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School Practitioner Community of Practice
(A network for sharing & exchange)
(2/9/22)

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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

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

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For discussion and interchange:
Request from a reporter

I'm working on a story about the role peer support programs at high schools are playing in the response to the youth mental health crisis. I'm telling most of this story through the lens of peer counseling programs. In my reporting, I've found that these programs are much less common than they were in the '80s and '90s, and have seemingly been replaced by peer mentoring programs and youth advisory boards. I'm wondering if you could explain to me why that's the case.

Center Response

About mentors: It is widely accepted that youngsters benefit from having a positive, caring, adult role model. At schools, there are a range of adults who can be such models. At the same time, it is clear that many students do not have a personal connection to an adult at school. This is where mentoring programs can help fill a critical gap. The benefits of mentoring programs are described not only as helping individual students but as contributing to establishment of a safe and positive school climate (see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mentoring.pdf).

About peer tutoring as part of a learning supports system: Teachers can't and shouldn't be expected to work alone in the classroom. This is particularly the case in schools serving large numbers of students who are not doing well and where class size can range up to over 40 students. Schools need to develop a variety of ways that teachers can expand and integrate social capital into classrooms to improve resources and strategies for enhancing learning and performance. One readily available set of resources are students themselves.
See http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/peertutor.pdf

From Finland: *Setting up Peer Support Programmes in Schools – A step-by-step Guide*

Conflicts, loneliness, exclusion and ostracising are everyday occurrences in school life. Peer support does not eliminate these problems but it helps prevent and combat them before they develop into a crisis.
Peer supporters are ordinary students who want to help others and contribute to the school community on a voluntary basis. They receive appropriate training, but there must always be an adult

facilitator who retains responsibility for running the scheme and supervises them. The services of peer supporters include promoting group cohesion and positive group behaviour by running class discussions and organizing various games and activities that help students bond with each other and work together. Peer supporters also play an important part in preventing and combating bullying. They also arrange a range of various activities designed to promote a more supportive atmosphere in schools, while at the same learning in the activities and processes themselves.

https://dzmdrerwnq2zx.cloudfront.net/prod/2017/10/11162217/Setting-up-Peer-Support-Programmes-in-Schools.pdf#:~:text=A%20peer%20support%20scheme%20encourages%20young%20people%20to,important%20part%20in%20developing%20a%20safe%20school%20ethos

From American School Counselor Assn.: *The School Counselor and Peer Support Programs*

Development of relational peer networks in schools can improve students' academic achievement and social supports (Williams et al., 2018). Specifically, peer support programs can be defined as peer-to-peer interaction in which individuals who are of approximately the same age take on a helping role, assisting students who may share related values, experiences and lifestyles. Peer support programs include activities such as assistance in one-to-one and group settings, academic/educational help, new student aid and other diverse activities of an interpersonal helping nature.

School counselors are aware that students often communicate more readily to peers than adults. Peer support programs can enhance the effectiveness of school counseling programs by increasing outreach and raising student awareness of services. Through proper selection, training and supervision, peer support can be a positive influence within the school and community. Research indicates peer support programs are helpful when focused on assisting students with social/emotional or academic problems and disabilities (Logsdon, et al., 2018), while promoting protective factors (e.g., developmental assets determined by the Search Institute). Peer support programs can also help create a positive school culture and connectedness to the school community for both mentors and mentees (Voight & Nation, 2016) as well as safer schools (Walker, 2019).

https://www.schoolcounselor.org/Standards-Positions/Position-Statements/ASCA-Position-Statements/The-School-Counselor-and-Peer-Support-Programs

For more resources on this topic from our Center and from others,
see our online clearinghouse Quick find on
Peer Relationships, Peer Support, and Peer Counseling
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/peersupport.htm

Here is an excerpt from the article the reporter wrote:

Amid a youth mental health crisis, teens help one another

... At the center of discussion around the youth mental health crisis is what adults, particularly those at schools, can do to support struggling teens. What receives far less attention, though, is how young people can help one another.

An untold number of high schools across the U.S. already offer peer support programs and have done so for quite some time. Perhaps the most established kind of such support is peer counseling. In the 1970s, the late Palo Alto school psychologist Barbara Varenhorst helped pioneer the model, training students in active listening skills, and how and when they should refer a classmate to a school counselor.

High schools in Pomona were among those that adopted this model in the 1970s and '80s, according to teacher Sheila Balk, who has led the peer counseling program at Pomona High School for 26 years. Those interested in joining peer counselor ranks must be in the 11th or 12th grade and undergo a rigorous interview process.

"There are two kinds of people in the program — people we need and people who need us," she said. "People we need are usually gregarious or want to go into some kind of counseling profession. Others just need a place to belong; you can see that they have skills and talents that just haven't been brought out yet. But basic counseling skills — anybody can learn them."

Peer counselors are trained for four months (as part of a yearlong elective) before they meet with students. The curriculum, approved in 2019 by the University of California high school articulation team, stresses empathetic listening, deescalation, restorative justice practices and coping skills. The program, Balk said, is "ever-evolving and fluid to meet student needs."

