SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT UCLA

Addressing Barriers to Learning

New ways to think . . .

Better ways to link

Mental Health in Schools Center Training and Technical Assistance

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It seems that the most important influences in the prosocial development of children are the experiences that form the foundation of caring -- receiving nurturance and empathy and being given the opportunities for mastery.
Chaskin & Rauner, 1995

Enabling Learning in the Classroom: A Primary Mental Health Concern

Over half my class needs special help!
What's a teacher to do?

For many, when any student is not doing well, the trend is to refer them directly for counseling or for assessment in hopes of referral for special help -- perhaps even special education assignment. In some schools and some classrooms, the number of referrals is dramatic. Where special teams have been established to review teacher requests for help, the list grows as the year proceeds. The longer the list, the longer the lag time for review -- often to the point that, by the end of the school year, the team only has reviewed a small percentage of those on the list. And, no matter how many are reviewed, there are always more referrals than can be served.

One solution might be to convince policy makers to fund more services. However, even if the policy climate favored expanding public services, more health and social services alone are not a comprehensive approach for addressing barriers to learning. More services to treat problems certainly are needed. But so are prevention and early-after-onset programs that can reduce the numbers teachers send to review teams.

Contents

Helping Teachers Assist Identified Students: *Classroom-Focused Enabling*

When a teacher encounters difficulty with a youngster, a first step is to try addressing the problem in the regular class. This usually means enhancing the teacher's ability to prevent and respond to learning and behavior problems. In developing a school's *Enabling Component* (see box on p. 2), this area is one of six clusters of programmatic activity and is called *Classroom-Focused Enabling*.

A key facet of Classroom-Focused Enabling is personalized on-the-job education. The aim is to increase a teacher's array of strategies for working with a wide range of individual differences and creating a caring context for learning. Such strategies include ways to accommodate and also teach students to compensate for differences, vulnerabilities, and disabilities. In this context, special attention is given to targeting how paid assistants, peers, and volunteers are used to enhance social and academic support.

Another aspect of Classroom-Focused Enabling involves restructuring the functions of student support staff so they play a greater role in directly assisting the teacher *in the classroom*. This calls for redesigning the job descriptions and staff development of resource and itinerant teachers, counselors, and other pupil services personnel so they are able to work closely with teachers and students in the classroom and on regular activities.

Classroom-Focused Enabling requires programs and systems for

- personalized professional development of teachers and support staff
- developing the capabilities of paraeducators and other paid assistants, and volunteers.
- temporary out of class assistance for students
- expanding resources.

(See the survey in the *Ideas into Practice* section on pages 7-9).

(cont. on page 2)

Through a programmatic approach for *Classroom-Focused Enabling*, teachers increase their ability to address problems as they arise. In turn, this can increase the effectiveness of regular classroom programs, support inclusionary policies, and reduce the need for specialized services.

A Caring Context for Learning

From a psychological perspective, it is important that teachers establish a classroom atmosphere that encourages mutual support and caring and creates a sense of community. Such an atmosphere can play a key role in preventing learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems. Learning and teaching are experienced most positively when the learner *cares* about learning and the teacher *cares* about teaching. Moreover, the whole process benefits greatly when all the participants *care* about each other.

Caring has moral, social, and personal facets. And when all facets of caring are present and balanced, they can nurture individuals and facilitate the process of learning. At the same time, caring in all its dimensions should be a major focus of what is taught and learned. That is, the classroom curriculum should encompass a focus on fostering socio-emotional and physical development.

Caring begins when students (and their families) first arrive at a school. Classrooms and schools can do their job better if students feel they are truly welcome and have a range of social supports.

(cont. on page 5)

Why Schools Need an Enabling Component

No one is certain of the exact number of students who require assistance in dealing with the many factors that can interfere with learning and performance. There is consensus, however, that significant barriers are encountered by many, especially those from families that are poor. Schools committed to the success of all children must be designed to *enable learning* by addressing barriers to learning.

Enabling is defined as "providing with the means or opportunity; making possible, practical, or easy; giving power, capacity, or sanction to." The concept of an *enabling component* is formulated around the proposition that *a comprehensive, multifaceted, integrated continuum of enabling activity* is *essential* in addressing the needs of youngsters who encounter barriers that interfere with their benefitting satisfactorily from instruction.

