

## About School Response to School Shooting

Our Center at UCLA received a request from the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) to write a blog related to the recent school shooting for National Healthy Schools Day. This is what we wrote:

Healthy schools don't wait to react to tragic events. They are proactive in working with their surrounding community to improve schools in ways that promote healthy social-emotional development and prevent problems, as well as having a comprehensive system in place to handle problems.

So, it is essential that folks understand that developing a healthy and positive school climate involves more than enhancing school safety. School climate is an emergent quality. That is, it emerges as school improvement efforts fully reflect our society's commitment to equity, fairness, and justice. And, if the commitment to ensuring equity, fairness, and justice is to be meaningful, it cannot be approached simplistically. (It was said of the legendary coach Vince Lombardi that he was always fair because he treated all his players the same -- like dogs!)

Schools (and society at large) certainly must enhance safety and do more to address mental health concerns. However, schools must embed all such efforts into comprehensive school improvements that effectively close the wide-spread opportunity and achievement gaps. Such improvements start with designing instruction in ways that account for a wide range of individual differences and circumstances. But, the work can't stop there if we are to make schools healthier places and assure all students an equal opportunity to succeed at school (and beyond). In particular, school improvement policy and planning needs to face up to transforming the way schools address the many barriers to learning and teaching that are encountered each day. This requires immediately moving on from current student/learning support practices and reactive and limited special initiatives.

For too long, comprehensive efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students have been marginalized in school improvement policy. While gun violence is on everyone's mind, let's not pretend that the route to improving school climate and health is through cameras, metal detectors, locks, more police on campus, armed teachers, and the like. As student protestors across the country are declaring: WE DESERVE BETTER!

Current events and the shift to more local control established by the Every Student Succeeds Act provide the opportunity for moving forward to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports at every school. Such a transformation won't be easy. This is core challenge for all leaders pursuing school improvement as they heed the call for healthier and safer schools. Fortunately, they can build on pioneering efforts to transform student/learning supports that are underway across the country (see the National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports - <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>). Such efforts recognize that: Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights and that transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to enabling equity of opportunity, promoting whole child development, and enhancing school climate.

And we remember Cesar Chavez's words about accomplishing what we dream of:

*To make a great dream come true,  
the first requirement is a great capacity to dream;  
the second is persistence.*