Students are referred to peer counselors by teachers and administrators, often because of discipline issues or because they're struggling academically. But kids also seek out the service on their own.

They're free to leave class and go to the peer counseling hub — known as the wellness center — and talk to someone about why they're upset or anxious. The center gets about five walk-ins a day.

There has been an especially high demand for services this school year because kids are overwhelmed, anxious and depressed....

Given the heaviness of their meetings with students, counselors are trained to know their limits, Balk said. Sessions are confidential unless someone expresses intent to hurt themselves or others, or they are being hurt. In that case, the counselor must immediately speak to an advisor, who then reaches out to the school district's mental health support team....

Experts cautioned that peer support programs should not be a substitute for actual therapy. Sometimes kids just need to vent. But many require sustained professional help....

Still, peer programs can go a long way toward making students feel supported, said Margo Ross, managing director of communications and development at the Center for Supportive Schools. The New Jersey-based organization has assisted schools in establishing peer mentoring programs since 1979.

"You really can't compete with the ability that young people have to relate to one another and influence one another," Ross said. "We help young people do what they're doing naturally, but we make sure they're doing it in the most positive and helpful ways."

An effective peer program should be accessible to as many students as possible, Ross added. For instance, the Center for Supportive Schools model requires every freshman to be paired with a peer leader who can help them navigate their first years of high school. Independent reviews of the program found that mentees demonstrated improved academic performance and social-emotional skills, as well as lower dropout rates.

In Ross' view, a peer leader shouldn't be a counselor — "It's not the peer leader's responsibility to do that," she said — but more a listening ear, role model and liaison to adults who can help them with more serious problems.

The peer counseling model, although still prevalent, has evolved in many schools. Take L.A. Unified School District, which had more than 100 such programs in the late '80s. Now only six high schools in the district have opted for a program that trains students to mentor peers in the areas of mental, relational and reproductive health.

Peer counseling may no longer the dominant model of peer support in California because dedicated funding for it no longer exists, said Janis Ryan, an educational consultant and former facilitator of student assistant programs at Desert Sands Unified School District. Schools used to pay for their peer counseling programs with funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools funding, which was eliminated in 2011.

Such programs also have limited staying power because when new administrators come into schools, they may not value or understand their utility, Ryan said. These are the programs that are often cut if funding is needed elsewhere, as has been the case for many electives as education budgets have tightened. Meanwhile, peer mentoring programs like those associated with Friday Night Live are funded on an ongoing basis and are built into the state infrastructure...."

https://www.latimes.com/california/newsletter/2021-12-20/youth-mental-health-crisis-teens-help-one-another-8-to-3

Listserv Participants: *What's the situation with peer supports in your locale?*

Send comments to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Are you in a lousy mood today?
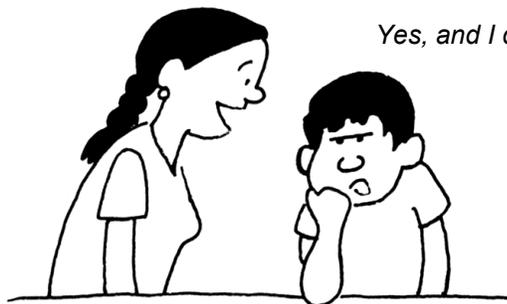
Yes, and I don't want anyone to ruin it!

>US Department of Education statements about using the relief funds

From: *U.S. Department of Education Announces Distribution of All American Rescue Plan ESSER Funds and Approval of All 52 State Education Agency Plans*

"...U.S. Department of Education announced that every state education agency received approval of their American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief plan before the end of December 2021. As a result, the Department has distributed all $122 billion of ARP ESSER funds to all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico...."
https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-announces-distribution-all-amer ican-rescue-plan-esser-funds-and-approval-all-52-state-education-agency-plans

From: Secretary Cardona's letter to educators

...Let us be clear: ARP provides vital resources to hire additional educators and school staff and to improve compensation to recruit and retain educators and school staff. School districts should act with urgency to keep schools open for in-person learning and ensure they do not waste this opportunity to make critical investments.

To this end, this letter describes (1) evidence-based and promising short- and long-term strategies for addressing teacher and staff shortages that can be funded through ARP ESSER and (2) examples of how ARP and previous relief funds are already being used to attract and retain teachers and staff. These strategies can help to fill currently open positions and add and fill new roles, such as providing one-time initial hiring incentives, or short-term investments in additional staff to support students and educators and increased needs. The current needs of our students, families, and educators call on us to act and use the Federal resources made available to respond to this crisis. We must do everything we can right now to support our students during this critical year by addressing the impact of the last few years on their social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs.

Strategies for Hiring and Retaining Qualified and Effective Educators

1. Increase Educator and Staff Compensation

The most common reason educators have cited for leaving school employment in the last year is stress, followed by insufficient pay. Many school leaders are increasing wages by offering hiring and retention bonuses, working towards permanent salary increases, or providing premium pay that help educators receive the compensation they deserve and keep them in the profession, and we encourage others to continue to work towards increasing compensation....