Turning the concept into practice calls for weaving together school and community resources to address problems experienced by students and their families. Included are programs to promote healthy development and foster positive functioning as the best way to prevent many learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems and as a necessary adjunct to correcting problems. An *enabling component* encompasses six programmatic areas of activity designed to (1) enhance classroom-based efforts to enable learning, (2) provide prescribed student and family assistance, (3) respond to and prevent crises, (4) support transitions, (5) increase home involvement in schooling, and (6) outreach to develop greater community involvement and support (including recruitment of volunteers).

The concept of an *enabling component* provides a broad unifying notion around which those concerned with restructuring education support programs and services can rally. At a fundamental policy level, the concept paves the way for understanding that restructuring should encompass three primary and complementary components: *instruction/curriculum*, *enabling*, and *governance/management*. The message for policy makers is:

> For school reform to produce desired student outcomes, *school and community reformers must expand their vision beyond restructuring instructional and management functions and recognize there is a third primary and essential set of functions involved in enabling teaching and learning.*

References

Adelman, H.S. (1996). *Restructuring support services: Toward a comprehensive approach.* Kent, OH: American School Health Association.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (1997). Addressing barriers to learning: Beyond school-linked services and full service schools. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 67,* 408-421.

Center News

Our ways of helping are expanding. We don't have all the answers, but we work diligently to try to meet each request.

Technical Assistance

Some help is always close at hand. Contact us at:

E-mail: smhp@ucla.edu Phone: (310) 825-3634
Write: Center for Mental Health in Schools
Department of Psychology, UCLA
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563

We'll let you know what we know, use your request to try to find out some more, and/or connect you with someone who can help. Fortunately, through the Internet, timely access to relevant information and resources increasingly is at all our finger tips. If you don't have access, we can be your link. Soon almost everyone will have access through work, local libraries, or a friend. With this in mind, one aspect of our technical assistance is designed to pass on what we learn about efficient use of this info highway when responding to your requests.

Consultation Cadre Database Online

A Consultation Cadre is one way we link people. Cadre members offer their expertise related to variety of system and program concerns, and almost every type of psychosocial problem. They work in urban and rural areas across the country. You can use the above contact information to request names when you need them.

For those on the Internet, as part of our ever expanding web site, we now have online a searchable version of the Cadre database. This means that at any time you can find the names of over 275 professionals who have volunteered to network with others and share what they know.

If you are on the Internet, go to our home page
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

Click on "Search Our Consultation Cadre." There you will find the topics by which we group cadre members' expertise. Highlight your topic; click on "submit" to begin the search. A list of names will be generated. (Some are accompanied with a bit of background on the person; information on the others will be added as we receive it.) For those cadre members with Email, you can just click and connect. Try it out and let us know what you think.

And remember, the Consultation Cadre represents only one avenue to information and resources. As you look over "hard copy" information from our center or browse our web site, you will become acquainted with a host of resources available from us, our sister center (the Center for School Mental Health Assistance at the University of Maryland at Baltimore) and the many other organizations and clearinghouses around the country.

ENEWS

Our monthly electronic newsletter augments our center's quarterly print newsletter and the other ways we share information and facilitate interchanges. Each month ENEWS highlights an emerging issue and offers responses, requests, and questions from readers. Information is provided on relevant recent publications, upcoming initiatives, conferences, workshops, and helpful resources. Also included are some job opportunities and an update on resources available from our center and our sister center.

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Soon, you will be able to access the latest issue of ENEWS through our web site. It is being put online in Adobe's Acrobat PDF file format so that you can download copies by using Adobe's Acrobat Reader (which is free). If you don't have the latest version of the Adobe Reader (3.01), we have included a link to their web site (http://www.adobe.com) for easy downloading of the software. (Previous issues of our quarterly print newsletter already are online.)

From the Center's Clearinghouse

Also, on line is the Center's clearinghouse catalogue with its search engine. Browse our web site frequently and you will find more and more documents developed by our clearinghouse. We are adding them using Adobe's Acrobat PDF file format for ready downloading. Our intent, over time, is to provide timely and free access to all our materials.(Since it will take a bit of time to load all our documents, let us know if there is something you would like to see us post soon.)

Center Staff:
Howard Adelman, Co-Director
Linda Taylor, Co-Director
Perry Nelson, Coordinator
Judy Onghai, Asst. Coordinator
. . . and a host of graduate and undergraduate students

Do You Know About ?

