

31 years & counting



Excerpts from

# Addressing Barriers

# to Learning

*New ways to think . . .*

*Better ways to link*



Vol. 22, #4

To help schools get the new year off to a strong start, this issue of the Center's quarterly provides excerpts from recent issues related to improving student/learning supports.

## Contents

### EXPANDING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT UNDER ESSA

- >Revitalizing Local Control: Transforming Student/Learning Supports and Enhancing Equity of Opportunity
- >Escaping Old Ideas to More Effectively Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching
- >Saving Starfish Is Not Enough!

### MAKING IT WORK FOR EVERY STUDENT

- >Addressing Attendance Problems: Focusing on Engagement and Re-engagement
- >Focus on School Adjustment Problems: INVEST NOW . . . OR PAY LATER!
- >Grit – Another Buzzword? Student Motivation – a Fundamental Intervention Concern!
- >Personalization: Don't Let it Become Another Buzzword
- >Working with Disengaged Students

### TRANSFORMING STUDENT AND LEARNING SUPPORTS

- >Want Equity of Opportunity for All Students? Move Beyond Tweaking School Improvement Policy and Practice
- >About Center Assistance for Transforming Students & Learning Supports

Why do you think we'll do better at school this year?



Because I heard that Congress passed a law that says every student will succeed!

\*\*\*\*\*

### Want resources? Need technical assistance? Coaching?

- Use our website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>
- or contact us – E-mail: [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)
- Not receiving our monthly electronic newsletter (ENEWS)?
- Or our weekly *Community of Practice Interchange*?
- Send requests to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

\*\*\*\*\*

The Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports is part of the Department of Psychology at UCLA.

Center Staff:

- Howard Adelman, Co-Director*
- Linda Taylor, Co-Director*
- Perry Nelson, Coordinator*
- . . . and a host of students*

## **Revitalizing Local Control: Transforming Student/Learning Supports and Enhancing Equity of Opportunity**

**G**iven the renewed emphasis on local control, a pressing opportunity and critical imperative is to *transform* how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

To this end, the need is to go well beyond the immediacy of ESSA planning in order to more effectively enhance equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond. School improvement planners must escape old ideas and move in new directions to end the marginalized and fragmented status of student/learning supports.

*Currently, the majority of resources allocated for student/learning supports address discrete, categorical problems, often with specialized services for a relatively small number of students. The result: Existing supports are highly fragmented and incapable of handling the nature and scope of problems experienced at many schools. Calls for improving the situation often stress unrealistic appeals for more student support personnel, rather than illuminating new directions. In the absence of innovative frameworks for substantive, scalable, and sustainable systemic changes, the whole enterprise will remain marginalized in school improvement policy and practice.*

Local control offers many opportunities for states and districts to move in transformative ways to improve student/learning supports. Three foundational concerns related to moving in new directions are highlighted on the following pages:

- (1) *Expanding School Improvement Policy to More Effectively Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching*
- (2) *Rethinking Evaluation and School Accountability to Get Credit for All that is Being Done*
- (3) *Being Rational and Analytical in Bringing Evidence-Based Practices into Schools*

Finally, we share a set of steps for moving forward to transform student/learning supports (based on input from the *National Summit on ESSA and Learning Supports: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching to Enhance Equity of Opportunity* and from sources around the country).

**For the full article, go to**  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/spring17.pdf>

## Escaping Old Ideas to More Effectively Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

*The real difficulty in changing the course of any enterprise  
lies not in developing new ideas but in escaping old ones.*

John Maynard Keynes

**P**ublic education is at a crossroads. Moving in new directions is imperative. One of the most pressing challenges is to improve how schools address barriers to learning and teaching as part of their role in enhancing equity of opportunity. A positive future for public education depends on moving in new directions to accomplish this. Tweaking and tinkering old ideas is a recipe for disaster.

The imperative for moving school improvement policy and practice in new directions is highlighted by such long-standing problems as

- increasing equity of opportunity for every student to succeed, narrowing the achievement gap, and countering the school to prison pipeline
- reducing unnecessary referrals for special assistance and special education
- improving school climate and retaining good teachers
- reducing the number of low performing schools
- enhancing graduation rates and successful transitions to post-secondary opportunities.

Overcoming these problems requires making sustainable progress in

- improving supports for specific subgroups (e.g., English Learners, immigrant newcomers, lagging minorities, homeless students, students with disabilities)
- increasing the number of students who re-engage in classroom learning and doing so in ways that improve attendance, reduce disruptive behavior, and decrease suspensions and dropouts
- increasing family and community engagement with schools
- responding effectively when schools experience crises events and preventing crises whenever possible.

In some schools, continuous progress related to these concerns is being made. For many, however, sustainable progress remains elusive - and will continue to be so as long as the focus of school improvement policy and practice is primarily on improving instruction. Efforts to expand the use of instructional technology, develop new curriculum standards, make teachers more accountable, and improve teacher preparation and licensing all have merit; but they are insufficient for addressing the many everyday barriers to learning and teaching that interfere with effective student engagement in classroom instruction.

