

School Practitioner Community of Practice (A network for sharing & exchange)

November 3, 2021

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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).

For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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

For further discussion and interchange:

>The problem of engaging (and reengaging) students

We received the following response to the October ENEWS feature: *How are Schools Enhancing Student Engagement? (in person, in quarantine, online, in independent study....?)*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/oct2021.pdf>

“The letter that you posted on the UCLA list serve seemed to oversimplify what is rapidly becoming a very complex problem in our schools. To tell schools to simply ‘engage all students in learning and re-engage those who have not done so’ is analogous to telling our government to ‘just feed the hungry’ without any direction as to how to do so logistically. At my high school for example, where I am the psychologist for about 1600 students, we have literally dozens of students who are actively school avoidant, many still in treatment for depression, anxiety etc. Re-engagement is, of course, of paramount importance, but each case is quite unique and represents a virtual ‘roller coaster’ of a lengthy trip as we begin the school avoidance protocol for each. It is probably fair to say that RTI is in its infancy stage in the vast majority of schools here in our state thus that support system is not one that can be drawn upon.

I am especially concerned that your brief letter ignores two ‘elephants in the living room’ which serve to undermine our efforts:

1. The over diagnosis of Specific Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism is often precipitated by the combination of parents who are seeking answers to significant issues around school failure and difficulty with behaviors at home, and medical providers that are eager to ‘support’ the parents by providing a diagnosis and prescription for an IEP or 504 plan. Now as true for all School Psychologists, I am aware of the distinction between a diagnosis pinned on a child by a medical provider and the existence of an educational disability per IDEA, but compassion must be shown for the parents who find themselves in the middle between the medical provider’s and school’s evaluations. and conclusions.

2. What is rarely if ever addressed is a discussion of the ‘true cost of a special education label’ and what exactly is/will be the harm in identifying a student as disabled for educational purposes? One parent challenged me with respect to this, when she asked, “what exactly does it cost you to give my child an IEP?” While I attempted to defend the resistance to a special education label in terms of reduced expectations, limited course of study, self-esteem issues, limited future potential post high school, etc., in her mind, none of that mattered compared to the impact of school failure.

You point out the need to avoid excessive labelling but do not address the cost of such a label nor the reality of non-HS graduation due to lack of adequate support/modification. We have all agreed that there is a terrible cost -- one that should be avoided whenever possible. And again without the benefit of a systematic process for intervention design, delivery and progress-monitoring, we are quite helpless. At this point in time, our state is attempting to move toward a statewide RTI process for SLD eligibility but the timeframe is approximately 5-7 years.”

Comment from the Field:

We shared this response and here’s a reaction from a colleague:

“...Public schools were designed a long, long time ago, when conditions were very different. Maybe the old school system methods, curriculum, and strategies were designed for a world that no longer exists. Perhaps we need to go back to the drawing board and start over fresh?

Instead of asking computer programmers to come up with an app that improves student engagement in an out-of-date/broken environment, I suggest talking to community organizers about how to get a neighborhood to discuss what people need from their schools, and equitable methods for achieving that dream.

For example, currently, school funding is connected to attendance. This creates a lot of rules and regulations about requiring attendance, and punishing non-attendance, sometimes with jail sentences (which can prevent future employment). What if a totally new system disconnected funding and welcomed students to school whenever they could get there? Absence is not always due a diagnosable condition inside the student.

What if we abandoned the fantasy that the only reason a student needs extra help is because there is some kind of internal disability? All the time and money now put into child find, evaluation, and expensive ‘cast of thousands’ meetings to argue about ‘sped eligibility’ vs ‘Section 504 eligibility’ vs ‘not eligible’ can be put towards figuring out how to better assist any student who seems to be struggling.

Schools need to be designed to be more flexible. The pandemic isolations taught us that. The immediate environment can change dramatically in a moment. Teachers have been taught to monitor and adjust to conditions within the classroom; school districts need to develop the capacity to monitor and adjust to conditions in their neighborhoods. I have my doubts that the multiple layers of bureaucracy, tradition, funding, racial bias, and power enclaves seen in the many current schools can be adjusted. I suspect we may need to start over fresh.”

Center Comments:

We thank the above colleagues for sharing their views and concerns. Clearly, folks have strong feelings about all this. The matters raised are complicated and deserve further interchange.