From here and there . . .

Empirically Supported Psychosocial Interventions for Children

In the Spring 1998 *Clinical Child Psychology Newsletter*, Christopher Lonigan provides an update on the work and controversies related to identifying empirically supported psychosocial interventions. Referring to the state of the art as reported in a special issue of the *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology* (1998, volume 26, number 2), he states:

> "On the one hand, the news ... is good. There are a number of treatments for depression, anxiety, ADHD, and conduct problems that meet fairly strict standards of evidence for efficacy. On the other hand, the news ... is not a glowing report on the state of our knowledge about therapy for children. Readers ... will most likely be surprised that there are so few treatments ... included among a list of well-established or probably efficacious treatments .... In most cases, however, the absence of a particular technique [reflects] the fact that there have been no well-designed studies . . . .

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> Upon hearing Congressional testimony from a leading scientist that indicated "*On the one hand, research suggests . . . But on the other hand...*," one exasperated Senator was heard to moan, "*What we need in this country is more scientists who can give the same answer with both hands*."

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Effectiveness of School-based M.H. Services for Children: A 10-year Research Review

Using a computerized data-base search, Kimberly Hoagwood and Holly Erwin (1997, *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 6,* 435-451) reviewed the literature from 1985 to 1995 on school-based mental health services for children. Of the 5,046 references, only 15 studies met appropriate research criteria. Based on these, three types of interventions are reported as having some degree of empirical support: cognitive-behavioral therapy; social skills training; and teacher consultation.

Keeping Schools Open As Community Learning Centers: Extending Learning in a Safe, Drug-Free Environment Before and After School

This guidebook (put out by the National Community Education Association, the U.S. Dept. of Education, and others) discusses Community Learning Centers for basic and active community involvement in raising and educating children. Information is presented on establishing programs, program ideas and models are highlighted, and several sources are suggested as ways to weave together funding. Want more information? visit the Department of Education Web Site at http://www.ed.gov. For a copy, call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

Paraeducators: Learning on the Web

In the May/June 1998 issue of *Teaching Exceptional Children*, Allen Steckelberg and Stanley Vasa at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln describe their three phase training program using an interactive web site (URL = http://para.unl.edu) and group and practicum activities. Through a university/school collaboration, they used the Internet not only to provide content/information but also to encourage communication among program instructors, supervising teachers, and paraeducator personnel. The program description provides a useful overview of the work paraeducators can do to help teachers enable and support student learning.

National Assembly on School-Based Health Care
Annual Meeting: Los Angeles June 25-27, 1998
Theme: *Communities Creating Access to Care*

At this annual meeting, the Mental Health Section will offer three special sessions. On Thursday 6/25, the focus will be on "Developing and Maintaining Stable Funding" (Presenters: John Schlitt, Steve Adelsheim, & Howard Adelman). On Saturday 6/26 the topics are: in the a.m., "Quality Assurance and Evaluation in School Mental Health" (Mark Weist and Jenni Jennings) and in the p.m., Integration in School Mental Health (Michel Lahti, Rachel Grier, Linda Taylor, Mary View-Schneider, Neal Mazer).

Other sessions relevant to school mental health will discuss group counseling (Irving Berkowitz and Leslie Morris), systems of care (Mary Jane England, Marty Griffin, Ellen Linder), family therapy (Cathy Wecherling, Jenni Jennings, Leonora Stephens, Phyllis Green), effectiveness (Paula Ambruster), outcome evaluation (Mona Forbes), substance abuse (Leslie Mandel), and more.

Contact: National Office at (888) 286-8727

(continued from page 2)

A key facet of welcoming encompasses effectively connecting new students with peers and adults who can provide social support and advocacy. On an ongoing basis, caring is best maintained through use of personalized instruction, regular student conferences, activity fostering social and emotional development, and opportunities for students to attain positive status. Efforts to create a caring classroom climate benefit from programs for cooperative learning, peer tutoring, mentoring, advocacy, peer counseling and mediation, human relations, and conflict resolution. Clearly, a myriad of strategies can contribute to students feeling positively connected to the classroom and school.

Given the importance of home involvement in schooling, attention also must be paid to creating a caring atmosphere for family members. Increased home involvement is more likely if families feel welcome and have access to social support at school. Thus, teachers and other school staff need to establish a program that effectively welcomes and connects families with school staff and other families to generate ongoing social support and greater participation in home involvement efforts.