Policy makers and administrators know that good instruction delivered by highly qualified teachers cannot ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Even the best teacher can't do the job alone. Teachers need student and learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide in order to personalize instruction and provide special assistance when students need such help. Unfortunately, school improvement plans continue to give short shrift to these critical matters.

We recognize, as did a Carnegie Task Force on Education, that school systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students. But as the task force stressed: when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.

Now is the time to fundamentally transform how schools address factors that keep too many students from doing well at school. And while transformation is never easy, pioneering work across the country is showing the way. Trailblazers are redeploying existing funds allocated for addressing barriers to learning and weaving these together with the invaluable resources that can be garnered

by collaboration with other agencies and with community stakeholders, family members, and students themselves.

**The first step in moving forward is to escape old ideas.**

**The second step is to incorporate a new vision in school improvement planning for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Our analyses envision a plan that designs and develops a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports.**

**The third step is to develop a strategic plan for systemic change, scale-up, and sustainability.**

This year we have prepared two new resources for moving these steps forward:

(1) A new (and free) book entitled:

>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide* (draft edition)  
Download from the Center's homepage at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

(2) Just published by Cognella:

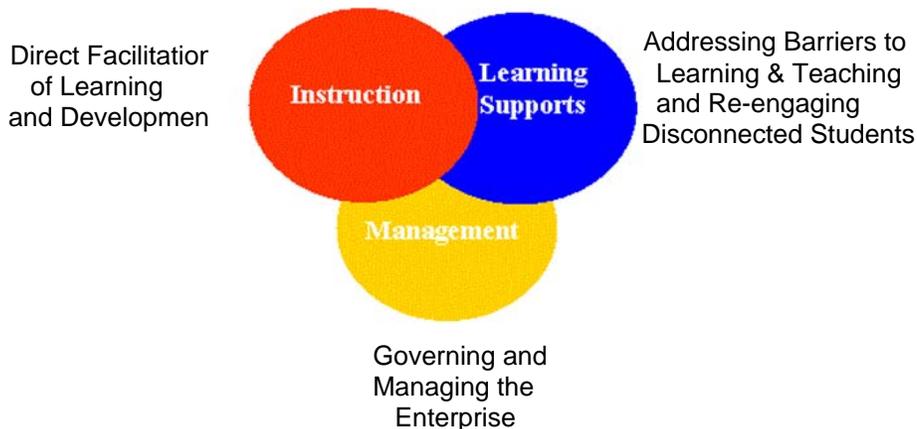
>*Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*

<https://titles.cognella.com/transforming-student-and-learning-supports-9781516512782.html>

These resources can help make the rhetoric of the Every Student Succeeds Act a reality.

And our Center can help by providing free coaching and technical assistance. Feel free to contact at us at [adelman@psych.ucla.edu](mailto:adelman@psych.ucla.edu) or to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

### A Three Component Framework for to Enhance Equity in School Improvement Policy & Practice



**The original article is online at**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/winter17.pdf>

## ***Saving Starfish is Not Enough!***

In making the case for student and learning supports, some leaders have stressed the starfish parable. We think it important also to use the bridge metaphor to more fully indicate the role schools must play in addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Here is how we present both:

### **The Starfish Parable**

The day after a great storm had washed all sorts of sea life far up onto the beach, a youngster set out to throw back as many of the still-living starfish as he could. After watching him toss one after the other into the ocean, an old man approached him and said, It's no use your doing that, there are too many, You're not going to make any difference.

The boy looked at him in surprise, then bent over, picked up another starfish, threw it in, and then replied: It made a difference to that one!

This parable, of course, reflects all the important clinical efforts undertaken by staff alone and when they meet together to work on specific cases.

### **The Bridge Metaphor**

In a small town one weekend, a group of school staff went fishing together down at the river. Not long after they got there, a child came floating down the rapids calling for help. One of the group on the shore quickly dived in and pulled the child out. Minutes later another, then another, and then many more children were coming down the river.

Soon every one was diving in and dragging children to the shore and then jumping back in to save as many as they could.

In the midst of all this frenzy, one of the group was seen walking away. Her colleagues were irate. How could she leave when there were so many children to save? After long hours, to everyone's relief, the flow of children stopped, and the group could finally catch their breath.

At that moment, their colleague came back. They turned on her and angrily shouted: "How could you walk off when we needed everyone here to save the children?"

She replied, "It occurred to me that someone ought to go upstream and find out why so many kids were falling into the river. What I found is that the old wooden bridge had several planks missing, and when some children tried to jump over the gap, they couldn't make it and fell through into the river. So I got some local folks and we fixed the bridge."

Fixing and building better bridges is a good way to think about the type of unified and comprehensive system that underscores the importance of taking time to improve and enhance resources, programs, and systems in urban schools (including a focus on mental health concerns) so that all students at all schools in a district have an equal opportunity for success at school and beyond.

***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  
and enhancing school climate.***

## **Addressing Attendance Problems: Focusing on Engagement and Re-engagement**

**R**educing school absences is one of the most challenging matters facing many schools. Prevailing policies that simply mandate attendance and spell out increasingly harsh punishments for unexcused absences fail to take into account the range of underlying causes of attendance problems and the range of prevention, early intervention, and ongoing support that might more effectively address the problems.

