

**School Practitioner Community of Practice**  
(A network for sharing & exchange)  
(11/24/21)

**Contents**

**>About alternative schools**

**>About the impact of the shortage of substitute teachers**

**>Links to a few other relevant shared resources**

**>Request from the field for participants in school mental health study**

**(Scroll down to read about the above and for hotlinks to resources)**

**Note:** Go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/> for links to other Center resources.

**This resource is from the**

**Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports, UCLA**

*So please feel free to share with anyone you think might benefit (e.g., forward our resources to individuals and share on listservs and websites).*

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**For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**For previous postings of community of practice discussions, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>**

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**For discussion and interchange:**

**>>About alternative schools**

**Requests from colleagues:**

The pandemic has increased interest in alternative schools. In response to requests, here is some general information and initial comments from the field. Note that many of the strategies used in alternative education settings readily fit into regular school programs to better engage students and keep them in regular education settings. For resources on alternative education, see our online Quick Find on the topic at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/altschool.htm>

To start off, here are a few excerpts from online resources that cover some basic questions:

**1. What are the goals of alternative schools?**

From the California department of education

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/eo/as/asprogramssummary.asp>

“The goals of alternative schools and programs of choice, as outlined in EC Section 58500, are the following:

Maximize the opportunity for students to develop the positive values of self-reliance, initiative, kindness, spontaneity, resourcefulness, courage, creativity, responsibility, and joy.

Recognize that the best learning takes place when the student learns because of his or her desire to learn.

Maintain a learning situation that encourages student motivation, time-management, and the ability to follow their own interests.

Maximize the opportunity for teachers, parents, and students to cooperatively develop the learning process and its subject matter. This opportunity must be a continuous, permanent process.

Maximize the opportunity for students, teachers, and parents to continuously react to the changing world, including, but not limited to, the community in which the school is located.”

## 2. *What are factors that often lead to students enrollment in alternative schools?*

From: the MA Department of Education

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/alted/about.html?section=factors>

"There are many factors that may place students at risk - including school, student, community, and family related factors. The following list was adapted from the publication by SE Wells (1990) *At Risk Youth: Identification, Programs, and Recommendations*.

Student Related:

Attendance/truancy; Behavior/discipline problems; Pregnancy/parenting; Drug Abuse; Poor peer relationships; Suspension/expulsion; Friends have dropped out; Illness/disability

Family Related:

Low socioeconomic status; Dysfunctional home life; Low parental involvement; Low parental expectations; Non-English speaking home; Domestic violence

School Related:

Conflict between home and school culture; Ineffective discipline system; Lack of adequate counseling; Negative school climate; Lack of relevant curriculum; Passive instructional strategies; Inappropriate use of technology; Disregard of student learning styles; Suspension/expulsion; Low expectations; Lack of language instruction

Community Related:

Lack of community support services; Lack of community support for schools; High incidence of criminal activity; Lack of school/community linkage; High mobility/homelessness"

## 3. *What is the role of an administrator in an alternative school?*

From: *Guidelines for alternative education settings*

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Publications/Guidelines-for-Alternative-Education-Settings/Best-Practice-Guidelines-for-Program-Implementation>

"...Administrators in alternative settings must meet all local and state certification requirements. In collaboration with staff, they are responsible for the alternative school/program and actively plan and participate in establishing a quality learning experience for students. As instructional leaders their duty is twofold. First, they need to ensure that the students in their care receive a high quality, efficacious, educational experience. Secondly, they are responsible for representing that school/program within the larger school/district and to ensure that their program is compliant with all related federal and state laws and regulations.

School district leaders support administration in a respectful manner that is consistent with all educational programs in the district. Administrators in the alternative education setting collaborate with district leadership, staff, and community members to develop relationships that reflect ownership and support for the alternative education setting. Leadership is responsible to develop and support reasonable expectations by staff and students. The rules are positively stated such that they are clearly understood by staff, students, and parents/guardians. They need to be applied consistently to guide and teach appropriate student behavior, monitor progress, and manage the learning experience. Programs are prepared to support students for whom the monitoring system indicates more intensive supports are required (e.g., services provided by external providers). District administration is accountable to students, their families and the community for the quality of education that students in their jurisdiction receive...."