Also, just as with students and their families, school staff need to feel truly welcome and socially supported. Rather than leaving this to chance, a caring school develops and institutionalizes a program to welcome and connect new staff with those with whom they will be working. And it does so in ways that effectively incorporates newcomers into the organization. (For more on this, see the *Lessons Learned* section on pages 10-11.)

What is a psychological sense of community?

People can be together without feeling connected or feeling they belong or feeling responsible for a collective vision or mission. At school and in class, a psychological sense of community exists when a critical mass of stakeholders are committed to each other *and* to the setting's goals and values *and* exert effort toward the goals and maintaining relationships with each other.

A perception of community is shaped by daily experiences and probably is best engendered when a person feels welcomed, supported, nurtured, respected, liked, connected in reciprocal relationships with others, and a valued member who is contributing to the collective identity, destiny, and vision. Practically speaking, such feelings seem to arise when a critical mass of participants not only are committed to a collective vision, but also are committed to being and working together in supportive and efficacious ways. That is, a conscientious effort by enough stakeholders associated with a school or class seems necessary for a sense of community to develop and be maintained. Such an effort must ensure effective mechanisms are in place to provide support, promote self-efficacy, and foster positive working relationships.

There is an obvious relationship between maintaining a sense of community and sustaining morale and minimizing burn out.

Expanding the Context

Learning is neither limited to what is formally taught nor to time spent in classrooms. It occurs whenever and wherever the learner interacts with the surrounding environment. All facets of the community (not just the school) provide learning opportunities. *Anyone in the community who wants to facilitate learning might be a contributing teacher*. This includes aides, volunteers, parents, siblings, peers, mentors in the community, librarians, recreation staff, etc. They all constitute what can be called *the teaching community*. When a classroom successfully joins with its surrounding community, everyone has the opportunity to learn and to teach.

Most schools do their job better when they are an integral and positive part of the community. Unfortunately, schools and classrooms often are seen as separate from the community in which they reside. This contributes to a lack of connection between school staff, parents, students, and other community residents and resources. For schools to be seen as an integral part of the community, steps must be taken to create and maintain collaborative partnerships.

A good place to start is with community volunteers. Greater volunteerism on the part of parents, peers, and others from the community can break down barriers and helps increase home and community involvement in schools and schooling. Thus, a major emphasis in joining with the community is

(cont. on page 6)

establishment of a program that effectively recruits, screens, trains, and nurtures volunteers. In addition, we all must work toward increased use of school sites as places where parents, families, and other community residents can engage in learning, recreation, enrichment, and find services they need.

Teachers Working and Learning Together in Caring Ways

Increasingly, it is becoming evident that teachers need to work closely with other teachers and school personnel, as well as with parents, professionals-in-training, volunteers, and so forth. Collaboration and teaming are key facets of addressing barriers to learning. They allow teachers to broaden the resources and strategies available in and out of the classroom to enhance learning and performance.

As Hargreaves (1984) cogently notes, the way to relieve "the uncertainty and open-endedness" that characterizes classroom teaching is to create

> communities of colleagues who work collaboratively [in cultures of shared learning and positive risk-taking] to set their own professional limits and standards, while still remaining committed to continuous improvement. Such communities can also bring together the professional and personal lives of teachers in a way that supports growth and allows problems to be discussed without fear of disapproval or punishment.

Collaboration and collegiality are fundamental to morale and work satisfaction and to transforming classrooms into caring contexts for learning. Collegiality, however, cannot be demanded. As Hargreaves stresses, when collegiality is *mandated*, it can produce what is called *contrived collegiality* which tends to breed inflexibility and inefficiency. Contrived collegiality is compulsory, implementation-oriented, regulated administratively, fixed in time and space, and predictable. In contrast, *collaborative cultures* foster working relationships which are voluntary, development-oriented, spontaneous, pervasive across time and space, and unpredictable.

In many ways, the success of *Classroom-Focused Enabling* depends on the school's ability to organize itself into a learning community that personalizes inservice teacher education. Such "organizational learning" requires an organizational structure

> `where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision and improve shared mental models' [Senge, 1990] by engaging in different tasks, acquiring different kinds of expertise, experiencing and expressing different forms of leadership, confronting uncomfortable organizational truths, and searching together for shared solutions (Hargreaves, 1994).