In addressing attendance concerns, it is important to begin by exploring two questions: *What factors lead to student absences? Given these factors, how can schools more effectively address the problem?*

### **Why are Students Absent?**

In their 2008 report *Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, Hedy Chang & Mariajose Romero stress that while the reasons children are absent vary, poor and low-income children are especially vulnerable because their families often lack resources such as transportation, food, clothing, and social supports that help ensure regular attendance.

Attendance suffers when families are struggling to keep up with the routines of school in the face of a lack of reliable transportation, working long hours in poorly paid jobs with little flexibility, unstable and unaffordable housing, inadequate health care and escalating community violence. Other common contributors to absenteeism stressed in the report include teen motherhood, single motherhood, low maternal education, welfare, unemployment, food insecurity, poor maternal health, having multiple siblings, or other serious family concerns (such as mental illness, homelessness, child or domestic abuse, incarceration of a parent) that make school attendance difficult for children. [http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_837.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html)

From an intervention perspective, current policy is mainly reactive. There is a clear need for greater attention to prevention and intervening as early as feasible after attendance problems are noted. And such activity needs to be embedded into a system that weaves together school and community resources. ...

### **What Schools Can Do Now**

Over the long-run, schools must develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. Such a system includes a range of supports for *transitions* and classroom and school-wide programs designed to *re-engage* students who have become actively disengaged from schooling. Our focus here is on immediately addressing these two major intervention concerns.

### **Transition Interventions**

Periods of transition can increase school attendance problems. For example, each of the following are risky times:

- >Entry into school at kindergarten
- >Moving to a new home and entry into a new school
- >Beginning a new year in a new class
- >Articulation from elementary to middle or middle to high school
- >Re-entry from suspensions, expulsions, juvenile detention
- >Inclusion from special education to regular education

While the nature and scope of transitions vary, the core concern is developing a range of practices to address barriers that make it hard for students in transition to function effectively. In planning and implementing supports for transitions, it is useful to think in terms of three overlapping facets of intervention. These are:

- Welcoming**
  - Social supports**
  - Induction**
  - Facilitating connections**
  - Enhanced options**
  - Addressing interfering factors**
  - Accommodation**
- Broad-band practices – often designated universal approaches (e.g., orientations, welcoming, social supports, induction into peer groups and classroom activities, enhancing options, facilitating ongoing interpersonal connections and social-emotional development).
  - Enhanced personalization to accommodate minor differences – watching for and monitoring of those having minor adjustment problems and providing just a bit more personalized assistance (e.g., aid in overcoming minor barriers to successful adjustment, a few more options and accommodations to enable effective functioning and make participation more attractive).
  - Special assistance – identifying as early as feasible those who have not made an effective adjustment or who remain uninvolved due to major barriers, an intense lack of interest or negative attitudes, and/or lack of capability. (e.g., this requires continued use of personalized approaches, as well as intensive outreach and special assistance).

To make it happen, we recommend establishing a development workgroup. Such a team can take responsibility for ensuring that necessary functions for establishing supports for transitions are carried out (e.g., planning and development, implementation, capacity building, etc.).

Whatever the mechanism used to develop transition supports, it is essential to fully incorporate what is developed into school improvement plans. Accomplishing this is aided when a commitment is made to move, over time, toward developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable approach for addressing barriers to learning.

### Mapping and Analyzing Transition Programs at a School

As a school sets out to enhance the usefulness of learning supports for addressing barriers to learning and teaching, it helps to clarify

>what is in place    >what needs improving    >what is missing

This provides a basis for resource and gap analyses. Such analyses are key to deciding what is worth continuing as is, what is not worth continuing, how resources can be deployed to strengthen current activity, and what the priorities are for developing additional programs. In the process, recommendations can be made about (a) what procedures are in place for enhancing resource usefulness and (b) how to improve resource use and effectiveness.

A self-study survey provides a starting point. See the Center's self-study survey of supports for transitions <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/transitionssurvey.pdf>. The Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds provide easy access to a variety of resources relevant to intervening to enhance school attendance. Start with the Quick Finds on

>Attendance – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/attendance.html>

>Motivation – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

>Transition Programs/Grade Articulation – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm)

**For the full article, go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/winter16.pdf>**

***If the weather is extremely bad, school attendance will be down.  
If the weather is extremely good, school attendance will be down.***

## **Focus on School Adjustment Problems: INVEST NOW . . . OR PAY LATER!**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/fall15.pdf>

Some students experience difficulties adjusting to new classes, new schools, new teachers, new classmates. It's particularly poignant to see a student who is trying hard, but can't keep up.

Over the first few weeks, teachers realize quickly who has and hasn't made a good adjustment to their classroom and to the school. This is the time to address the problem before it gets worse. If adjustment problems are not addressed, student motivation for school dwindles, and behavior problems increase. Misbehavior often arises in reaction to learning difficulties.

Now is the time to be proactive. Staff development needs to focus on strategies that enable good student adjustment, as well as identifying and addressing problems as soon as they arise. This is the time for student support staff to work with teachers in their classrooms to intervene before problems become severe and pervasive and require referrals for out-of-class interventions.

We address the problem as part of the school's focus on Supports for Transitions which is one of the six arenas of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports.

