

30 years &  
counting



# Addressing Barriers to Learning

*New ways to think . . .*

*Better ways to link*



Vol. 21, #2

## Absenteeism: Beyond Reporting and Beyond Another Special Initiative

An estimated five to seven and a half million students miss 18 or more days of school each year, or nearly an entire month or more of school, which puts them at significant risk of falling behind academically and failing to graduate from high school.

U.S. Department of Education

*Every student absence jeopardizes the ability of students to succeed at school and schools to achieve their mission. School attendance is a constant concern in schools. Average daily attendance rates are a common determiner of school funding, so schools funded on the basis of average daily attendance have less resources to do the job. Students who are not at school cannot receive instruction, and school performance indicators suffer. Excessive school absence is a precursor of school dropout. Some youngsters who are truant from school engage in behaviors that are illegal. And the negative correlates related to school attendance problems go on and on.*

One early impact of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) will be increased attention to attendance problems. For many schools attendance will become the additional accountability indicator stressed in ESSA.<sup>1</sup>

Under the new act, States will be required to report chronic absenteeism rates for schools, and school districts will be allowed to spend federal dollars on training to reduce absenteeism.<sup>2</sup> Since all schools take attendance, an immediate focus will be on establishing systems for reporting chronic absenteeism (including truancy).

Establishing a reporting system will be relatively easy. Significantly reducing chronic absenteeism has and will continue to be difficult.

At this juncture, the federal government has decided to create a national *Every Student, Every Day* initiative to “address and eliminate chronic absenteeism” (see Exhibit 1). Such special initiatives do focus attention on a problem, but usually only for a brief interval of time. Because they are extraordinarily funded and implemented under exceptional conditions, sustainability beyond two to three years is rare. And replication of major intervention elements on a large scale often is not feasible.

Please note that we have great respect for those involved in the *Every Student, Every Day* initiative. And, clearly, their commitment, motivation, and aims are wonderful. It’s hard to argue that more mentors and more public information are anything but good. The reality, however, is that effectively dealing with the problem of chronic absenteeism over the long-run requires a fundamental rethinking of policies and practices. In particular, the need is for a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system that directly addresses barriers to learning, re-engages disconnected students in classroom instruction, and re-engages disconnected families with schools.

Also in this issue:

>*Concerns about Personalized Teaching*

>*Center News*

## Exhibit 1

**A New National Initiative:  
How effective will it be? How long will it last?**

In response and in support of the President's My Brother's Keeper Initiative (MBK), the U.S. Departments of Education (ED), Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Justice (DOJ) have launched: *Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*--<http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/index.html>

**Features of the Initiative**

*A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism.* The Toolkit offers information, suggested action steps, and lists of existing tools and resources—including evidence-based resources—for individuals, leaders, and systems to begin or enhance the work of effective, coordinated community action to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism.

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf>

*A White House Fact Sheet.* To provide info on upcoming activities, technical assistance, events.

*A Virtual Summit on Addressing and Eliminating Chronic Absence.* This online summit will take place on Nov. 12. And will outline key steps that states, districts and communities can take to improve student achievement by monitoring and reducing chronic absence. It will:

- Explain the importance of looking beyond average daily attendance rates to identify students who are missing so much school that they are falling behind academically.
- Share strategies that work for improving attendance and achievement, including positive messaging, family outreach, student incentives and mentoring programs.
- Highlight the importance of engaging community partners, such as, health providers and criminal justice agencies. [http://www.adobeconnect.com/e7fcef7i14w/event/event\\_info.html](http://www.adobeconnect.com/e7fcef7i14w/event/event_info.html)

*Ad Campaign.* The Ad Council, in partnership with the Department of Education and the Mott Foundation, will simultaneously launch a multi-million dollar parent engagement campaign to elevate the conversation about the devastating impact of chronic absenteeism, specifically targeting parents of K-8th grade students. <http://absencesaddup.org/>

*Success Mentors Initiative.* Stemming from the My Brother's Keeper task force, the intent is to scale-up an evidence-based, data-driven mentor model to reach and support the highest risk students – using existing resources already linked to schools, and the metric of chronic absenteeism to drive school and life success. The Initiative is a partnership between the Department of Education and Johns Hopkins University. It aims to reduce chronic absenteeism by connecting over one million students with caring mentors. The launch will start with school districts in 10 communities – Austin, Boston, Columbus, Denver, Miami-Dade, New York City, Philadelphia, Providence, San Antonio and Seattle. Additional communities are expected to join this effort by the spring. Over the coming months, MBK Success Mentors will work with students in the 6th and 9th grades across the 10 communities' high needs school districts, with the goal of reaching over 250,000 students over the next two years and eliminating chronic absenteeism in these grades. At full scale when operating in grades K-12 across districts, the model aims to reach over 1 million students within the next 3-5 years. In the next phase, the initiative will be bolstered by college students from nearby colleges who will serve as MBK College Success Mentors, leveraging federal work-study allocations. Miami-Dade College will be the first MBK community to launch this college-linked model as part of this effort.