Finally, we all must acknowledge that problems related to working relationships are a given -- even in a caring environment. A common example that arises in such situations is rescue dynamics. These dynamics occur when caring and helping go astray, when those helping become frustrated and angry because those being helped don't respond in desired ways or seem not to be trying. To minimize such dynamics, it is important for all concerned to understand interpersonal dynamics and barriers to working relationships and for sites to establish effective problem solving mechanisms to eliminate or at least minimize such problems.

> Additional discussion of working relationships is available in several works prepared by our center. (As noted on p.3 of this newsletter, some of these works are already or soon will be accessible through the Internet.)

Some Relevant References

Chaskin, R.J. & Rauner, D.M. (eds.) Youth and caring. A special section of the May 1995 issue of the *Phi Delta Kappan*.

Fowler, R.C., & Corley, K.K. (1996). Linking families, building communities. *Educational Leadership, 53*, 24-26.

Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Kruse, S. & Louis, K.S. (1995). Teacher teaming -- opportunities and dilemmas. *Brief to Principals*, No. 11. Published by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1025 W. Johnson St., Madison, WI 53706.

Sarason, S. (1996). *Revisiting "The culture of school and the problem of change."* New York: Teachers College Press.

Ideas into Practice
Self-study to Enhance Classroom-Focused Enabling

The following survey is one of a set designed as self-study instruments related to a school's programmatic areas for addressing barriers to learning. School stakeholders use such surveys to map and analyze the current status of their programs. The survey presented below looks at classroom efforts to enable learning (see the lead article in this newsletter).

This type of self-study is best done by teams. For example, a group of teachers could use the items to discuss how the school currently supports their efforts, how effective the processes are, and what's not being done. Members of the team initially might work separately in filling out the items, but the real payoff comes from discussing them as a group. The instrument also can be used as a form of program quality review. (The entire set of surveys is available from our center's clearinghouse.)

In analyzing, the status of the school's efforts, the group may decide that some existing activity is not a high priority and that the resources should be redeployed to help establish more important programs. Other activity may be seen as needing to be embellished so that it is effective. Finally, decisions may be made regarding new desired activities, and since not everything can be added at once, priorities and timelines can be established.

Survey (self-study) -- Classroom-Focused Enabling

Please indicate all items that apply	**Yes**	**Yes but more of this is needed**	**No**	**If no, is this something you want?**
A. What programs for *personalized professional development* are currently at the site?				
1. Are teachers clustered for support and staff development?	___	___	___	___
2. Are models used to provide demonstrations?	___	___	___	___
3. Are workshops and readings offered regularly?	___	___	___	___
4. Is consultation available from those with special expertise such as				
a. members of the Student Success Team?	___	___	___	___
b. resource specialists and/or special education teachers?	___	___	___	___
c. members of special committees?	___	___	___	___
d. bilingual and/or other coordinators?	___	___	___	___
e. counselors?	___	___	___	___
f. other? (specify) _____	___	___	___	___
5. Is there a formal mentoring program?	___	___	___	___
6. Is there staff social support?	___	___	___	___
7. Is there formal conflict mediation/resolution for staff?	___	___	___	___
8. Is there assistance in learning to use advanced technology?	___	___	___	___
9. other (specify) _____	___	___	___	___
B. What *supports* are available *in the classroom* to help students identified as having problems?				
1. Are "personnel" added to the class (or before/after school)? If yes, what types of personnel are brought in:				
a. aides (e.g. paraeducators; other paid assistants)?	___	___	___	___
b. older students?	___	___	___	___
c. other students in the class?	___	___	___	___
d. volunteers?	___	___	___	___
e. parents?	___	___	___	___
f. resource teacher?	___	___	___	___
g. specialists?	___	___	___	___
h. other? (specify)_____	___	___	___	___

