

Minimizing Referrals Out of the Classroom

Schools ask: *What more can be done in a classroom so that referrals are only necessary for the few students whose problems are relatively severe?*

All efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching build on the promotion of healthy development and personalized instruction. Then, to further reduce inappropriate referrals, schools need to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports.

One facet of such a system is establishing a full continuum of interventions (from prevention, to responding to the first signs of problems, to effective interventions for chronic problems). The continuum encompasses enhanced classroom efforts and schoolwide interventions and weaves together school and community efforts. An effective continuum helps:

Prevent problems – Rather than waiting to react to problems that can lead to out of class referrals, staff development focuses on helping teachers redesign classroom to enhance student engagement. Engagement is key to eliminating common problems (e.g., engaged students learn better and are less likely to misbehave). Authentic engagement involves strategies that avoid over-reliance on rewards and consequences and that promote intrinsic motivation for learning. Outside the classroom, preventing problems requires engaging activities and a range of effective supports (e.g., for transitions before and after school, for home involvement).

Reduce the need for referral by responding as soon as a problem arises – When problems can't be prevented, it is essential to have positive interventions that can respond as soon as feasible after problems appear. As a first step, the focus is on making personalized changes in the classroom to better account for the student's motivation and capabilities (e.g., appropriate accommodations, changes in schedules and activities to minimize the problems). Then, if necessary, it is time to add personalized special assistance in the classroom. Such strategies not only reduce the need for referral to specialized services, they counter suspensions and expulsions (see <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/pits.22111>).

Minimize referrals, which enables the referral system to function properly – After classroom efforts and other general school supports have been enhanced, considerably fewer students will need referrals for special out of class school and community-based interventions. This allows the school's referral system to counter disproportional referrals (see <https://academic.oup.com/cs/article/39/4/248/4107279>) and respond better to those who do need more than the classroom can offer.

A note about referrals to alternative programs (including special education placements). In extreme cases, alternative program referrals are made. For these to produce positive outcomes, the program must account for the individual's motivation and capabilities and provide personalized assistance that enhances motivation and competence. (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/altschool.htm>).

One caution about alternative programs involves the downside of grouping students who manifest deviant behavior. Research stresses that deviant behavior can be exacerbated when deviant youth are together in programs (<http://www.srcd.org/documents/publications/SPR/spr20-1.pdf>).

A second caution involves the tendency not to plan for reintegrating students (despite policies that stress students should be in regular school settings to the degree that these can be effective). It is essential to ensure a strong emphasis on (a) enhancing the students' intrinsic motivation for returning and succeeding in a regular school setting and (b) providing supports for transitioning them back from alternative programs. A successful transition includes specially designed welcoming and social supports for reentry. It also usually calls for some changes in the regular school program to accommodate the needs of the returning student (more academic support, a peer buddy, a one-to-one contact staff person, etc. (see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm)).

Four Immediate Steps to Take

- (1) *Open the classroom door to bring extra hands into the classroom.* Invite in support staff, peer tutors, parent volunteers and volunteer from colleges, service clubs, senior centers, etc., to help provide additional student support and guidance.
- (2) *Enhance engagement strategies.* In particular, consider additional ways to personalize instruction and learning – focusing on both academic and social-emotional learning and increasing enrichment opportunities.
- (3) *Use Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies.* The aim is to use such strategies to personalize instruction and, if necessary, provide accommodations and special assistance to respond as soon as a problem appears.
- (4) *Use referral as a last resort.* See Practice Notes on *Students in Distress* for immediate next steps to take when referral is necessary (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/distresspn.pdf>).

The following Center resources provide detailed strategies related to the above:

>*Personalizing Learning and Addressing Barriers to Learning* (two modules for continuing education)

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/dbsimple2.asp?primary=2104&number=9958>

>*RTI and Classroom & Schoolwide Learning Supports* (four modules for continuing education)

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/dbsimple2.asp?primary=2311&number=9897>

For more about referral and related processes at schools, see:

>*School-Based Client Consultation, Referral, and Management of Care*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/consultation/consultation2003.pdf>

Two free books are have been developed to bring all this together. See:

>*Improving School Improvement*

>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*

Both can be accessed at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html .

The Relationship Between Student Behavior and Engagement

By Brian Stack

<http://exclusive.multibriefs.com/content/the-relationship-between-student-behavior-and-engagement/education>

"...Over the last 10 years as a school administrator, I have seen a dramatic decline in classroom disruptions and general student misbehavior that I believe is correlated to increased student engagement in school... My staff quickly discovered that the more we engaged in student-centered, project-based, and hands-on activities in the classroom, the more students would be engaged and less likely to act out. Additionally, we discovered that adding choice and voice options for students continued to reverse the trend of student disengagement.

We stopped offering students the choice to stay in class or leave when there was a behavior problem. We found other ways to support them when they were disengaged. Instead of asking teachers to send disruptive students out to receive supports, we brought the supports to the student in the classroom. We call these supports "push ins," and they were adults who didn't have teaching roles such as social workers, deans, and academic advisers. A new cycle was formed where students stayed in class and found ways to re-engage in their learning. The model shows promise and may serve as inspiration for other school leaders looking to change the culture at their school."

You aren't paying attention to me.
Are you having trouble hearing?

I hear O.K.
I'm having trouble listening!



***Addressing Classroom Problems: A Learning Supports Practice Series for Teachers**

Teachers ask: *What can I do right away?*

Often the best way to learn is by addressing a specific concern that needs an immediate response.

With this in mind, the Center is producing a series of resources focused on daily classroom dilemmas teachers experience and some initial ways to deal with such concerns. The emphasis is on engaging and re-engaging students in classroom learning.

As a school moves to develop a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports, this series can help augment professional development by providing a stimulus for discussion by teachers and other staff.

Among others, the Center's learning supports practice series for teachers includes the following topics:

- > *Bullying* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/bullypn.pdf>
- > *Disengaged Students* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/disengpn.pdf>
- > *Fidgety Students* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fidgetypn.pdf>
- > *Homework Avoidance* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/homeworkpn.pdf>
- > *Students in Distress* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/distresspn.pdf>
- > *Minimizing Referrals out of the Classroom* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/referralspn.pdf>
- > *Prereferral Interventions* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/prereferral.pdf>
- > *Addressing Neighborhood Problems that Affect the School* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/neighborpn.pdf>

See the complete series and other resources for professional development at

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

(Click on "Online Resources Catalogue")

Feel free to email similar concerns to the Center for discussion as part of our weekly community of practice listserv. See:

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mhpractitioner/practitioner.pdf>

Prepared by the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA. The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA,
website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

Feel free to share and reproduce this document; no permission is needed.
If you have comments, suggestions, examples you would like to share, please let us know.
Send comments to ltaylor@ucla.edu