

from the Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports

Growing numbers of students labeled with disabilities: *Why is anyone surprised?*

The annual report on the *Condition of Education* from the U.S. Department of Education indicates an increase in the number of students labeled with disabilities.

7.2 million children ages 3 to 21 were served under IDEA during the 2020-2021 academic year. This represents 15% of all served. (2009-2010 school year data indicated that 6.5 million served under IDEA – representing 13% of public school students.)

Not surprisingly a disproportionate number continue to be diagnosed as having a *specific learning disability* (a third of students served under IDEA) and too many others are diagnosed as having ADHD (included under “other health impairment”).

Informed consensus has long cautioned that many students diagnosed as LD and ADHD are misdiagnosed. These are students experiencing commonplace learning and behavior problems who are assigned those labels mainly to enable schools to fund special assistance for them.

The reality in many schools is that the learning, behavior, and emotional problems of most youngsters do not stem from internal pathology. Indeed, many of their troubling symptoms would not have developed if environmental circumstances had differed in good ways and schools had unified, comprehensive, and equitable student/learning support systems.

Assigning so many students to special education who do not have true disorders/disabilities consumes resources needed for improving special education. It also works against improving how schools address barriers to learning and teaching, which is essential in stemming the tide of referrals for general help and special education.

A major step forward involves transforming how districts and their schools address barriers to learning and teaching. The following free books provide overviews and in-depth details of major ideas related to moving forward in new directions:

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

all three books can be accessed at

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

NOTE: As part of the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*, a national online summit is being planned focused on unifying student/learning supports with mental health concerns fully embedded. We are seeking your input as we plan the summit .

Click on the URL for the brief article indicated below.

On p. 3 you will find the first set of input we are seeking.

**Reversing the Fragmentation of Student/Learning Supports:
Are You Part of the Problem?**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/summer2022.pdf>

Please feel free to share with other leaders.

We look forward to your input.