Survey -- Classroom-Focused Enabling **(cont.)**	**Yes**	**Yes but more of this is needed**	**No**	**If no, is this something you want?**
2. Are materials and activities upgraded to				
a. ensure there are enough basic supplies in the classroom?	___	___	___	___
b. increase the range of high-motivation activities (keyed to the interests of students in need of special attention)?	___	___	___	___
c. include advanced technology?	___	___	___	___
d. other? (specify) _____	___	___	___	___
C. What is done to assist a teacher who has difficulty with limited English speaking students?				
1. Is the student reassigned?	___	___	___	___
2. Does the teacher receive professional development related to working with limited English speaking students?	___	___	___	___
3. Does the bilingual coordinator offer consultation?	___	___	___	___
4. Is a bilingual aide assigned to the class?	___	___	___	___
5. Are volunteers brought in to help (e.g., parents, peers)?	___	___	___	___
6. other? (specify) _____	___	___	___	___
D. What types of technology are available to the teachers?				
1. Are there computers in the classroom?	___	___	___	___
2. Is there a computer lab?	___	___	___	___
3. Is computer assisted instruction offered?	___	___	___	___
4. Are there computer literacy programs?	___	___	___	___
5. Are computer programs used to address ESL needs?	___	___	___	___
6. Does the classroom have video recording capability?	___	___	___	___
7. Is instructional TV used in the classroom?				
a. videotapes?	___	___	___	___
b. PBS?	___	___	___	___
8. Is there a multimedia lab?	___	___	___	___
9. other? (specify)_____	___	___	___	___
E. What curricular enrichment and adjunct programs do teachers use?				
1. Are library activities used regularly?	___	___	___	___
2. Is music/art used regularly?	___	___	___	___
3. Is health education a regular part of the curriculum?	___	___	___	___
4. Are student performances regular events?	___	___	___	___
5. Are there several field trips a year?	___	___	___	___
6. Are there student council and other leadership opportunities?	___	___	___	___
7. Are there school environment projects such as				
a. mural painting?	___	___	___	___
b. horticulture/gardening?	___	___	___	___
c. school clean-up and beautification?	___	___	___	___
d. other? (specify)_____	___	___	___	___

Survey -- Classroom-Focused Enabling **(cont.)**

	Yes	Yes but more of this is needed	No	If no, is this something you want?
8. Are there special school-wide events such as				
a. clubs and similar organized activities?	___	___	___	___
b. publication of a student newspaper?	___	___	___	___
c. sales events (candy, t shirts)?	___	___	___	___
d. poster contests?	___	___	___	___
e. essay contests?	___	___	___	___
f. a book fair?	___	___	___	___
g. pep rallies/contests?	___	___	___	___
h. attendance competitions?	___	___	___	___
i. attendance awards/assemblies?	___	___	___	___
j. other? (specify) _____	___	___	___	___
9. Are guest contributors used (e.g., guest speakers/performers)?	___	___	___	___
10. Other? (specify)_____	___	___	___	___

F. What programs for temporary out of class help are currently at the site?

1. Is there a family center providing student and family assistance?	___	___	___	___
2. Are there designated problem remediation specialists?	___	___	___	___
3. Is there a "time out" room?	___	___	___	___
4. other? (specify) _____	___	___	___	___

G What programs are used to train paraeducators, volunteers, and other "assistants" who come into the classrooms to work with students who need help?

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

H. Which of the following can teachers request as special interventions?

1. family problem solving conferences	___	___	___	___
2. exchange of students as an opportunity for improving the match and for a fresh start	___	___	___	___
3. referral for specific services	___	___	___	___
4. other (specify) _____	___	___	___	___

I. Is there ongoing training for team members concerned with the area of Classroom-Focused Enabling? ___ ___ ___ ___

J. Please indicate below any other ways that are used at the school to assist a teacher's efforts to address barriers to students' learning.

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

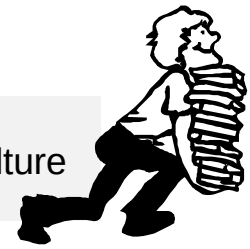
K. Please indicate below other things you want the school to do to assist a teacher's efforts to address barriers to students' learning.

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Lessons Learned
Toward a Caring School Culture



Schools often fail to create a caring culture. A caring school culture refers not only to caring *for* but also caring *about* others. It refers not only to students and parents but to staff. Those who want to create a caring culture can draw on a variety of ideas and practices developed over the years.

Who is Caring for the Teaching Staff?

Teachers must feel good about themselves if classrooms are to be caring environments. Teaching is one of society's most psychologically demanding jobs, yet few schools have programs designed specifically to counter job stress and enhance staff feelings of well-being.

In discussing "burn-out," many writers have emphasized that, too often, teaching is carried out under highly stressful working conditions and without much of a collegial and social support structure. Recommendations usually factor down to strategies that reduce environmental stressors, increase personal capabilities, and enhance job and social supports. (Our center provides an overview of this topic in an introductory packet entitled *Understanding and Minimizing Staff Burnout*.)