From our perspective, a significant part of the problem remains with how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and (re)engagement concerns. We understand that folks have to continue to address the immediate problems as best they can and, in the process, will continue to be frustrated and upset with a system that needs to be transformed. The bottom line for us is that student/learning support staff cannot continue to spend all their time responding to the culture of crisis that dominates their work life. The challenge at this time is to escape old ways of thinking about these matters. New directions are needed.

Our view is that they need to negotiate changes in their job description so they can devote a portion of their days to advocating and providing leadership for the transformation of how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students and families. Pursuing such a transformation calls for innovative, big picture thinking about revamping available student and learning supports. The aim of transformation is to respond effectively in classrooms and schoolwide (and, as appropriate, online) to the overlapping emotional, behavior, and learning problems that interfere with the best teaching practices. The intent is to make systemic changes that, over time, will enable helping *all* students who are not doing well and enhance equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond.

Our website is designed to help with immediate needs and with moving efforts forward. For

example, these matters are discussed in some detail in several recent books:

- > *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
- > *Improving School Improvement*
- > *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

All three are available at this time as free resources at

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

And as aides, we have been building a *System Change Toolkit*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

We also offer technical assistance and coaching for those who are leading the way for system transformation <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/coach.pdf>

And for information about the research and lessons learned from the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*, see

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

Are these matters being discussed in your locale?

Please let us know so we can share the info widely. Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu

>What are students saying after the first months of school?

From: *What Students Are Saying About What It's Like to Be Back in School*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/16/learning/what-students-are-saying-about-what-its-like-to-be-back-in-school.html>

>"I am enjoying the amount of engagement that I get in my classes. Sometimes in Zooms the teachers wouldn't even require us to have our cameras on and now we are getting called on in class and we actually get to join discussions. I feel like I am learning more this way because my mind doesn't wander as much as it did online. It is taking more time to get used to than I anticipated but I think in person learning is going to be a good thing overall."

>"I am so glad to be back in school. Of course, the looming threat of Covid can be nerve-wracking, especially with the occasional student refusing to wear a mask correctly, but, since I am vaccinated, the mental relief of learning in person again somewhat outweighs this fear for me. It is obviously a huge improvement academically; I already feel more motivated and focused on the various tasks before me, however I am also finding myself overall happier and more excited about day-to-day life now that I have somewhere to get up and go every day."

>"School was never my biggest struggle, good grades were a standard for me, and I worked hard in everything. Anxiety and panic wasn't part of my daily routine and to be honest I didn't understand why it was so hard for some people to focus or talk to others at school. Just eighteen months later, I have lost all capacity to sit in a classroom and learn. Homework and assignments feel like the hardest task and last thing I ever want to do. Random events set off this panicky feeling that triggers me to so easily feel overwhelmed and helpless. Overall I look at Pre-COVID me and see a stranger: I don't know her."

>"The process before returning to school this year felt nothing but normal. ... That feeling of normalcy led me to believe that this school year would be much more normal as well, at least compared to my sophomore year on Zoom. But, in all honesty, this year (to me) is far from normal, and often, I miss my time on Zoom. This year, I have already dropped an honors class, homework takes me far too long to complete, my test-taking skills are beyond poor, and overall, it's a struggle. While I can't speak for others, my best guess is that I am not the only one in this situation. Based off of just people I know, anxiety levels are through the roof ... With all the negatives I am writing about, it would be unfair to not mention the positives: easy access to resources, social interaction, a teacher in front of us, high school sports, etc. I truly do appreciate the fact that we are in school because at one point, us students need to remember how a normal school year feels. But, my life, as well as several others, currently consists of stress, followed by more stress. The only cure is adjustment, which will take time. But, I am confident we can all get there one step at a time."

What are your students saying about coming back to school? Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources Operational

Planning for COVID-19 Vaccinations for Kids Ages 5-11

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/20/fact-sheet-biden-administration-announces-update-on-operational-planning-for-covid-19-vaccinations-for-kids-ages-5-11/>

Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral and Mental Health during COVID-19 Era

<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/students/supporting-child-student-social-emotional-behavioral-mental-health.pdf>

50 state comparison of K12 and special education funding

<https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-k-12-and-special-education-funding/>

Chronic Absenteeism: A Key Indicator of Student Success. Policy Analysis

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED574526.pdf>

Effectiveness of parent-engagement programs to reduce truancy and juvenile delinquency: A systematic review <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cl2.1189>