### **Addressing this as a Regular Transition Problem**

- (1) To facilitate a strong focus on school adjustment, use a staff development session to encourage structured discussions about what teachers can do and what other staff (e.g., student support staff, resource teachers) can do to team with teachers in the classroom to enhance school adjustment. Also clarify ways to use aides, volunteers, peer tutors/ coaches, mentors, those in the home, etc. to help with additional strategies designed to enhance social, emotional, and cognitive engagement.
- (2) Establish the first month for "Getting the School Year Off to a Good Start" (see *Is the School Year Off to a Good Start?* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/goodstart.pdf> )
- (3) Let staff know about the following free and easily accessed Center resources:
  - *Supports for Transitions* – Chapter 4 in *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/bookrev.pdf>
  - *Addressing School Adjustment Problems* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/adjustmentproblems.pdf>
  - *What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/WELMEET/welmeetcomplete.pdf>
  - *Welcoming Strategies for Newly Arrived Students and Their Families* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/welcomingstrategies.pdf>
  - *Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/welcome/welcome.pdf>
  - *Learning Supports: Enabling Learning in the Classroom* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtipract.pdf>
  - *Engaging and Re-engaging Students* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagingandreengagingstudents.pdf>

For more, use the Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds to link to other Center resources and to online resources across the country. For example, see:

>*Transition Programs/Grade Articulation/Welcoming* – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm)

>*Classroom Focused Enabling* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/classenable.htm>

>*Motivation* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

>*Response to Intervention* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/responsetointervention.htm>

## **Grit – Another Buzzword? Student Motivation – a Fundamental Intervention Concern!**

*Policy makers who assume that giving educators and students more reasons to care about character can be only a good thing should take heed of research suggesting that extrinsic motivation can, in fact, displace intrinsic motivation. While carrots and sticks can bring about short-term changes in behavior, they often undermine interest in and responsibility for the behavior itself.* Angela Duckworth

**W**e are pleased to see greater attention paid to student engagement and disengagement. However, as often happens, we fear the attention will be undercut by buzzwords that don't underscore the importance of motivation, especially intrinsic motivation.

A current buzzword is "grit." In 2013, Angela Duckworth, a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania did a TED Talk on grit that resulted in millions of views and widespread discussion. ([http://www.ted.com/talks/angela\\_lee\\_duckworth\\_the\\_key\\_to\\_success\\_grit.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_the_key_to_success_grit.html) )

Educators were further introduced to the term when the U.S. Department of Education published a report entitled: *Promoting Grit, Tenacity, and Perseverance: Critical Factors for Success in the 21st Century*. (<http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/technology/files/2013/02/OET-Draft-Grit-Report-2-17-13.pdf> )

### **What is Grit?**

Grit is a construct. Constructs are useful ideas that are created and used to help make sense of life and the universe. And history is strewn with constructs that outlived their usefulness. Grit is a highly popular idea now, but its longevity depends on how useful it turns out to be.

Duckworth defines Grit as "the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals. She notes that "On average, individuals who are gritty are more self-controlled, but the correlation between these two traits is not perfect: Some individuals are paragons of grit but not self-control, and some exceptionally well-regulated individuals are not especially gritty."

The construct calls to mind others such as resilience, perseverance, tenacity, self-determination, competence, self-efficacy, and more. For those who intervene with students, such ideas can become common terms in describing and making judgments about youngsters. But labeling these matters as character traits provides little information about how they develop and what strengthens and undermines them. ...

### **Don't Lose Sight of Facilitating Motivation**

Forbes writer, Jordan Shapiro, suggests that many who are using the term grit are invoking "the same familiar go-get-'em cowboy-individualism and unwavering underdog-tenacity that has always dominated the American mythos." (See *Grit, Optimism And Other Buzzwords In The Way of Education* <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jordanshapiro/2013/10/14/grit-optimism-and-other-buzzwords-in-the-way-of-education/#4893e4a1790b> )

However, all this plays out, it is important for parents, school personnel, and other interveners to focus less on whether a youngster has grit and more on how to facilitate motivation, and especially *intrinsic* motivation, for learning and performance and for overcoming problems. Interventions usually are not effective when a youngster is unengaged in the process.

At school, there is an ongoing interplay between motivation and learning. The roots of learning, behavior, emotional problems, and disengagement from classroom instruction are planted when instruction is not a good fit. And, of course, problems are reciprocally exacerbating.

In general, then, motivation is a fundamental concern for all students. For those who are not doing well at school, interventions to address their motivation are a *primary* concern. With all this in mind, parenting, teaching, counseling, mentoring, and all others forms of intervention are concerned with the following matters:

For those who are not doing well at school, interventions to address their motivation are a *primary concern*.