## **Comments from a Colleague:**

### **Here is one colleague's thoughts; *what are yours?***

"Alternative schools have fundamental assumptions about learning.

- > Autonomy (a separate setting apart from the traditional environment) is everything. Motivation research teaches us to escape negative environments and experience positive environments to build stamina and change ourselves for the good. Alternative schools must be autonomous to achieve maximum success. Students who have failed in a school environment do not thrive in the same environment in a different program. They seldom maximize their potential by staying in the same environment. Some will not stay there at all. Would You?

- > Personal advisory systems are implemented in alternative schools for constant encouragement of learning. Small size of the school and small teacher/pupil ratios guarantee personal attention and encouragement. Everyone assumes a counselor role and teaching role....
- > In order to succeed we have to deal with the whole child. Physical, moral, social, emotional, spiritual, career, intellectual. The student comes first...then curriculum. Motivation to learn comes from the individual. Once started it blossoms....
- > The timeline to learn is flexible in an alternative school. All learners vary in timeline and readiness to learn. Readiness is strongly influenced by biological factors as well as environmental. Student expectations vary in the number of courses to take. The students progress based on individual commitment....
- > Choice research is embraced in alternative schools. When given choices, students and parents get more involved and committed to school. Choices include: attending the school, timeline for school, course load, adjustments in school for other needed community-based services for accommodating needs, accommodations to pay fees, etc. ...
- > Numerous teaching strategies are practiced constantly in alternative schools to accommodate different learning styles. Variety in practices within any given day are recognized as needed such as field trips, simulation, peer teaching, group study, and discussion, demonstration, project-based learning, community service, including many more. ...
- > Students assume responsibility for their education in alternative schools. It is recognized that if students are given responsibility they will learn to be responsible. With responsibility comes commitment to learn. Accommodations are made to help students accept responsibility for their education. They can choose to attend or not with consequences, they can assume full schedules or not with consequences, they can accelerate their education to postsecondary options or not with consequences, etc....
- > Student governance includes all students in alternative schools. Family meetings are held for decision-making on curriculum, extra-curricular activities, interschool visitations, behavior policy, consequences, etc. The establishment of family and joint decision-making establishes ownership for all and commitment to monitor behavior. Students monitor their own environment to assist staff. Student governance leads to self-control and monitoring and learning the democratic process....
- > Personal contracts and goal setting are practiced constantly in alternative schools to establish the ability to set goals, develop plans to accomplish the goals, and create the resources necessary to support the plans. This learning is essential for success in all aspects of life....
- >Final message --The talents and future of each child are what are valued in an alternative school. Different learners have different intelligences needing some adjustments in the learning process, what is learned and how learning is demonstrated. The different talents are all valued because it takes different talents to make community work. It also takes different knowledge coming together VS all the same. Everybody is recognized as having talent and is perceived as being able to learn....”

### Another colleague specifically asked:

*What’s “the best way to interview for a alternative education principal.”*

The above material provides a basis for asking relevant questions of candidates. A final set of questions might be: *What are the challenges you expect as a principal of an alternative school? From the students? The families? The staff? The community agencies you will work with?*

In response to this matter, two colleagues suggested:

1. “Perhaps a few of the staff leaders (regular, special, and alternative ed) could be involved in the hiring interview, if nothing else, hearing the discussion might raise awareness about alternative education. If we want to find out if the applicant shares the values of alternative ed, maybe having the applicant observe/participate in some instruction and then discuss reactions during the interview. Could get the applicants’ ideas for how they would proceed during the discussion and see how that fits.”

2. "This is a great opportunity to highlight leadership qualities that should be integrated into regular education. Some of the greatest educational opportunities for students I've witnessed have been in alternative settings.