<http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-white-house-launches-new-national-effort-and-ad-council-campaign-eliminate-chronic-absenteeism-and-drive-student-success>

Usually, special initiatives (and demonstration and pilot projects) are ad hoc interventions that are not well integrated with other efforts to address factors causing absenteeism. Addressing complex problems with piecemeal approaches has unintended consequences. Among these is continuing the long-standing trend to address barriers to learning and teaching in a fragmented and marginalized manner. Moreover, special initiatives often draw attention and resources away from making essential institutional changes that can *transform* how schools address factors that interfere with enhancing equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond.<sup>3</sup>

## Understanding and Addressing the Problem

Reducing school absences is one of the most challenging matters facing schools. Each school, district, and state have statements of policy about attendance. The emphasis is on such questions as: What is an excused absence? What should be done about unexcused absences? When are absences severe and chronic? When does the school team work with the legal system to address truancy? What are the interventions and consequences for truancy?

Policies for unexcused absences that mainly punish and criminalize tend to ignore underlying causes. This has contributed to the failure of schools and communities to develop the type of prevention, early intervention, and ongoing supports that could significantly reduce absences.

### *Why are Students Absent?*

The literature commonly mentions a host of absenteeism correlates such as teen and single motherhood, large families, low maternal education, poor maternal health, incarceration of a parent, child or domestic abuse, homelessness, mental illness, and more. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) divide the reasons for absences into three broad categories:

- Students who cannot attend school due to illness, family responsibilities, housing instability, the need to work or involvement with the juvenile justice system.
- Students who will not attend school to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment and embarrassment.
- Students who do not attend school because they, or their parents, do not see the value in being there, they have something else they would rather do, or nothing stops them from skipping school.

Focusing only on “What’s wrong with that kid or that family” often amounts to blaming victims

Poor and low-income children are especially vulnerable (Chang & Romero, 2008). Their families often lack resources such as transportation, food, clothing, adequate health care, and social supports that help ensure regular attendance; their living arrangements often are unstable, and the communities in which they reside are plagued with conditions that make school attendance difficult.

Discussions of truancy add school factors to the picture. Focusing on truancy from the perspective of students, Gase, Deforest, Perry, and Kuo (2016) report that students tend to attribute their absences to matters such as boring, irrelevant, and difficult curricula, instruction that is impersonal and not engaging, negative relationships with teachers, and a chaotic or unsafe school environment. Those surveyed also indicated that their school’s response to truancy was an ineffective deterrent.

**In general, schools tend to see the truancy problem as residing with the student and family; students and families often see the problem as school-based.**

### A Note About Truancy

By sixth grade and beyond, truancy has become a significant and growing problem. After leaving the house, too many students either fail to show up at school or disappear from school during the day. Available evidence suggests that hundreds of thousands of youth are truant each day (e.g., Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2001).

Dembo and Gueddage (2009) note that “truancy is usefully conceived as midpoint along a continuum that begins with absenteeism and recurrent tardiness and ends with suspension or expulsion.” Truancy is related to poor school performance, family problems, delinquency, a range of psychosocial and mental health problems, and dropping out.

It is important to recognize that truancy often is a group phenomenon. Many students who cut school hang out together and, as a group, support truancy and a variety of risky behaviors. Gangs provide an extreme and rather intractable example (Sharkey, et al., 2011). Students who are not doing well at school often seek out gang membership; those who are in gangs generally do poorly at school and engage in delinquent behaviors.

One major policy and practice trend has been to designate the behavior as delinquency and punish it accordingly. Another has been to view truancy as a pathway to dropping out and to raise the age of compulsory attendance in hopes of reducing truancy and dropout rates. In response, there has been a strong outcry to move away from policies that criminalize students and push them out of school.

### So What Does Research Say Should be Done?

Reviewers agree that there is a paucity of sound research to support interventions for absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Dembo & Gueddage, 2009; McConnell & Kubina, Jr., 2014; Maynard, McCrea, Pigott, & Kelly, 2012; Sutphen, Ford, & Flaherty, 2010). At the same time, the literature suggests promising practices. For example, Dembo and Gueddage (2009) report that a review of promising truancy reduction programs by the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children suggests the following as critical intervention elements: (a) parent or guardian involvement, (b) a continuum of services that include meaningful incentives, consequences, and support, (c) collaboration with community resources, including law enforcement, mental health services, mentoring, and social services, (d) school administrative support and commitment to keeping youth in the educational mainstream, and (e) ongoing evaluation.