- **Motivation as a readiness concern.** Good performance and learning require motivational readiness. The absence of such readiness can cause and/or maintain problems. If a learner does not have sufficient motivational readiness, strategies must be implemented to develop it (including ways to reduce avoidance motivation). ...
- **Motivation as a key ongoing process concern.** Many learners are caught up in the novelty of a new subject, but after a few lessons, interest often wanes. Some student are motivated by the idea of obtaining a given outcome but may not be motivated to pursue certain processes and thus may not pay attention or may try to avoid them. ...
- **Minimizing negative motivation and avoidance reactions as process and outcome concerns.** Teachers and others at a school and at home not only must try to increase motivation – especially intrinsic motivation – but also avoid or at least minimize conditions that decrease motivation or produce negative motivation. ...
- **Enhancing intrinsic motivation as a basic outcome concern.** It is essential to enhance *intrinsic* motivation as an outcome so that what is learned (e.g., reading, good behavior) increasingly becomes a positive internalized attitude that mobilizes further pursuit of such learning and good behavior outside the teaching situation. ...

External reinforcement may indeed get a particular act going and may lead to its repetition, but it does not nourish, reliably, the long course of learning by which [one] slowly builds in [one's] own way a serviceable model of what the world is and what it can be.  
Jerome Bruner

An increased understanding of human motivation clarifies how essential it is to avoid conditions that can have a negative impact on a person's motivation. Examples of such conditions at school are sparse resources, excessive rules, a day-in, day-out emphasis on drill and remediation and short-term outcomes, and other processes that make people feel controlled and coerced and that limit the range of options. Such conditions often produce negative attitudes and *psychological reactance* which motivate behavior problems and reduce opportunities for positive learning and development. ...

School staff and parents need to use procedures that increase positive feelings, thoughts, and coping strategies and minimize use of practices that decrease motivation – especially intrinsic motivation. ...

School staff and parents need to use procedures that increase positive feelings, thoughts, and coping strategies and minimize use of practices that decrease motivation – especially intrinsic motivation. ...

\*\*\*\*\*

**Mother to son:** *Time to get up and go to school.*

**Son:** *I don't want to go. It's too hard and the kids don't Like me.*

**Mother:** *But you have to go – you're the teacher.*

### **Examples of Practices Relevant to Concerns about Intrinsic Motivation**

In general, a focus on intrinsic motivation encompasses enhancing feelings of self-determination, competence, and connectedness to significant others and countering threats to such feelings. For schools, this involves analyses of both intended interventions and the many unintended experiences students encounter each day. Below are a few examples of practices for enhancing intrinsic motivation and minimizing threats to motivation:

#### **Enhancing Intrinsic Motivation**

- Personalized (as opposed to individualized) instruction
- Building relationships and planning instruction with an understanding of student perceptions and including a range of real life needs, as well as personal and cooperative experiences
- Providing real, valued, and attainable options and choices ensuring shared decision making
- Enhancing feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others

#### **Minimizing Threats to Intrinsic Motivation**

- Ensuring a welcoming, caring, safe, and just environment
- Countering perceptions of social control and indifference
- Designing motivated applications as opposed to rote practice and deadening homework
- Ensuring extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities
- Providing regular feedback in ways that minimize use of evaluative processes that threaten feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others

Ultimately, engaging and re-engaging students in learning at school involves matching their motivation. Matching motivation requires an appreciation of the importance of a student's perceptions in determining the right mix of intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. It also requires understanding the key role played by expectations related to outcome. When students perceive instruction as a bad fit, social control strategies may keep them in line, but are unlikely to re-engage disconnected students in classroom learning.

For more, see *Engaging and Re-engaging Students and Families* (4 continuing education modules) – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagei.pdf>

**For the full article, go to**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/fall16.pdf>

## Personalization: Don't Let it Become Another Buzzword

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/fall16.pdf>

After years of being bandied about, the term *personalization* is coming to the policy forefront. With the increasing use of the term in U.S. federal policy, there is a tendency just to adopt it in place of terms such as individualized and differentiated instruction. This tendency is bolstered by the growing emphasis on using technology in teaching, which sometimes is described as personalized instruction. Indiscriminate use of the term turns it into yet one more buzzword, rather than a fundamental move beyond individualized instruction in the unending quest for improving how we meet learners where they are.

Based on a reciprocal determinist understanding of learning and behavior, *learning* is an ongoing, dynamic, transactional, and spiraling process. Similarly, effective *teaching* is conceived as a dynamic, transactional, and spiraling process that strives to meet learners where they are. That is, the aim is to create a good "match" or "fit" with the learner and, in the process, enhance equity of opportunity for success at school for all students.

Analyses indicate the primary emphasis in *individualized* approaches is on matching individual differences in *developmental capabilities*. In contrast, we define *personalization* as the process of accounting for individual differences in both *capability* and *motivation*.

Furthermore, from a psychological perspective, personalizing learning means ensuring learning opportunities are perceived by learners as good ways to reach their goals. Thus, a basic intervention concern is that of eliciting learners' perceptions of how well what is offered matches both their interests and abilities.

From this perspective, designing classrooms involves enabling teachers to

- personalize and blend instruction for all students
- provide a greater range of accommodations and enrichment options
- add special assistance in the context of implementing "Response to Intervention."

Such a design requires providing teachers with the knowledge and skills to develop a classroom infrastructure that transforms a big class into a set of smaller ones by using small group and independent learning options.

It emphasizes active learning (e.g., authentic, problem-based, and discovery learning; projects, learning centers, enrichment opportunities).

It includes reducing negative interactions and overreliance on social control disciplinary practices.

