

School Practitioner Community of Practice
(A network for sharing & exchange)
December 22, 2021

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(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).

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 discussion and interchange:

>About taking mental health days

Request to the Center from a reporter:

“The idea of taking a “mental health day” has exploded in popularity. Jobs are embracing it and so are schools. Illinois in September announced it would give all students 5 excused mental health days a year. How do you weigh in on this new trend. For example, is normalizing this a good thing? What are the benefits of “taking a mental health day,” both in the short term and the long run, on individual and societal levels? What precedent might it set? How might it impact policy? Also, what would you recommend for what to do on a mental health day. We hear the term, but some won’t be exactly clear on what they “should” do. Maybe others would just benefit from reading about a few ideas.”

Center Response: Supporting students (and staff) and promoting positive mental health has taken on new urgency with the social and health challenges of the pandemic. One facet has been the permission to take mental health concerns as seriously as we would physical health concerns.

Based on our efforts to improve how schools address barriers to learning and teaching, we emphasize that initiatives such as allowing for “mental health days” need to be part of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports – not just one more ad hoc and piecemeal initiative. From this perspective, we worry that addressing mental concerns in an ad hoc manner tends to limit the thinking of school policy makers with respect to the need to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable approach for ensuring student needs are effectively addressed.

Our recent book discusses all this in detail: Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

And here are some resources that discuss the pros and cons of mental health days

From: *Teens tell us what they think about mental health days*

https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/evjqd4/5-teens-tell-us-what-they-think-about-mental-health-days-in-school

“Last year, Utah included ‘mental or physical illness’ as one of the reasons that a student could be officially excused for their absence from school. More recently, in July, Oregon passed a law that grants students 5 MH days for each three-month period. As a result, more students are having open conversations about the importance of mental health, and the way their schools address it. ...

- >Students at my high school should be able to take mental health days because high school is a pretty stressful time. There are academic, social, and extracurricular pressures on students, just to name a few....
- >It is quite ironic how not only schools encourage students to sleep more, exercise often, and socialize to improve their wellbeing, but also are often a major cause for the students' mental health struggles in the first place. ...
- > Mental health needs to be made a priority in order for teens to open up and seek support they may need. There is so much stress among teens with the pressures of school and then they are not given opportunities or guidance to help cope or manage that stress....
- >Since students in each grade level are taught on the same level, missing days of school would result in students falling behind. And since the mental health breaks are ones that they could take at any time, it would put teachers at a disadvantage as they would have varying levels of attendance in their class. In addition, I feel that mental health days used by students may be for reasons other than recreation and wellbeing, which is not the point of those days. ...
- >I think high schools should invest in hiring more mental health and wellness counselors to decrease the student-to-counselor ratio. Then, students will be able to consult their school counselor more often for the mental health support they may need. ...
- >I do not believe students at my school specifically should have the option to take mental health days. If students with mental illnesses stayed home in isolation, there may be a chance that they could harm themselves as a result of their mental illness while alone rather than at school in a supervised environment. In addition, missing a day of school can further burden a student, which may result in greater stress and negative emotions. ...
- > It is important we give students time for a safe space instead of forcing them to dry their tears for school. We can not focus in class unless we take care of ourselves. Currently, my school does not give students that option. School can be a trigger and a stressor to the development of mental illness. ...”

From: *The futility of mental health days*

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/mindsharepartners/2019/10/10/the-futility-of-mental-health-days/?sh=7f83f1762d25>

“...Mental health days are reactionary, not preventative. Many articles outline the “signs that you need a mental health day” as exhaustion, inability to focus, feeling depressed, changes in sleep patterns, and more. These are all symptoms and precursors to burnout and full-blown mental health conditions. ... It is unlikely that a day off will fully resolve the buildup of these symptoms. ... In popular media, we have seen many articles citing the growing prevalence of depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions as evidence of the need for and utility of mental health days. However, tying mental health days too closely with mental health conditions is misleading in purporting a suggested ability for them to treat the symptoms of mental health conditions. In fact, suggesting that a mental health day, in isolation, is an appropriate response ... to an employee who is facing burnout or symptoms of a mental health condition is irresponsible without a more comprehensive support system ...

Mental health days have their utility and benefits when implemented correctly and as a complementary solution to a comprehensive mental health strategy. However, when used as a catch-all solution for all mental health challenges..., they only perpetuate the cycle of burnout and absenteeism by ignoring the root causes of mental health challenges.”