An evaluation of seven truancy demonstration programs by the National Center for School Engagement (2006) reported the following as lessons learned:

- to foster greater acceptance and impact, truancy services should become part of existing student support services and community organizations should join with schools;
- early intervention pays off, especially if it involves home visits and outreach to parents of children with few unexcused absences;

The youth in the study by Gase, Deforest, Perry, and Kuo (2016) recommended modifying the school environment to increase student engagement. They also called for more effective school and community prevention and response strategies and for addressing barriers to parent involvement and engagement.

As the folks at the former Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (now Education Northwest) noted in their *School Improvement Research Series*:

“Children at-risk need to be identified at a young age (as early as preschool) so that early sustained intervention can be applied. Success in the elementary grades diminishes the possibility of later dropping out in high school. The key ... is helping youth to overcome their sense of disconnectedness. It is imperative not to isolate or alienate any students from the school. Not all factors related to dropout [and truancy] reduction are school controllable, and solutions to the complex problem[s] of dropouts [and truancy] cannot be achieved by the schools alone. ... It requires resources that go beyond the school, and solutions require a team approach – the combined efforts of students, parents, teachers, administrators, community-based organizations, and business, as well as the federal, state, and local governments.”

### Attendance: A Right & Responsibility

It is often said that school attendance is both a right and a responsibility. Certainly, those of us who value education can readily agree with this. As a society, this means playing a greater role in addressing factors that abridge students’ rights to an education and paying particular attention to students whose absence is due to circumstances over which they have no control.

Some truancy is  
*reactive* and some  
is *proactive*

In general, the variety of factors causing school attendance problems make it essential to avoid lumping all youngsters together in planning what to do. For example, some truancy is *reactive* and some is *proactive*, and the underlying motivation for not coming to school can vary considerably in both cases.

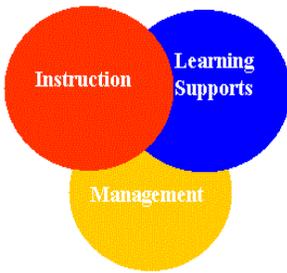
Any students who do not experience school as good for them are unlikely to view schooling as a right or a responsibility. Indeed, they probably experience it as an infringement on their self-determination. This affects their motivation (e.g., generates avoidance motivation, psychological reactance) and often leads to disengagement. From this perspective, addressing the problem requires strategies that are more psychologically sophisticated than those currently used by most schools. As many teachers and student support staff will admit, their professional preparation did not, and their continuing education does not, focus on how to re-engage students (and families) who have become disengaged from the school.

### Moving Forward: Transforming Student and Learning Supports

From the broad perspective of addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students and families, all school attendance problems provide another indication that moving in new directions for providing student and learning supports is essential. Attendance problems are complex and multifaceted. Policy and practice must now evolve so schools, families, and communities are working together to develop approaches that reflect this reality.

Current absentee  
policy is  
not proactive

Current absentee policy is mainly reactive. Proactive policy is necessary to expand efforts for prevention and for intervening as early as feasible after attendance problems are noted. And policy needs to embed such efforts into a comprehensive, multidimensional, and cohesive approach that weaves together school and community resources. Such an approach will require *transforming* student and learning supports rather than continuing to tinker with “improvements” (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, b, 2015; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008a, b).



Transforming student/learning supports starts with a process that (1) coalesces existing student and learning supports into a cohesive component and (2) over a period of several years, develops the component into a comprehensive intervention system that is fully interwoven into instructional efforts. Such a component is key to enabling all students to have an equal opportunity to learn at school and all teachers to teach effectively. This type of systemic approach is especially important where large numbers of students are not succeeding.

A learning supports component must address barriers that interfere with learning. However, doing so is not sufficient for enhancing equity of opportunity and enabling learning at school. Also essential is a potent approach to re-engaging students in classroom instruction.

### About the term Learning Supports

Currently, states and districts are trending toward using the term “Learning Supports” to cover the range of activity involved in addressing factors interfering with school success. Learning supports are defined as the resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school by directly addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

Learning supports are designed to (1) directly address interfering factors and (2) do so in a way that re-engages students in classroom instruction. Attention to both these matters is essential because, in general, interventions that do not ensure a student’s meaningful engagement in classroom learning are insufficient in sustaining student involvement, good behavior, and effective learning at school. In the classroom and school-wide, such supports encompass efforts to reduce the overemphasis on using extrinsic reinforcers and enhance an emphasis on intrinsic motivation to promote engagement and re-engagement.