All this reflects the type of principles stressed by the Universal Design for Learning. Properly implemented, the changes can increase the effectiveness of regular classroom instruction, prevent problems, support inclusionary policies, and reduce the need for specialized *services*.

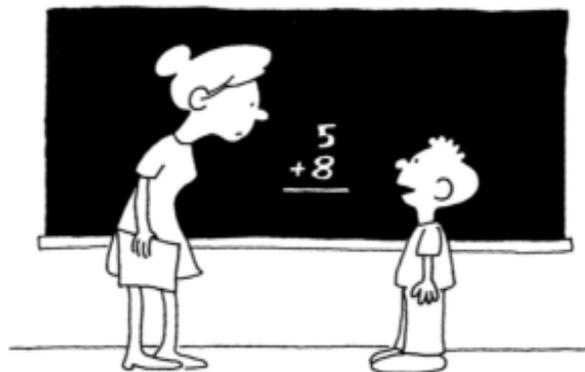
We know that schools are concerned with more than classroom instruction. Personalized instruction is one facet of addressing the context and conditions that must be improved to

address factors interfering with student learning and performance. Another facet is special assistance for students as needed. School-wide the emphasis is on (1) enrichment activities that promote engagement at school and facilitate positive development, learning, and well-being and (2) providing student and learning supports to better address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

Personnel preparation and continuing professional development for most school personnel has yet to include an in-depth focus on these essential concerns. The following resources can help fill the gap:

>*Personalizing Learning and Addressing Barriers to Learning* –  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/personalizeI.pdf>

>*ESSA, Equity of Opportunity, and Addressing Barriers to Learning* –  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essaanal.pdf>



GOSH, MRS. THOMPSON, I WAS READY TO  
LEARN MATH YESTERDAY. TODAY I'M READY  
TO LEARN TO READ.

## Working with Disengaged Students

**M**otivation is the first and foremost concern in efforts to re-engage the majority of disconnected students. Here are four general strategies to think about.

***First, clarify the student's perceptions of the problem*** – Talk openly with students about why they have become disengaged so that steps can be planned for how to alter their negative perceptions and prevent others from developing such perceptions.

***Reframe school learning*** – For those who have disengaged, reframing teaching approaches is essential so that these students (a) view the teacher as supportive (rather than controlling and indifferent) and (b) perceive content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable. This includes eliminating threatening evaluative measures; reframing content and processes to clarify purpose in terms of real life needs and experiences and underscoring how it all builds on previous learning; and clarifying why the procedures are expected to be effective – especially those designed to help correct specific problems.

***Renegotiate involvement in school learning*** – New and mutual agreements must be developed and evolved over time through conferences with the student and where appropriate including parents. The intent is to affect perceptions of choice, value, and probable outcome. The focus throughout is on clarifying awareness of valued options, enhancing expectations of positive outcomes, and engaging the student in meaningful, ongoing decision making. For the process to be most effective, students should be assisted in sampling new processes and content, options should include valued enrichment opportunities, and there must be provision for reevaluating and modifying decisions as perceptions shift.

***Reestablish and maintain appropriate working relationships*** (e.g., through creating a sense of trust, open communication, providing support and direction as needed).

To maintain re-engagement and prevent disengagement, the above strategies must be pursued using processes and content that:

- minimize threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others
- maximize such feelings (included here is an emphasis on a school taking steps to enhance public perception that it is a welcoming, caring, safe, and just institution)
- provide a meaningful set of choices support and guide decision making about personal goals and ways to achieve them
- facilitate acceptance and valuing of responsibility for decisions
- increase awareness of personal goals, motives, and capabilities
- support and guide motivated practice (e.g., providing opportunities for meaningful applications and clarifying ways to organize practice)
- provide continuous information on learning and performance in ways that highlight accomplishments
- provide opportunities for continued application and generalization (e.g., ways in which students can pursue additional, self-directed learning or can arrange for additional support and direction).

From a motivational perspective, key facets of accomplishing this involve enhancing learner options and decision making (see box on the next page).

### **About Options and Decision Making**

If the only decision a student can make is between reading book A, which she hates, and reading book B, which she loathes, she is more likely to be motivated to avoid making any decision than to be pleased with the opportunity to decide for herself. Even if she chooses one of the books over the other, the motivational effects the teacher wants are unlikely to occur. Thus:

***Choices have to include valued and feasible options.***

David wants to improve his reading, but he just doesn't like the programmed materials the teacher uses. James would rather read about science than the adventure stories his teacher has assigned. Matt will try anything if someone will sit and help him with the work. Thus:

***Options usually are needed for (a) content and outcomes and (b) processes and structure.***

Every teacher knows a classroom program has to have variety. There are important differences among students with regard to the topics and procedures that currently interest and bore them. And for students with learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems, more variety seems necessary.

