Listserv is designed as a way for all to share and learn. And the Center offers free technical assistance and coaching.

So, if you have questions, concerns, advice, and/or reflections on your efforts to enhance equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school and beyond, let us know.

Send your comments and questions to ltaylor@ucla.edu

*For information about the
National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports,

see

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

And note that our new book detailing the prototypes and related resources is now in press.

For a preview, contact ltaylor@ucla.edu .

***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

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/>)