#### *Mapping and analyzing resources*

A major ongoing task in moving forward involves mapping and analyzing all resources used to address students’ learning, behavior, emotional, and physical problems. The mapping and analysis provide the basis for clarifying current resource use, critical gaps, poor use of resources (including redundant efforts), ways to enhance resource use, and next steps in system development. As we will highlight, the work is aided through use of a framework that accounts not only for the continuum of interventions, but also for the range of activity schools need to pursue in addressing problems each day.<sup>4</sup>

Mapping and analysis also provide the opportunity to establish a leadership team for designing and developing learning supports. Such a team consists of an administrative leader and key learning and support staff.<sup>5</sup>

Besides underscoring critical gaps in the system of interventions, other goals of the analysis are to identify possible ways to share resources and achieve economies of scale. To these ends, planners consider how a cluster of schools (e.g., a feeder pattern or family of schools) can work together on mutual concerns and how the cluster can outreach and share connections with economic and social capital in the community. At the same time, because in many places school and community resources are sparse, care must be taken to avoid creating the false impression that community resources are ready and able to meet the multifaceted needs of students and their families. Such an impression colludes with the unfortunate trend in some districts to cut learning and student support personnel.<sup>6</sup>

**Decisions to move forward should be accompanied by a formal policy commitment to the effort. Such policy must be designed to weather budget cutbacks and the departure of key administrators.**

*Intervention thinking must be reframed*

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* underscores that significant numbers of students require supports to successfully meet challenging state academic standards. What the act doesn't address is the nature and scope of essential learning and student supports (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2016). As a result, guidelines based on the act will likely maintain the current ineffective approach to addressing barriers to learning and re-engaging disconnected students and families.

The intervention prototype developed by our Center for enabling learning is designed to provide a more comprehensive and cohesive guide. It has two facets:

- one conceptualizes levels of intervention as a full continuum of overlapping intervention subsystems that interweave school-community-home resources.
- the second organizes support programs, services, and specific activities into a circumscribed set of arenas.

*An overlapping continuum of subsystems – not just a multi-tiered model*

As a framework for preventing and addressing behavior and learning problems, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* references use of a school-wide tiered model (also referred to as a multi-tier system of supports). The tiered model is defined as “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making.”

Emphasis on the tiered model is a carryover from previous federal policy guidelines related to Response to Intervention and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The result over the last few years of this policy emphasis is that schools increasingly are framing student and learning supports in terms of tiers or levels. As currently conceived, however, the multi-tier model is an insufficient organizing framework for developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

The simplicity of the tiered presentation as widely adopted is appealing and helps underscore differences in levels of intervention. However, while conceptualizing levels is essential, multi-tier formulations as commonly discussed are insufficient. Three basic concerns about such formulations are that they mainly stress levels of intensity, do not address the problem of systematically connecting interventions that fall into and across each level, and do not address the need to connect school and community interventions. As a result, they have done little to promote the type of intervention framework that policy and practice analyses indicate is needed to guide schools in transforming student and learning supports into a unified and comprehensive system.<sup>7</sup>

Because a continuum of interventions is a basic facet of any comprehensive intervention system, states and districts now have the opportunity to fill gaps in the multi-tier framework. The aim is to develop and implement an overlapping and intertwined continuum of interventions.

The levels of intervention are designed to

- promote healthy development and prevent problems
- intervene early to address problems as soon after onset as is feasible
- assist with chronic and severe problems.

Each level is an interconnected subsystem

Each level represents a subsystem. The three subsystems overlap. All three are conceived as an interconnected system that strives to weave together school and community resources (see Adelman & Taylor, 2015).

*Escaping the trend to generate laundry lists of programs and services at each level*

It is necessary also to coalesce the continuum activities into a circumscribed set of arenas that reflect the supports being provided. Research over many years stresses that student and learning supports cluster usefully into six arenas.<sup>8</sup> (We think of these as the curriculum of learning supports.) The arenas encompass efforts to

Research stresses that student and learning supports cluster usefully into six arenas

- enhance strategies in regular classroom to enable learning (e.g., collaborative work among teachers and with student support staff to ensure instruction is personalized with an emphasis on enhancing intrinsic motivation for all students and especially those manifesting mild-moderate learning and behavior problems; re-engaging those who have become disengaged from learning at school; providing learning accommodations and supports as necessary; using response to intervention in applying special assistance; addressing external barriers with a focus on prevention and early intervening)
- support transitions (e.g., assistance to students and families as they negotiate the many hurdles encountered during school and grade changes, make daily and program transitions, seek access to supports, and so forth)
- increase home and school connections and engagement (e.g., addressing barriers to home involvement, helping those in the home enhance supports for their children, strengthening home and school communication, increasing home support of the school)
- increase community involvement and collaborative engagement (e.g., outreach to develop greater community connection and support from a wide range of entities, including enhanced use of volunteers and other community resources, establishing a school-community collaborative)
- respond to, and where feasible, prevent school and personal crises (e.g., preparing for emergencies, implementing plans when an event occurs, countering the impact of traumatic events, implementing prevention strategies; creating a caring and safe learning environment)
- facilitate student and family access to special assistance (including specialized services on- and off-campus) as needed

