

Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(July, 2023 Vol. 27 #10) – 37 Years & Counting

Featured

Using the Summer to Enhance the Student/Learning Support System at Schools

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During a school year, it's hard to find enough time to stop, think, and plan better ways of doing what's needed. It is a bit like Winnie the Pooh's experience when going downstairs. As Milne describes the event:

Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it.

With the increased concerns after the pandemic about matters such as mental health and learning loss, the summer months provide an opportunity for staff who work year round to think and plan ways to improve student/learning supports.

About Using the Summer to Enhance the Student/Learning Support System at Schools

As the numbers of students experiencing learning, behavior, and emotional problems increased this past year, teachers and support staff at many schools struggled even more than in the past.

While the relief funds have been somewhat helpful, they have not met the need and are only temporary bandaids. The reality is that student/learning supports remain marginalized, fragmented, and counterproductively competitive with each other for sparse resources. The problems related to improving such essential supports are compounded by the overemphasis on the limited intervention framework provided by MTSS and the continued failure to embed Mental Health in Schools into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable student/learning supports system. In general, improvement efforts are reactive, often in response to the latest crisis. Summer provides a time to become more proactive in planning better ways to address barriers to learning and teaching in coming years.

Now is the time to focus on coalescing available school and community resources and strategically developing them over 2-3 years into a comprehensive and equitable system.

Plan staff development for all personnel (e.g., teachers, support staff, administrators) to enhance learning about a better system for addressing factors interfering with learning and teaching and how to work together to develop such a system. In particular, consider how to introduce administrators to the need and prototypes for expanding policy, enhancing operational infrastructure, and redeploying resources in developing a system of student/learning supports that can effectively reduce the opportunity and achievement gaps. Consider introducing ways for support staff and teachers to collaborate more effectively (and to do so in classrooms as much as is feasible). And consider ways for schools to work more productively together and with district and community resources to deal with common problems, achieve economies of scale, and enhance practices for prevention and for responding quickly when problems arise.

The current trend in improving student/learning supports involves tinkering in ways that make changes that don't make a dent in reducing the opportunity and achievement gaps. Schools need a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports that embeds a focus on a full range of mental health and psychosocial and educational concerns.

Here are a few resources to help increase understanding of these matters and how to move forward.

- > ***MTSS: Strengths and Weaknesses***
- > ***Student Supports: What's in place? What's Missing?***
- > ***Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions***

While our Center's work has produced many resources related to these matters, the work is detailed in three free books:

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

Enhancing Administrative and Staff Leadership for Improving Student/Learning Supports

Every district and school needs to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. To make it happen, they need formalized leadership and workgroups. See the Center report: ***Improving Student/Learning Supports Requires Reworking the Operational Infrastructure***.

Since planned improvements mean little if they don't play out at the school level, this report begins at that level. Then, based on analyses of what is needed to facilitate and enhance school level efforts, mechanisms are conceived that enable groups or "families" of schools to work together to increase efficiency and effectiveness and garner economies of scale. From this perspective, district level mechanisms are reconceived with a view to supporting each school and family of schools as they change and develop. Also at the district level, establishment of a school-community collaborative is outlined. Finally, we highlight the special operational infrastructure that facilitates adoption, adaptation, and implementation of the major systemic changes involved in improving student/learning supports.

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Summer schools weird. A subject I didn't grasp in the previous nine months
I'm now expected to successfully learn in six weeks.

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>Quick Links to Online Resources

Developmental trajectories of positivity from mid-childhood to early adolescence: Family and school environmental predictors

Mass Violence, Community Violence, and Hate Crimes

Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors

Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates for students and school staff

Bereavement and Recovery

NAEP Scores ‘Flashing Red’ After a Lost Generation of Learning for 13-Year-Olds

FCC Emergency Connectivity Fund Commits \$21 Million to 6 States

Using Student Awards to Promote Self-Reflection

State(s) of Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education: Looking at Equity

Social Media and Youth Mental Health

75 Children's Books About Mental Health

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From a high school principal congratulating graduating seniors

The perseverance aspect of coming back in person and grappling with interactions, grappling with the content again, a different setting, a more traditional setting, learning the study habits, study techniques... I think, as a result, this class is very resourceful – they had to come back and figure it all out again. I hope one of their key takeaways from their last four years is their versatility and their flexibility. I would tell them to embrace whatever life throws at them, stay positive and optimistic and take each new bump as a challenge, embrace that challenge and keep on going. They’ve already demonstrated their ability to do that, so keep adapting.

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Here’s what was discussed in the Community of Practice during June

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

Note: All community of practice editions contain Links to relevant shared resources.