... How much greater the range of options needs to be depends primarily on how strong avoidance tendencies are. In general, however, the initial strategies for working with such students involve

- further expansion of the range of options for learning (if necessary, this includes avoiding established curriculum content and processes)
- primarily emphasizing areas in which the student has made personal and active decisions
- accommodation of a wider range of behavior than usually is tolerated (e.g., a widening of limits on the amount and types of "differences" tolerated)

From a motivational perspective, one of the most basic instructional concerns is the way in which students are involved in making decisions about options. Critically, decision-making processes can lead to perceptions of coercion and control or to perceptions of real choice (e.g., being in control of one's destiny, being self-determining). Such differences in perception can affect whether a student is mobilized to pursue or avoid planned learning activities and outcomes. ...

Thus, essential to programs focusing on motivation are decision-making processes that affect perceptions of choice, value, and probable outcome. Three special points should be noted about decision-making.

- Decisions are based on current perceptions. As perceptions shift, it is necessary to reevaluate decisions and modify them in ways that maintain a mobilized learner.
- Effective and efficient decision making is a basic skill, and one that is as fundamental as the three Rs. Thus, if an individual does not do it well initially, this is not a reason to move away from learner involvement in decision making. Rather, it is an assessment of a need and a reason to use the process not only for motivational purposes, but to improve this basic skill.
- Among students manifesting learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems, it is well to remember that the most fundamental decision some of these individuals have to make is whether they want to participate or not. ...

**For the full article, go to**  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/fall16.pdf>

## TRANSFORMING STUDENT AND LEARNING SUPPORTS

### **Want Equity of Opportunity for All Students?**

### **Move Beyond Tweaking School Improvement Policy and Practice**

*Is there anyone who really believes that equity of opportunity for success at schools can be achieved without a fundamental transformation of public policies related to poverty and how schools address the many barriers to learning and teaching?*

**W**e all know that it will be sometime before anything substantive is done to reduce growing economic disparities. But there are indications of increasing awareness and readiness for addressing factors interfering with equity of opportunity for success at school.

The challenge is to turn the awareness and readiness into *transformative* action. This requires that schools stop approaching the many overlapping barriers to effective schooling (such as bullying, school shootings, substance abuse, health problems, disconnected youth, newly arrived immigrants, homeless students, etc. etc.) as if each needed separate initiatives and programs.

What analyses of school improvement guides and planning indicate is a long-term pattern of piecemeal, unsystematic, and often superficial attention to these matters. Moreover, over the last 25 years report after report and initiative after initiative have continued to ignore fundamental systemic change implications of all this. When it comes to recommendations for improving how schools address barriers to learning, the primary focus repeatedly is on hiring more personnel, linking with community services, and doing more to coordinate and integrate services.

At schools, for example, the main call is for more staff (e.g., counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, special educators). Those in the community who want to work with schools call for school-linked services, integrated services, one-stop shopping, wraparound services, seamless service delivery, coordinated school health, co-location of services, integrated student supports, full-service schools, systems of care, and more. Schools differ, of course, in what student and learning supports they provide; some offer a few; some have many. Some are connected with community services (e.g., health and social services, after-school programs). However, given the sparsity of community services, agencies endeavoring to bring their services to schools usually must limit activity to enhancing supports at a few schools in a neighborhood.

More resources and better integration of efforts clearly are needed. However, the overemphasis on these concerns has led to insufficient attention to the need for fundamental system transformation.

On the positive side, all this activity underscores concern about the nature and scope of inequity of opportunity and the widespread inadequacy of current school and community interventions. It also reflects an appreciation that connecting school-home-community is essential to the well-being of children and youth and to enhancing equity of opportunity for them to succeed at school and beyond. Such connections can provide more support for schools, students, and families. Linking with and collocating at schools also is seen by agencies as providing better access to families and their children, promoting greater engagement, and enhancing opportunities for having an impact on hard-to-reach clients. Moreover, the hope is that integrated interventions will increase the pool of resources for student and learning supports and address disparities. All good outcomes.

On the negative side, however, all this activity amounts to just more tweaking of current policies and practices, rather than facing-up to the imperative for *systemic transformation*. Moreover, as currently implemented, serious unintended negative consequences have been observed (e.g., increased marginalization of student supports, counterproductive competition for sparse resources, reductions of school support staff in the false belief that linkages to community resources will be sufficient).

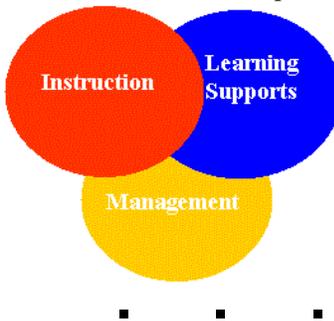
## Focusing on Transformation

It is essential and it is time to end the long-standing *marginalization* of student and learning supports in school improvement policy and practice. Because of the marginalization, most efforts to *directly* use student and learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching are not a *primary* focus in school improvement planning. The marginalization perpetuates fragmentation of supports. The marginalization contributes to the trend to make student support staff among the first cut when budgets tighten. The marginalization encourages counterproductive job competition among student support staff and with community professionals bringing services to schools.

Ending the marginalization requires moving to a three component framework for improving schools. Analyses indicate that school improvement policy and practice currently is guided primarily by a two component framework (i.e., an instructional component and a management component). As a result, all interventions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students are given secondary consideration at best.

Advocacy for ending the disorganization and effectively weaving together whatever a school has with whatever a community is doing to confront barriers to equity of opportunity should, first and foremost, be directed at establishing a three component school improvement framework.