The six arenas:

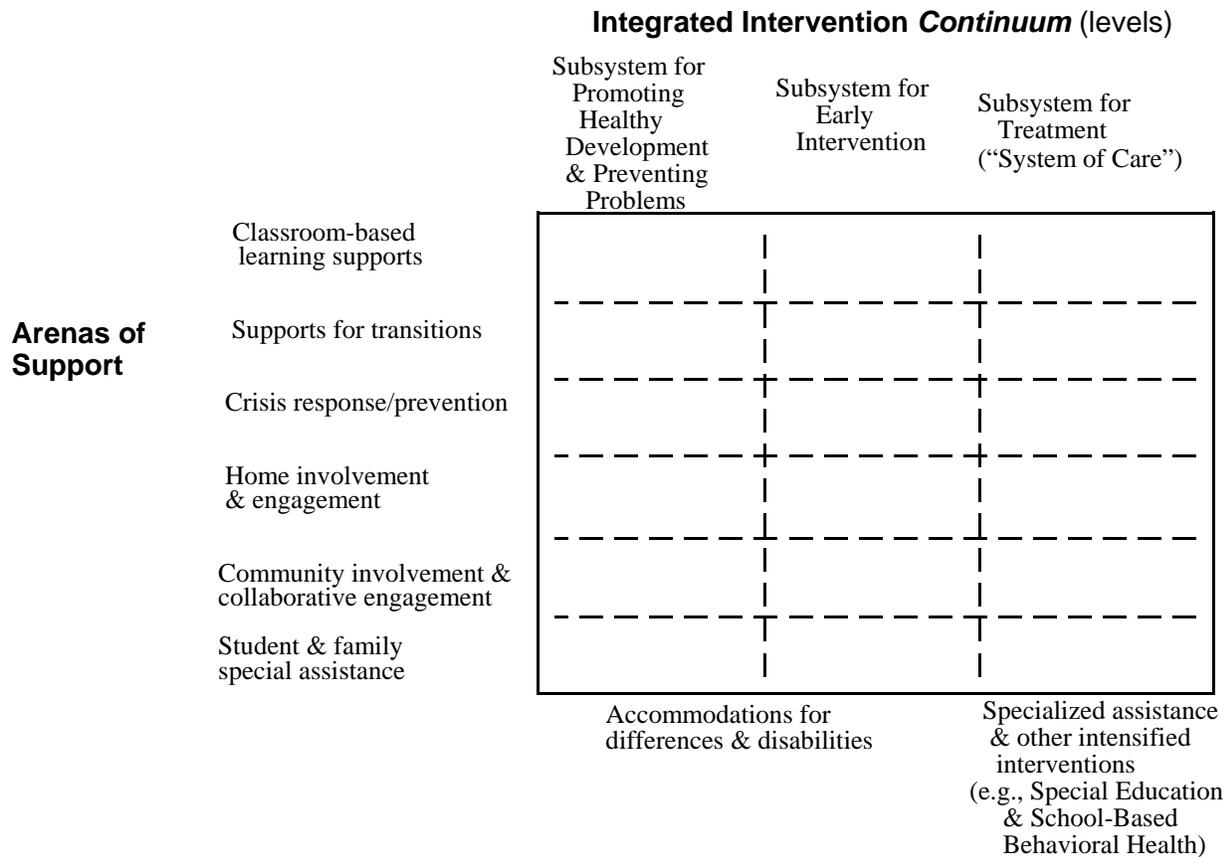
- unify student and learning supports by grouping the many fragmented approaches experienced at school in ways that reduce responding to overlapping problems with separate and sometimes redundant interventions
- address barriers to learning/teaching in-classrooms and school-wide through improved personalized instruction, increased accommodations, and by providing special assistance as soon as problems arise
- enhance the focus on motivational considerations with a special emphasis on intrinsic motivation as it relates to student readiness and ongoing engagement and with the intent of fostering intrinsic motivation as a basic outcome
- add specialized remediation, treatment, and rehabilitation as necessary, but only as necessary.

**A core concern is enhancing capacity for teachers to enable the learning of students who are not doing well by increasing the range of supports in the classroom, as well as expanding those outside the classroom.**

As illustrated in Exhibit 2, the six *arenas* and the *continuum* constitute the prototype intervention framework for a comprehensive system of learning supports. Such a framework can guide and unify development of a learning supports component as part of efforts to improve schools. The matrix provides a framework for mapping what is in place, analyzing gaps, and planning new directions.

Exhibit 2.