From: *“Illinois passes bill allowing students up to five excused mental health days...”*
<https://lancasterpress.com/top-stories/2021/10/10/illinois-passes-bill-to-allow-students-to-take-up-to-five-excused-mental-health-days/>

And Illinois isn't the only state to pass such a law, according to the New York Times, as Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Nevada, Oregon and Virginia have passed similar bills....

Guidance counselor Anne Tichacek... acknowledges that everyone needs a break sometimes, she also hopes that students realize some setbacks. “Being alone with your thoughts isn't always the best place to be, sometimes to break out of the cycle you need to break yourself from that mold. You need to force yourself to get out and do things that don't sound all that appealing sometimes because otherwise you start to withdraw more and might start to isolate more and that can be detrimental to your mental health,” she said. “On the surface, I think it would be good for students but I'm not necessarily aware of any research that shows avoiding a situation is helpful. So if a student is struggling in school because of their mental health or it's impacting their school in any way, avoiding the situation wouldn't be the best idea....”

The article the reporter wrote is:

It is OK to Take Mental Health Days

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/mental-health-day-5209222>

Is this topic being discussed in your locale?

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

For discussion and interchange:

>About student apathy

Concerns from a colleague: “I have noticed that students are a lot more apathetic overall. Especially the current high school freshman and sophomores. Students are used to getting a free pass for not doing work because schools have been more lenient over the last 2 years. Now that things are going back to normal, I find that my students are having a hard time adjusting. I was reading some of the student supports posts, and I saw that some students echoed this in their comments. My freshman and sophomore also have noticeably lower self-esteem. The mental wellness of my students is a bit concerning, and there is not a lot of support for these students. These last couple of years have been challenging for students, that's for sure.”

Center Response: It's not surprising that students are "down." Everyone is a bit worn out at this time. As seen in the following resources, a widely held view is that in addressing learning loss schools cannot just go back to teaching as usual.

From: *Rethinking learning loss* <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00940771.2021.1979832>

"There is much to gain when we refuse to focus on learning loss ... the ebb and flow of a usual school year will continue to be disrupted as schools and classrooms need to close, students and educators quarantine, and many suffer the health impacts of the virus. Yet what educators and learners continue to accomplish, despite this myriad of obstacles, is nothing short of miraculous. It is in acknowledgment of these accomplishments that we share our thoughts on the learning loss narrative that continues to negatively impact how we think about schools, learning, and most importantly, the young adolescents and families...

One problematic component of the learning loss narrative is that it centers traditional academic teaching, which has been happening inconsistently as a result of COVID-19 mitigation and prevention efforts. This narrow definition of learning held by those who subscribe to the learning loss narrative lives on from the educational accountability era of No Child Behind and other legislative mandates of the 1990s and 2000s, including Race to

the Top. When learning is defined as gaining specific pieces of knowledge and skills at a certain time, one could make the case for a loss of learning for many over these past 18+ months. But is that really how we want to define learning....

Instead of a focus on the need to teach more content, how might we instead center the need to teach with greater compassion and empathy, ... take the time to ask your learners to reflect on and share stories about what they have learned and how they have grown since the start of the pandemic...."

From: *New approach to social and emotional skills*
<https://oecdeditoday.com/new-approach-social-emotional-skills/>

"...The interconnected development of cognitive, social and emotional skills starts during early infancy and continues throughout one's lifespan. However, unlike academic learning, the development of social and emotional skills in students does not follow a steady upward trend. A striking, but not unexpected, result from the survey is that all 15-year-old students, irrespective of their gender and social background, reported lower social and emotional skills on average than their 10-year-old counterparts.

Parents and educators ratings confirmed the dip in social and emotional skills as students grow older. Also, students' creativity and curiosity were found to be lower among 15-year-olds than among 10-year-olds. While developmental factors may play a role here, this might also partly derive from the fact that education systems often expect compliance from students, with the potential consequence of driving out curiosity and creativity as students grow older and stay longer in the education system....

These findings emphasise the importance of not only dedication in pursuing predetermined goals, even in the face of difficulties, but also cultivating an intellectual curiosity for a diverse range of topics. External forces like parents' or teachers' expectations can drive persistence. External drivers, however, can disappear or change over time but intellectual curiosity is a powerful intrinsic motivator. Those students who are curious about a diverse set of topics and love learning new things are better equipped to face difficulties and are more likely to reach their goals...."