This expanded policy framework is needed to ensure a *primary* commitment to addressing barriers to learning and teaching.



## Concluding Comments

*Tweaking is Not Enough.* Despite the many efforts to improve schools, the attack on public education continues on several fronts from a variety of stakeholders. Concerns continue about the achievement gap, student dropouts, the plateauing of achievement test gains, and low performing schools.

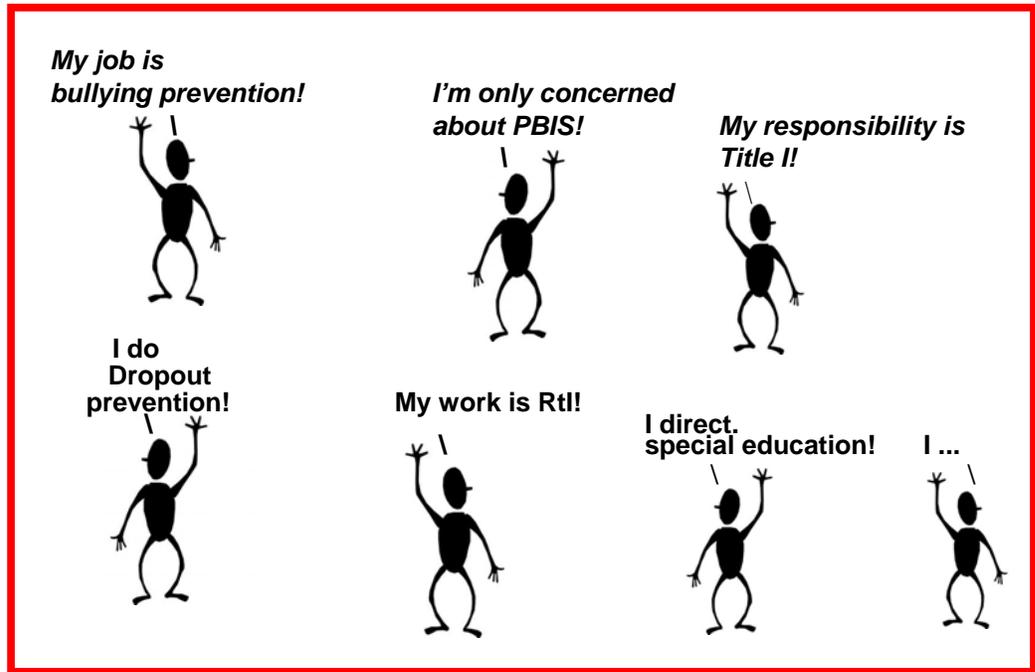
The reality is that schools are confronted daily with multiple, interrelated problems that require multiple and interrelated solutions. These include a host of neighborhood, family, schooling, peer, and personal factors. Policy must fundamentally transform how schools connect with homes and communities so they can work together in pursuing shared goals related to the general well-being of the young and society.

Equity of opportunity is one of democracy's most elusive goals. Public education has an indispensable role to play in achieving this goal, but schools are hampered by fundamental gaps in school improvement policy and practice.

Leading the way to equity requires high levels of dedication and perseverance. The *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports* is both an invitation and a call to action to all who want to enhance equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school and beyond.

**For the full article, go to**  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/fall15.pdf>

**Maintaining  
Fragmentation &  
Marginalization**



While the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) offers opportunities, it also continues the piecemeal approach to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students and families. See our analysis:

*Analyses of ESSA's Focus on Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essaanalyses.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>

***It is time to make the transformation of student and learning supports a major issue in school improvement policy and planning.***

## **About Center Assistance for Transforming Students & Learning Supports**

**I**t is clear from the responses to the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports* that many places are ready to move forward.

And, districts and schools have e-mailed us wanting to know more about what direct assistance our Center can provide.

### ***Here's How We Can Directly Help in Making it Happen:***

We know that transforming student and learning supports is challenging (especially with everything else that has to be done on most days). Our hope has always been that, given their sparse resources, state departments, districts, and schools will avail themselves of the free and easily accessible resources we have developed to guide efforts to transform student and learning supports.

In addition, with a view to supporting state and local efforts in developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports, the Center offers free mentoring, coaching, and technical assistance by email and phone to teams that are moving this work forward. Those making such systemic changes have found it particularly helpful when we work with them in preparing a design document and strategic plan that integrates the transformation into their existing school improvement plans.

For those seeking our no cost coaching and technical assistance, we find the best way to start is to have an initial conference call with key leadership and then schedule follow-up exchanges with any and all who are working on the transformation. ***In preparation for the first call, we suggest the following:***

- (1) read Part I in *Transforming Student and Learning Supports ...*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/bookrev.pdf>
- (2) as a supplement to the reading, look at the brief introductory webinar at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/powerpoint/briefintroslicesrec.pptx> and the accompanying handouts at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/intropphandouts.pdf>
- (3) browse the resources compiled in our System Change Toolkit  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>
- (4) see *Relaunching Student and Learning Supports* –  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/relaunch.pdf>  
and email us with items that need immediate discussion.

**If you're ready to move forward, let us know by sending an email to  
[Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**