What tends to be ignore d is that schools have no formal mechanisms to care for staff. As schools move toward local control, they have a real opportunity to establish formal mechanisms and programs that foster mutual caring. In doing so, special attention must be paid to transitioning in new staff and transforming working conditions to create appropriate staff teams whose members can support and nurture each other in the classroom, every day. Relatedly, classrooms should play a greater role in fostering student social-emotional development by ensuring such a focus is built into the curricula (discussed in *Lessons Learned* in the Spring 1997 newsletter; ask for a copy).

Helping Youngsters Overcome Difficulty Making Friends

A caring school culture pays special attention to those who have difficulty making friends. Some students need just a bit of support to overcome the problem (e.g., a few suggestions, a couple of special opportunities). Some, however, need more help. They may be very shy, lacking in social skills, or may even act in negative ways that lead to their rejection. Whatever the reason, it is clear they need help if they and the school are to reap the benefits produced when individuals feel positively connected to each other.

School staff (e.g., teacher, classroom or yard aide, counselor, support/resource staff) and parents can work together to help such students. The following is one set of strategies that can be helpful:

- Identify a potential "peer buddy" (e.g., a student with similar interests and temperament or one who will understand and be willing to reach out to the one who needs a friend)
- Either directly enlist and train the "peer buddy" or design a strategy to ensure the two are introduced to each other in a positive way
- Create regular opportunities for shared activities/ projects at and away from school (e.g., they might work together on cooperative tasks, be teammates for games, share special roles such as being classroom monitors, have a sleep-over weekend)
- Facilitate their time together to ensure they experience good feelings about being together.

It may be necessary to try a few different activities before finding some they enjoy doing together. For some, the first attempts to match them with a friend will not work out. (It will be evident after about a week or so.) If the youngster really doesn't know how to act like a friend, it is necessary to teach some guidelines and social skills. In the long-run, for almost everyone, making friends is possible and is essential to feeling cared about.

> A useful resource in thinking about strategies for helping youngsters find, make, and keep friends is*: Good Friends are Hard to Find* a book written for parents by Fred Frankl (1996; published by Perspective Publishing). The work also has sections on dealing with teasing, bullying, and meanness and helping with stormy relationships.

Applying Rules in a Fair and Caring Way

> *Should different consequences be applied for the same offense when the children involved differ in terms of their problems, age, competence, and so forth?*

Teachers and parents (and almost everyone else) are confronted with the problem of whether to apply rules and treat transgressions differentially. Some try to simplify matters by not making distinctions and treating everyone alike. For example, it was said

(cont. on page 11)

of Coach Vince Lombardi that he treated all his players the same -- like dogs! A caring school culture cannot treat everyone the same.

Teachers and other school staff often argue that it is unfair to other students if the same rule is not applied in the same way to everyone. Thus, they insist on enforcing rules without regard to a particular student's social and emotional problems. Although such a "no exceptions" strategy represents a simple solution, it ignores the fact that such a nonpersonalized approach may make a child's problem worse and thus be unjust.

A caring school culture must develop and apply rules and offer specialized assistance in ways that recognize that the matter of fairness involves such complicated questions as, Fair for whom? Fair according to whom? Fair using what criteria and what procedures for applying the criteria? Obviously what is fair for the society may not be fair for an individual; what is fair for one person may cause an inequity for another. To differentially punish two students for the same transgression will certainly be seen as unfair by at least one of the parties. To provide special services for one group's problems raises the taxes of all citizens. To deny such services is unfair and harmful to those who need the help.

Making fair decisions about how rules should be applied and who should get what services and resources involves principles of *distributive justice*. For example, should each person be (1) responded to in the same way? given an equal share of available resources? (2) responded to and provided for according to individual need? (3) responded to and served according to his or her societal contributions? or (4) responded to and given services on the basis of having earned or merited them? As Beauchamp and Childress (1989) point out, the first principle emphasizes equal access to the goods in life that every rational person desires; the second emphasizes need; the third emphasizes contribution and merit; and the fourth emphasizes a mixed use of such criteria so that public and private utility are maximized (in *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*). Obviously, each of these principles can conflict with each other. Moreover, any may be weighted more heavily than another, depending on the social philosophy of the decision maker.