For more on this, see ;

> *'Schools are killing curiosity': why we need to stop telling children to shut up and learn*
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jan/28/schools-killing-curiosity-learn>

> *Children's Need to Know: Curiosity in Schools*
<https://meridian.allenpress.com/her/article-abstract/81/4/625/32012/Children-s-Need-to-Know-Curiosity-in-Schools?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

> *Schools Are Missing What Matters About Learning*
<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/07/the-underrated-gift-of-curiosity/534573/>

> *Supporting curiosity in schools and classrooms*
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352154620300796>

And for a broader perspective, see the following free resources from our Center:

> Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide

> Improving School Improvement

> Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change

all three can be accessed from our Center's website. Go to:

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

Listserv Participants: As you reflect on the past year, what do you think about what you have learned about schools and youth living through a pandemic? What changes would you make in your school to promote intellectual curiosity for middle and high school students? Send comments to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

Bullying Prevention in Adolescence: Solutions and New Challenges
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jora.12688>

Toolkit for Schools: Engaging Parents and Families to Support Social and Emotional Climate and Learning
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/sec/sec_toolkit.htm

The Pandemic Hit Vulnerable Students Hardest. Now, Schools Have to Reckon With the Effects
<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/the-pandemic-hit-vulnerable-students-hardest-now-schools-have-to-reckon-with-the-effects/2021/12>

Identifying Supports for Struggling Students
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA827-3.html

Students' Experiences with Bullying, Hate Speech, Hate Crimes, and Victimization in Schools
<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104341.pdf>

School Connectedness Still Matters: The Association of School Connectedness and Mental Health During Remote Learning Due to COVID-19
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10935-021-00649-w>

Life Interrupted: Family Routines Buffer Stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10826-021-02063-6>

Getting Candid: Framing the Conversation around Youth Substance Use Prevention
<https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/getting-candid/introduction/>

Coping With the COVID-19 Crisis: The Importance of Care for Caregivers—Tips for Parents and Teachers
<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid-19-resource-center/crisis-and-mental-health-resources/coping-with-the-covid-19-crisis-the-importance-of-care-for-caregivers%E2%80%94tips-for-parents-and-teachers>

Social and Emotional Learning Within Science Education
https://www.wested.org/wested-insights/social-and-emotional-learning-within-science-education/?utm_source=e-bulletin&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2021-12-issue-1#

6 Intrinsic Motivators to Power Up Your Teaching
<https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/6-intrinsic-motivators-to-power-up-your-teaching>

4 educator trends going into 2022
<https://www.smartbrief.com/original/2021/12/4-educator-trends-going-2022>

Should Kids Take Mental Health Days?
https://childmind.org/article/should-kids-take-mental-health-days/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=publ_ed_nl_2021-12-14&utm_content=cta3_should-kids-take-mental-health-days

Tips on Family Gatherings & Holiday Seasons
<https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/institute/Supporting-Youth-in-Foster-Care.pdf>

Black and Latino Students Are Still More Likely to Have Inexperienced Teachers
<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/black-and-latino-students-are-still-more-likely-to-have-inexperienced-teachers-study-says/2021/12>

Ensuring Access To Affirming Mental Health Care For LGBTQ+ Children And Teens
https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20211203.985345/full/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=hasu&utm_campaign=blog&utm_content=klein&utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=New+December+Issue%3A+Hospitals%2C+Workforce%2C+Equity+%26+More&utm_campaign=HASU%3A+12-12-21&vgo_ee=dEKgjm3Q%2B8ELHC1674nog%3D%3D

Kids' Share 2021: Report on Federal Expenditures on Children through 2020 and Future Projections
<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/kids-share-2021-report-federal-expenditures-children-through-2020-and-future-projections>

Centering Disability in Technology Policy Issue Landscape and Potential Opportunities for Action
<https://www.aapd.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/centering-disability-120821-1326-final.pdf>

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>

1/10 Effective Communication with the IEP Team

1/11 McKinney-Vento 101: Basic Requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act

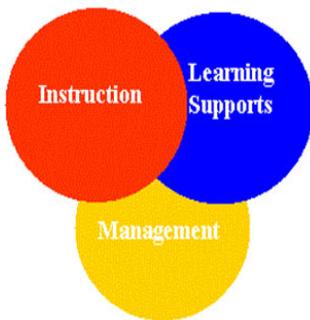
1/11 Special Education: What Do I Need to Know

1/13 Assessing Equity in Your Student Activities

1/27 Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Students Experiencing Homelessness

Webinar recording: Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth

<https://preventioninstitute.us17.list-manage.com/track/click?u=5f4bf5a36bd9f72789255d49a&id=17f472fea9&e=b6757fd9d7>



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/>)