2. Build and Maintain a Cadre of High-Quality Substitute Teachers

States and districts can use ARP funds to recruit and train high-quality substitute teachers. To create some stability and certainty, substitute teachers could be assigned to a school for an entire school year. This strategy would help substitute teachers be more prepared to step into the classroom and support continuity for students when educators need to take time off. These substitute teachers can also co-lead small group learning and provide support during release time for educators to allow for teacher professional development....

3. Support Educator and Staff Well-Being, Including Improved Working Conditions

Now, more than ever, supporting educator well-being is critical for retaining our current educators and staff.... As educators continue working during a global health crisis, educator well-being and support continue to be essential to school and district success....

>Building intentional systems that support educator and staff well-being. Efforts to prioritize communication and collaboration between staff and leadership nurture, and model, a sense of connectedness that is crucial to supporting educators and keeping them in the profession....

>Increasing the availability of qualified adults and personnel to support educators, students, and staff. For example, districts can partner with institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and businesses to provide additional supports to educators

and students through the use of teaching candidates and well-trained volunteers....

>Implementing flexible and creative scheduling to support students for full-week in-person learning while providing planning and collaboration time for teachers....

4. Make Investments in the Educator Pipeline

As states and districts work to stabilize their educator pipeline, a variety of strategies have been identified that can both support the preparation and development of new educators and encourage them to work in high-need schools....

https://exceptionalchildren.org/blog/secretary-cardona-issues-letter-how-address-educator-shortages-arp-funds

How is all this topic being discussed in your locale?

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

Links to a few other relevant shared resources

We were asked to share this resource: *From the Barrio to the Board Room* http://www.fromthebarrio.com

More Resources

Planning for Uncertainty: An Educator's Guide to Navigating the COVID-19 Era,
https://www.gse.upenn.edu/system/files/Planning-for-Uncertainty-Guide.pdf

ACTION STEPS for Improving How Schools Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching - including mental health concerns http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/actionsteps.pdf

2022: Staying In School In-Person
https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/COVID%20Guidance_Handout_Final_508.pdf

Ensuring a Safe and Positive Climate in School and Community Settings for Children and Youth with Disabilities
https://exceptionalchildren.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/School%20Climate%20-%202020.pdf

Forum for Children's Well-Being: Promoting Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Health for Children and Youth
https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/forum-for-childrens-well-being-promoting-cognitive-affective-and-behavioral-health-for-children-and-youth

Integrating Positive Youth Development and Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Approaches Across the Child Welfare and Justice Systems
https://www.childtrends.org/publications/integrating-positive-youth-development-and-racial-equity-inclusion-and-belonging-approaches-across-the-child-welfare-and-justice-systems

Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707/PDF/379707eng.pdf.multi

We won't Argue Against Adding More Counselors,
BUT ... Addressing Student Mental Health Concerns Involves Much More than Increasing the Number of Mental Health Providers http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/morethan.pdf

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.
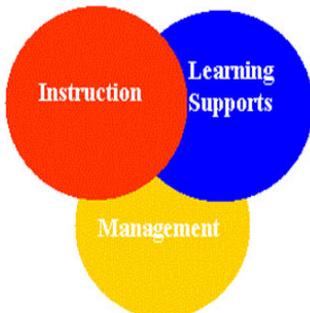
Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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

2/9 How to Plan Staff Meetings that Create a Culture of Collaboration

2/9 Understanding Doubled-Up

2/9 College and career readiness in rural settings

2/10 Cultivating Compassionate School Communities

2/10 Back on Track for School Success: Mental Health and Education

2/10 Tools to Help Your Child De-Stress

2/15 Art and social emotional learning

2/17 Helping Youth Navigate Dangers in the Digital Age

2/22 Paving the Way to College for Students Experiencing Homelessness

2/24 Redesigning Schools to Embrace Today's Conditions

2/24 Working Towards Positive Educational Outcomes: Mental Health and Special Education

3/8 McKinney-Vento School Selection Rights

3/30 Determining McKinney-Vento Eligibility

3/2 National Summit on Youth Homelessness

3/15 Essential Tools for Effective Homevisits

3/16 Equity, Race, Gender and the Assistant Principal

Series On: **Building a National Movement to Prevent Trauma and Foster Resilience**
https://psu.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN__AYYzYl0T4yXthlOdDLBVw

1/21: Building the Movement in the Education and Health Care

2/4: Building the Movement with Child Welfare and Justice Systems

2/18: Building the Movement through Transformative Justice and Faith-Based Communities

3/4: Building the Movement with Populations with High Prevalence of Trauma

3/18: Building the Movement with Foundations and the Private Sector

4/1: Building the Movement to Address Global Crises

4/15: Building the Movement through Policy and Advocacy

Webinar recording: Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth
https://preventioninstitute.us17.list-manage.com/track/click?u=5f4bf5a36bd9f72789255d49a&id=17f472fea9&e=b6757fd9d7

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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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**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 a**t http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm
and on Facebook (access from the Center's home page http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/)