Many parents and some teachers lean toward an emphasis on individual need. That is, they tend to believe fairness means that those with problems should be responded to on a case-by-case basis and given special assistance. Decisions based on individual need often call for exceptions to how rules are applied and unequal allocation and affirmative action with regard to who gets certain resources. When this occurs, stated intentions to be just and fair often lead to decisions that are quite controversial. Because building a caring school culture requires an emphasis on individual need, the process is not without its controversies.

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It is easy to lose sight of caring, and it is not easy to develop and maintain a caring school culture. In an era when so many people are concerned about discipline, personal responsibility, school-wide values, and character education, *caring counts*. Indeed, it may be the key to student well-being and successful schools.

Research on Youth and Caring

Protective factors. In the May 1995 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*, a series of articles discuss "Youth and Caring." Included is an overview of findings from the Research Project on Youth and Caring (carried out through the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago). Among a host of findings, researchers in that program report that caring and connectedness can protect against specific risk factors or stressful life events. The protective facets of caring are seen as transcending differences in class, ethnicity, geography, and other life history variables.

What makes for a caring environment? Karen Pittman and Michelle Cahill studied youth programs and concluded that youngsters experience an environment as caring when it

- creates an atmosphere where they feel welcome, respected, and comfortable,
- structures opportunities for developing caring relationships with peers and adults,
- provides information, counseling, and expectations that enable them to determine what it means to care for themselves and to care for a definable group,
- provides opportunities, training, and expectations that encourage them to contribute to the greater good through service, advocacy, and active problem solving with respect to important matters.

A Coalition for Policy Cohesion

All youngsters, *all* families, *all* neighborhoods are affected by the fragmented and marginalized nature of policies for addressing barriers to development and learning. By not moving aggressively to increase policy cohesion, limited resources often are expended unwisely. The negative impact is not just on those experiencing problems, but on society as a whole.

One of the ironies when policy makers call for collaboration is that so little attention is given to forming *collaborations to affect policy.* It is increasingly evident that there is a critical need to fill policy gaps and enhance policy cohesion related to addressing barriers to development and learning. Currently, there is no group or mechanism focusing specifically on these matters.

While every organization has specific interests, many share facets of their agenda, have overlapping functions, and want to work more closely around areas of common concern. From this perspective, it seemed worth determining whether enough key organizations would agree to enter into a coalition -- linked by the common aims of fostering policy integration and filling policy gaps related to addressing barriers to development and learning.

To help establish the coalition, the School Mental Health Project at UCLA set out to identify interested organizations, facilitated creation of a steering group, and is providing support for the coalition's initial activities. The excellent response to the announcements about forming the coalition is a solid indication of both need and interest. Representatives of over 75 organizations already have responded. Others have indicated interest, and as the coalition moves forward, it is certain that more organizations will join. All organizations at all levels are welcome to join, as are individuals whose interests and talents can move the agenda forward.

In December 1997, inquiries were sent to all who expressed interest to identify those willing to serve on the coalition's steering committee to set priorities and establish a plan of action for moving forward. Again, the response was excellent. Through long-distance communications, initial work was done, and a decision made to meet with those who could attend a March 1998 steering group session in DC. At the meeting, the Steering Group worked on a statement of purpose, discussed ideas related to organizational and operational structure, and delineated some first activities. The group's report is available through our center (see newsletter insert).

Please use the enclosed form to ask for what you need and to give us feedback. Also, send us information, ideas, and materials for the Clearinghouse.

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Put a check mark before those items you would like us to send you. (There is no charge if you request one of these using this form.)

___ *Report from the Steering Committee for the Coalition for Cohesive Policy in Addressing Barriers to Development & Learning*

___ *Policy Report: Addressing Barriers to Student Learning: Closing Gaps in School/ Community Policy and Practice*

___ *An updated free listing of Center developed resources such as our Introductory, Resource, and Technical Aid Packets; guidebooks; continuing education modules; policy reports; articles* *(Note: If you have access to the Internet, you can go to our Website* **http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu** *to find an updated list and copies of some of the resources.)*

Any other resource requests?

Note below any ideas you have for how we could expand useful networking for you and your colleagues; also feel free to suggest other resources you would like to see us develop.

As always, we welcome your feedback on any facets of the Center's operations.

Your Name _____ Title _____

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Thanks for completing this form. Return it by FAX to (310) 206-8716 *or* in a separate envelope *or* by folding it in half to use the return address on the back as a mailing label.

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