**Intervention Prototype Framework for a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System of Learning Supports**



In a pioneering move, the Alabama State Department of Education has adopted the above framework in its statewide initiative for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. An early result has been to improve attendance. In the first year, working in ten districts and 78 schools, the data indicate 25 percent fewer days lost.<sup>9</sup>

**Properly implemented, a learning supports component is meant to enhance equity of opportunity and whole child development and play a major role in improving student and school performance. Effective implementation also should foster productive school-community relationships (e.g., community schools) and promote a positive school climate.**

## A Personalized Approach to Connecting with Students Who Are Becoming Disengaged

Students who are not doing well at school often develop extremely negative perceptions of teachers, programs, and school in general. Any effort to re-engage these students must begin by recognizing such perceptions and focus on motivational considerations. There are four general strategies we recommend for all working with disengaged students (e.g., teachers, support staff, administrators):

- (1) **Clarify student perceptions of the problem** – Talk openly with students about why they are disengaged; then plan steps with them for altering negative perceptions.
- (2) **Reframe school learning** – In the case of those who have become disengaged, it is unlikely that they will be open to schooling that looks like "the same old thing." Major changes in approach are required if they are even to perceive that anything has changed. Exceptional efforts must be made if these students are to perceive (a) the teacher as supportive (not controlling and indifferent) and (b) content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable. It is important, for example, to eliminate threatening evaluative measures; reframe content and processes to clarify purpose in terms of real life needs and experiences; underscore how it all builds on previous learning; and clarify why procedures can be effective – especially those designed to help correct specific problems.
- (3) **Renegotiate involvement in school learning** – New and mutual agreements must be developed (and evolved over time) through conferences with the student and as where appropriate with 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.

Note: In all this, it is essential to remember that effective decision making is a basic skill (as fundamental as the three Rs). Thus, if a student does not do well initially, this is not a reason to move away from student 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 also to improve this basic skill.

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

In applying the above strategies, maintaining re-engagement and preventing disengagement requires a continuous focus on:

- >ensuring that the processes and content minimize threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others, maximize such feelings, and highlight accomplishments (included here is an emphasis on a school enhancing public perception that it is a welcoming, caring, safe, and just institution)
- >guiding motivated practice (e.g., providing opportunities for meaningful applications and clarifying ways to organize practice)
- >providing continuous information on learning and performance
- >providing 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).

## Concluding Comments

School attendance problems provide another indication of the need to move forward in new directions for student and learning supports. Ideas for developing more sophisticated approaches can be adapted from current efforts. But, policy and practice must now evolve so schools, families, and communities are working together to develop a system of interventions that reflect the complexity of attendance problems. The complexity demands moving to more comprehensive, multidimensional, and cohesive solutions. Focusing only on what's wrong with a particular student often is tantamount to blaming the victim and contributes to formulating punitive policies and practices.

While the *Every Student Succeeds Act* recognizes that significant numbers of students require supports to successfully meet challenging state academic standards, the legislation doesn't account for the nature and scope of the necessary supports. Given this, the likelihood is that guidelines and plans will be developed in ways that mirror the act's limitations. With the transition to state and local planning, the opportunity arises for escaping the weaknesses of the federal legislation and the various narrow initiatives that mainly continue to emphasize reporting, adding a few more programs/services, and improving their coordination and integration.

With a direct focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching, the challenge and opportunity ahead is to unify student and learning supports and then develop a comprehensive and equitable system. To do less, is to maintain an unsatisfactory status quo while adopting rhetoric that promises every student will succeed.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>ESSA calls for continuing to collect data on school quality and climate including rates of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, school-related arrests, referrals to law enforcement, and chronic absenteeism (including both excused and unexcused absences). With the new law, state-designed accountability systems are expected to include at least one additional indicator of school success or student support. At state, local educational agency, and school levels, assessment results are to be disaggregated by each major racial and ethnic group, economically disadvantaged students as compared to those who are not economically disadvantaged, children with disabilities as compared to children without disabilities, English proficiency status, gender, and migrant status. Disaggregation is not required if the number of students in a subgroup is insufficient to yield statistically reliable information or the results would reveal personally identifiable information about an individual student.

<sup>2</sup>Chronic absenteeism is commonly defined as a student missing 10% or more of school days, whether excused or unexcused, or missing a month or more of school in the previous year.

<sup>3</sup>*Making the Grade: Assessing the Evidence for Integrated Student Supports* (2014). Child Trends

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[https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Community-Schools-Layout\\_e.pdf](https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Community-Schools-Layout_e.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>See the Center's *Tools for Mapping and Analyzing Learning Supports* –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>See *Key Leadership Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Student & Learning Supports* –

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/report/resource\\_oriented\\_teams.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>In the struggle to balance tight school budgets, this false impression has contributed to serious cuts related to student supports. Such cuts further reduce the amount of resources available for schools to deal with problems interfering with student and school success.