The students typically end up in an alternative setting because a traditional setting doesn't meet their needs. So often, these needs are complex and chronic which exacerbates a student's efforts to focus on their education. A leader for an alternative school needs to have all the "traditional" training and experiences of someone from a "regular" school setting but also needs to understand the risk factors and challenges that exist for students in an alternative setting. This leader needs to know the research about addressing those challenges, enhancing existing protective factors, and connecting students with adults at school. For example, we know from research that it only takes one positive adult/student relationship at school to increase the likelihood that a student will succeed by 50%. An alternative educational leader needs to understand the research and know what works. (My personal recommendation is to ensure a candidate understands Hawkins & Catalano's research on risk and protective factors. As you know, their focus is on substance use but they include other risky behaviors, talk about exposure and duration as well as speak to factors that increase resilience.) Knowing that no school has the resources they need to meet all the needs of their students, I would ask a candidate to provide examples of how s/he has worked with community-based groups, agencies or organizations to benefit students and their families. Then I would follow up on that information with interview questions on why they believe this is important to work with the community and ask for their ideas on establishing or maintaining links between this school and community programs/services.

Similarly, I would ask for examples of how a candidate has connected with families in the past to benefit students. Interview questions could then focus on their ideas about working with families, whatever they may look like. The point is that an effective leader will understand the importance of building and sustaining support systems outside of school for students who have probably not had them in the past.

And finally, I would like to know how a candidate will go about addressing the most pressing challenges faced by students in this school. I believe the "ideal" candidate will begin with data. What are some of the most common challenges and how do you know? Of course candidates are not likely to be familiar with information specific to that school, but the ideal candidate should have thoughts about a process to analyze existing data, review existing resources (and how effective they've been), and understand how to use research to maximize what exists. Naturally, this process is not done solely by a principal but in collaboration with staff. From there, the staff need only to follow research on creating a system of supports using tools from the Center.

Overall, the leadership of this school must be grounded in research, know how to use information, and make decisions with staff (and students!) that are innovative and practical. A tall order, but the students and staff deserve nothing less."

***Tomorrow you go back to school.***



### **About the impact of the shortage of substitute teachers**

From: *Substitute shortage reported in urban and rural schools across the state*  
<http://www.hawaiifreepress.com/Articles-Main/ID/29529/Substitute-shortage-reported-in-urban-and-rural-schools-across-the-state>

“Educators across the state report the substitute shortage caused by the pandemic has made it more difficult for teachers to teach and students to learn in large and small schools in communities of all sizes, according to a survey the State Teachers Association conducted of its members in October. More than 100 substitute positions go unfilled every day around the state, according to reports from schools.

An overwhelming majority of educators who answered the survey reported staffing shortages and many of them offered specific examples of how the substitute shortage affects them and their students....

“Some substitutes have accepted a job only to be pulled from the assignment they signed up for to babysit multiple classes in a cafeteria or gym – or some other bait-and-switch – and are no longer willing to take jobs at a particular school or within a complex,” wrote one teacher....

A teacher at an intermediate school reported, “Oftentimes there are signs on classroom doors directing students to report to the cafeteria. While in the cafeteria, students from multiple classes are supervised by a substitute and an administrator where the students are told to read or work on their computers.”...

The substitute shortage has caused educators to cancel or not attend professional development and other workshops to learn new ways to teach children better....

One district substitute, a retired public school teacher, said she receives more than 20 calls a day with substitute openings which she is turning down because she is 65 years old and isn’t comfortable working in crowded classrooms where younger children aren’t eligible for vaccines yet....”