The impact of interventions to prevent truancy: A review of the research literature

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191491X19303979>

Modifying Education Agency Exercises and Drills in Response to the Pandemic

https://rems.ed.gov/docs/ModifyingExercisesFactSheet_508C.pdf

How to Build Culturally Affirming Schools, According to Over 100 Black Teachers

<https://www.the74million.org/article/new-report-how-to-build-culturally-affirming-schools-according-to-over-100-black-teachers/>

School leaders: Proactive approach key to addressing 'devious licks,' other social media challenges

<https://www.k12dive.com/news/school-leaders-proactive-approach-key-to-addressing-devious-licks-other/608856/>

School Bullying Has Decreased During the COVID-19 Pandemic, but Schools Should Prepare for Its Return

<https://www.childtrends.org/blog/school-bullying-has-decreased-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-but-schools-must-be-prepared-for-its-return>

Should Kids Take Mental Health Days? <https://childmind.org/article/should-kids-take-mental-health-days/>

SAMHSA's 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health

https://www.samhsa.gov/newsroom/press-announcements/202110260320?utm_campaign=386b60df3a-SAMHSA_Announcement_2021_10_26_1600418&utm_medium=email&utm_source=SAMHSA&utm_term=0_ee1c4b138c-386b60df3a-167791969

Transgender Students and School Sports: Six Things to Know About a Raging Debate

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/transgender-students-and-school-sports-six-things-to-know-about-a-raging-debate/2021/10>

Reengaging Students through Physical Activity <https://www.nasbe.org/category/policy-updates/>

What research tells us about gifted education

<https://hechingerreport.org/proof-points-what-research-tells-us-about-gifted-education/>

Effects of Middle School Teachers' Praise-to-Reprimand Ratios on Students' Classroom Behavior <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10983007211035185>

Do Politics in Our Democracy Prevent Schooling for Our Democracy? Civic Education in Highly Partisan Times <https://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol29/iss2/3/>

A Few Quick Finds on the Center's website:

>Wellness <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/wellness.htm>

>Motivation, Engagement, Re-engagement <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

>Collaboration - School, Community, Interagency; community schools

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1201_01.htm

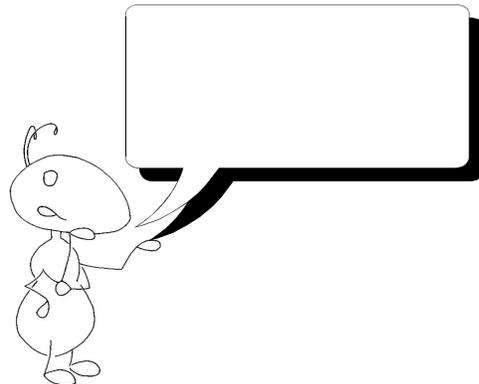
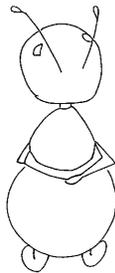
A Few Upcoming Webinars

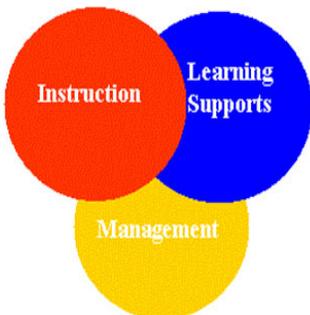
For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center’s Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

- 11/3 Managing anxiety and the return to schools
- 11/4 Why are we still doing that?
- 11/4 Back on track for School Success: Mental Health & Education
- 11/9 Supporting immigrant youth through connections
- 11/11 An overview of bullying prevention
- 11/16 Supporting your child's mental health needs at school
- 11/16 Using Stakeholder Surveys to Increase Family Engagement
- 11/18 Introduction to youth hate crimes
- 11/20 Supporting SEL Through the Library
- 11/22 MH Impacts of Surviving COVID-19: Implications for School Mental Health Systems Leaders and Providers
- 12/7 Compassionate School Practices: Alleviating Stress and Furthering Well-Being
- 12/15 Empowering assistant principals to lead learning communities
- 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>

We know our approach to providing student and learning supports is too marginalized, piecemeal, and fragmented. Why don't we move toward developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system?

(Fill in your answer here and send it to Ltaylor@ucla.edu)





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.

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

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

For new sign-ups – email 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/>)