<sup>7</sup>See Center policy and program reports and briefs – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/policyprogram.htm> .

<sup>8</sup>A brief discussion of and examples related to each of the six content arenas is offered in Part II of *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*.

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

<sup>9</sup>For more about the work in Alabama and about other states and districts that have used the prototype, see trailblazing examples and lessons learned in *Where's it Happening?* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/nind7.htm> .

## A Sample of Relevant References and Resources

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### For a variety of related resources:

(1) See the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds, These 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/Welcome – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm)

Examples of a few specific Center developed resources:

- >School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies & Practices Going in the Right Direction?  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Briefs/school attendance problems.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Briefs/school%20attendance%20problems.pdf)
- >School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schooleng.pdf>
- >Transitions: Turning Risks into Opportunities for Student Support  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transitions/transitions.pdf>
- >Toward Next Steps in School Improvement: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/towardnextstep.pdf>

(2) See the following Centers

- >Everyone Graduates Center – [www.every1graduates.org](http://www.every1graduates.org)
- >Attendance Works – [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)
- >National Center for School Engagement – [www.schoolengagement.org](http://www.schoolengagement.org)

(3) See the following online documents from sources across the country:

- >Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track –  
<http://www.advancementproject.org/reports/FINALEOLrep.pdf>
- >Habits Hard to Break: A New Look at Truancy in Chicago's Public High Schools –  
[http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub\\_id=47](http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub_id=47)
- >Small Schools on a Larger Scale: The First Three years of the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative – [http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub\\_id=4](http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub_id=4)
- >New Approaches to truancy prevention in urban schools –  
<http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-2/truancy.html>
- >Truancy: Summary description, state of evaluation, performance measures, evaluations, related resources – <http://www.jrsa.org>
- >Truancy Reduction: Keeping Students in School –  
[http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2001\\_9\\_1/contents.html](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2001_9_1/contents.html)

#### From the U. S. Department of Education

- >>Truancy: A Serious Problem for Students, Schools, and Society –  
<http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/training/truancy/problem.html>
- >>School Connectedness and Meaningful Student Participation –  
[http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/training/connect/school\\_pg3.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/training/connect/school_pg3.html)
- >>Dropout Prevention: A Practice Prevention Guide – <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>
- >>Approaches to Truancy Prevention – <http://www.vera.org>

#### From the National Center for Schools Engagement/CO Foundation for Families and Children – <http://www.schoolengagement.org>

- >>Guidelines for a National Definition of Truancy and Calculating Rates
- >>School Policies that Engage Students and Families
- >>Youth Out of School: Linking Absence to Delinquency

#### From the National Dropout Prevention Center – <http://www.dropoutprevention.org>

- >>Planning, collaborations, and implementation strategies for truancy programs
- >>Legal and economic implications of truancy
- >>Best Practices and model truancy programs
- >>Guidelines for evaluating truancy programs
- >>Fifteen effective strategies for improving student attendance & truancy prevention

#### From Education Northwest –<http://educationnorthwest.org/>

- >>School Improvement Research Series, Reducing the Dropout Rate
- >>Increasing Student Attendance: Strategies from Research to Practice

## Hot Issue

The Center regularly posts *Hot Issues* ( <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/ongoinghotissues.htm> ) and *Hot Topics* ( <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/hottopic.htm#Hot> ). Below is the latest hot issue.

### Concerns about Personalizing Teaching

Last November, RAND published (with funding from the Gates Foundation) a report entitled: *Continued Progress: Promising Evidence on Personalized Learning*, by John F. Pane, Elizabeth D. Steiner, Matthew D. Baird, & Laura S. Hamilton – [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1300/RR1365/RAND\\_RR1365.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1300/RR1365/RAND_RR1365.pdf)

In January, William R. Penuel and Raymond Johnson provided a review of the report for the Think Twice Think Tank Review Project at the National Education Policy Center – <http://nepc.colorado.edu/thinktank/review-personalized-learning>. They conclude that “readers should be skeptical of what promise the report's evidence actually provides for any given model of personalized learning being promoted or considered. The study does suggest that some practices are associated with some test score gains, but those practices may be quite different from those promoted under the flag of personalized learning.”

We have long been concerned with the way the construct of personalization in classrooms has morphed and been co-opted, especially by those involved with bringing technology into the classroom.

For example, the term "personalization" was emphasized in the common core standards initiative, the proposed model core teaching standards, the 2010 National Education Technology Plan, and Race to the Top guidelines. In all these instances, the construct was defined inadequately.

And, with respect to "innovative" school practice, last year we noted concerns related to how the twenty New England schools in the League of Innovative Schools were developing "personalized learning experiences" to address the "distinct learning needs, interests and aspirations of individual students." (See <http://www.nhregister.com/article/NH/20150319/NEWS/150319398>.)