Listserv Participants: How are you supporting students and staff when personnel shortages occur? [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

### **>Links to a few other relevant shared resources**

Analysis of behavioral interventions in alternative school settings  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pits.22591>

Vaccine Distribution and Communication Efforts Should Include Stakeholder Perspectives  
<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104457-highlights.pdf>

Youth homelessness <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-540-highlights.pdf>

United We Learn: Honoring America’s Racial and Ethnic Diversity In Education  
<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/united-we-learn/>

Surrounded by pandemic angst, what do middle schoolers want? A welcoming, safe place to learn  
<https://hechingerreport.org/column-surrounded-by-pandemic-angst-what-do-middle-schoolers-want-a-welcoming-safe-place-to-learn/>

Parental involvement in homework of children with learning disabilities during distance learning: Relations with fear of COVID-19 and resilience  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pits.22596>

Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Mental Health Needs.  
<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/students/supporting-child-student-social-emotional-behavioral-mental-health.pdf>

2021 KIDS COUNT Data Book: 2021 State Trends in Child Well-Being  
<https://www.aecf.org/resources/2021-kids-count-data-book>

Fact Sheet: Improving Access and Care for Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Conditions  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/19/fact-sheet-improving-access-and-care-for-youth-mental-health-and-substance-use-conditions/>

Structural Supports to Promote Teacher Well-being  
[https://annenbergbrown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch\\_for\\_Recovery\\_Brief\\_19.pdf](https://annenbergbrown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Brief_19.pdf)

Embracing Scientific Humility and Complexity: Learning "What Works for Whom" in Youth Psychotherapy Research  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15374416.2021.1929252>

Systematic Review and Meta-analysis: Effectiveness of Wraparound Care Coordination for Children and Adolescents <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0890856721001556>

GAO to Ed Dept: Update 2010 cyber risk plan, consider additional guidance  
<https://www.k12dive.com/news/gao-to-ed-dept-update-2010-cyber-risk-plan-consider-additional-guidance/610047/>

### A Few Upcoming Webinars

For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

12/7 Working Towards Positive Educational Outcomes: Mental Health and Special Education

12/7 Compassionate School Practices: Alleviating Stress and Furthering Well-Being

12/8 Navigating the Ins and Outs of Community Resources

12/8 Learning Heroes Parents 2021

12/9 Determining McKinney-Vento Eligibility

12/15 McKinney-Vento School Selection Rights

12/15 Empowering assistant principals to lead learning communities

12/16 Co-Creating Leadership Development Opportunities for Immigrant & Refugee Youth

12/16 Preventing youth hate crimes in schools and communities

Webinar recording: Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth  
<https://preventioninstitute.us17.list-manage.com/track/click?u=5f4bf5a36bd9f72789255d49a&id=17f472fe9a9&e=b6757fd9d7>

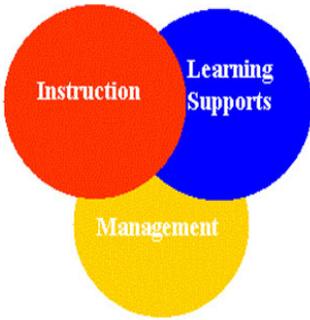
### **Request from the field for participants in school mental health study**

"My name is Shenita E. Williams and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. I am studying how school-based mental health systems can address the mental health needs of Black students. The study is a part of my doctoral dissertation entitled How School-Based Mental Health Systems Can Meet the Unique Cultural Needs of Black Students Experiencing Mental Health Challenges. More specifically, the study focuses on identifying challenges faced by Black students with mental health needs, identifying relevant cultural factors that school-based mental health practitioners should be aware of when providing mental health services in k-12 schools to Black students, and the overall expectations of school-based mental health systems that support the mental health needs of Black students.

I am writing to ask if you would share/post information about my study

Shenita E. Williams, LCSW ([sewilliams2@vcu.edu](mailto:sewilliams2@vcu.edu))

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For information about the  
**National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports**  
go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;  
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to  
promoting whole child development, advancing social justice,  
and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.

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**Invitation to Listserv Participants:**

Everyone has a stake in the future of public education. This is a critical time for action. Send this resource on to others. Think about sharing with the growing number who are receiving it. AND Let us know about what we should be including.

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

**THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!**

**For new sign-ups – email [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.**

**We post a broad range of issues and responses to the Net Exchange on our website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm> and on Facebook (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/> )**