All this, as well as the above report and review, are indications of how policy makers have embraced the concept of personalized learning and the various ways the term is interpreted. Clearly personalization is becoming a hot issue.

We think it is essential at this juncture to engage folks in a broader discussion than is captured by those currently advocating for personalization in the classroom.

Unfortunately, discussions of personalized learning often do not distinguish personalized learning from personalized instruction and usually fail to place such learning and instruction within the context of other conditions that must be improved in classrooms and school-wide to address factors interfering with student learning and performance.

Our Center has focused on personalization for decades. Currently, it is a major facet of our *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*. \* We hypothesize that properly conceived and implemented personalized instruction along with student and learning supports are essential to enabling equity of opportunity, closing the achievement gap, assuring civil rights, promoting whole child development, and fostering a positive school climate.

We stress that personalized instruction, in contrast to individualized instruction, strives to meet learners where they are – not only with respect to current capabilities, but critically with respect to motivational considerations. Moreover, even personalized instruction is insufficient for addressing common barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Such matters usually require adding special assistance/supports for students.

Learning is a nonlinear, dynamic, transactional, and spiraling process, and so is teaching. And when it comes to addressing student learning, behavior, and emotional problems, teachers can't do it alone. They need to collaborate with student and learning support staff and family members.

We discuss all this in *The Implementation Guide to Student Learning Supports: New Directions for Addressing Barriers to Learning* (H.S. Adelman & L. Taylor, 2006). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press and in two continuing education modules on personalized instruction:

- >Module I provides some background, commonly used definitions, and guidance for personalizing learning. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/personalizeI.pdf>
- >Module II highlights barriers to learning and teaching and classroom and school-wide strategies that build on personalization to address such barriers and re-engage disconnected students. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/persII.pdf>

We also have a Quick Find on the topic at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/classenable.htm> and other related resources can be freely downloaded from our Center website – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

### WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON ALL THIS?

Send comments for sharing to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

#### Previously Highlighted Hot Issues

- Arguments About Overdiagnosis of ADHD
- Moving Beyond the Concept of Integrated Student Supports
- Special Education Disputes Continue to Reflect the Many Issues that Permeate the Field
- Maintaining Momentum for Sound Systemic Changes When the Superintendency Changes
- And Yet Another Discrete Initiative!
- Enabling Learning: It's a Bigger Policy Problem than Most Education Reformers Appreciate
- Reporting on Teacher Effectiveness: The Discussion Heats Up
- Reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act and Addressing Barriers to Learning
- Grade Retention: What's the Prevailing Policy and What Needs to be Done?
- Suicide Prevention in Schools
- Should Policy Specify a Formal Role for Schools Related to Mental Health?
- Screening Mental Health Problems in Schools
- What's the Best Way to Shape the New Education Act to Enhance Equity of Opportunity?

\*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 and promoting whole child development.*

## Center Update



### Latest Center Resources

(For regular updates about new Center resources, go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> and click on *What's New.*)

#### **ESSA, Equity of Opportunity, and Addressing Barriers to Learning**

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

*See and share* this analysis of how the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) focuses on addressing barriers to learning and re-engaging disconnected students

### Also New

- >ESSA: Will Adding a Nonacademic Accountability Indicator Enhance Student and Learning Supports? – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/accountrep.pdf>
- >Student and Learning Supports: Moving Forward – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/suppbrief.pdf>
- >How will every student succeed? – <http://educationpost.org/how-will-every-student-succeed/>
- >About Anxiety Attacks – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/panic.pdf>
- >Addressing Barriers Confronting First-Generation College Students from Hispanic Families – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/firstgen.pdf>
- >Students Who Are Undocumented and Identify as Queer – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/lgbtq.pdf>
- >Transgender students and schools – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/trans.pdf>
- >Young people's concerns about body image – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/bodyimage.pdf>
- >Trauma: a barrier to learning and teaching – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/traumainfo.pdf>

### Examples of Recently Updated Resources

- >Responding to Crisis at a School – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/crisis/crisis.pdf>
- >Students and Psychotropic Medication: the School's Role – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/psymeds/med1.pdf>
- >Teen Pregnancy Prevention – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/teenpreg/teenpreg.pdf>
- >Social and Interpersonal Problems Related to School Aged Youth – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/socialproblems/socialprobs.pdf>
- >Learning Problems and Learning Disabilities – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/ldprobs/ldprobs.pdf>

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

Use our website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>  
 or contact us at [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu) or Ph: (310) 825-3634  
 Not receiving our monthly electronic newsletter (ENEWS)?  
 Or our weekly *Community of Practice Interchange*?  
 Send a request to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

The Center for Mental Health in Schools operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project in the Dept. of Psychology, UCLA.

#### Center Staff:

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