- >Colleague asks: How to measure school mental health success?
- >About reducing teacher burnout
- >Interchange about “Screening Students for Problems: Testing Often is Not Needed”
- >Adding belonging to summer learning
- >End of the school year is a time for expressing appreciations
- >Increasing student engagement: Students as teachers
- >Enhancing mental health effectiveness: Focus on Prevention
- >School board member responds to MH in Schools: Moving Beyond the Emergency

If you missed the resources and news in previous issues of the Community of Practice, see

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

>For more resources in general, see our website
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

>For info on the status of upcoming conferences
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/upconf.htm>

>For info on webinars
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

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Schools, in many ways, are representative of a general public commitment to a community and to the longevity and health of a community, to its vitality, to its future. *Amanda Lewis*

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>Calls for grant proposals
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/upcall.htm>

> job and training opportunities
when available
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/job.htm>

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

Our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

Let Us Know about what ideas are being proposed for moving in new directions for transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

And if anyone is thinking about increasing the capacity of a district or school with respect to developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, we can help. Send all info to ltaylor@ucla.edu

There's never time to plan things right.



True, but there's always time to do things wrong!



>A Few News Stories (excerpted from various news sources)

Children with anxiety are prescribed medications but little therapy. *More kids and teenagers with anxiety disorders are not getting the counseling they need. If children and teenagers receive any help for an anxiety disorder, it's usually medication — not counseling — according to a study published in Pediatrics. In fact, there was an inverse relationship between the need for therapy and what has been given over more than a decade. As the number of youth with anxiety disorders has risen continually since 2006, the number of children receiving psychotherapy has decreased.*

Youth farm safety camp. *The Williston West Farm Safety Camp offers an extensive, three-day experience for youth under age 16 to learn everything from how to properly handle livestock and understand agriculture laws to safely operating tractors and driving all-terrain vehicles. Williston Fire Dept. will teach participants how to properly use a fire extinguisher, how to recognize hazardous materials and what to do if a gas fire breaks out or they encounter a fire involving toxic fumes. Trinity Health will offer Stop the Bleed training, which teaches participants how to safely apply a tourniquet and other safety techniques.*

Anchorage School District sees high numbers of teachers retiring and resigning. *The Anchorage School District is seeing high numbers of educators resigning and retiring — a trend that picked up after the COVID-19 pandemic upended life and education in Alaska, and is continuing this school year. Anchorage education leaders say the exits are likely due to a mix of factors, including a lack of competitive retirement benefits, flat state funding and the exhausting toll teaching has taken on educators in recent years. And they come alongside continued staff shortages across the district.*

After 10 years, Chicago school closings have left big holes, and promises unkept. *In 2013 50 schools were closed by then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel. Today, Chicago and other big cities again face similar dynamics as those that led to school closings across the country: major student population declines, aging buildings in need of repair, and budget deficits. Elected to follow the two-decade reign of Richard M. Daley, Emanuel was confronting issues that had piled up in previous administrations. Daley and then-CPS CEO Arne Duncan opened scores of new schools in neighborhoods with declining population, many of them privately-run charters, which further drained traditional schools of kids and resources.*

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I strongly believe that the cost of closing schools in terms of the lost trust, the challenges of dealing with the facilities, and moving children ... outweigh any benefits you get from it.

Chicago Public Schools CEO Pedro Martinez

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>Comments and sharing from the field

1. "I would like to bring to your attention a just-published Edutopia blog that speaks to the aspects of SEL/SECD that schools most need now, and that can be implemented feasibly. This is not the best time, in most schools, to bring in formal SEL-related programs. Neither the kids nor the staff are ready, in most cases. By bringing considerations about SEL/SECD into the culture and climate of schools, we increase the capacity for improving mental health in the schools and potentiating more rigorous and systematic efforts at promoting social-emotional and character development.
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/using-sel-improve-morale>

2. We were contacted by this group and asked to share the following:
“At the Dawn Chorus Group, we see a world where good ideas flourish in communities. A world where people collectively work toward social, environmental, and well-being goals.... We are committed to finding new ways to make a difference in people’s lives through research and partnerships..... We are a team of psychologists, sociologists, technologists, geographers, and more who are passionate about helping people improve their work. Our goal is to use our expertise to help communities build a brighter tomorrow. We believe that good ideas flourish when strong communities support them....”
<https://dawnchorusgroup.com/about/>
3. A colleague sent Linda a thank you and a growing list of concerns about what is happening in schools related to student/learning supports:
“ Thank you for continuing to assist schools in improving the services provided to students. ... In 1997, Diane Allensworth wrote: Health education consists of planned sequential k - 12 curriculum that addresses the physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions of health. Then, persons started to chip away at each of these topics.... You and Dr. Adelman, always emphasized teams and whole child. Then parents and mostly politicians decided they are the experts on everything. ... Now we are labeling and dividing persons into groups again, and under the label of "mental health".

To Listserv Participants

- **Please share this resource with others.** (Everyone has a stake in the future of public education and this is a critical time for action.)
- **Let us know what’s going on** to improve how schools address barriers to learning & teaching and reengage disconnected students and families. (We can share the info with the over 130,000 on our listserv.)
- **For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**
- **Looking for information?** (We usually can help.)
- **Have a suggestion for improving our efforts?** (We welcome your feedback.)

We look forward to hearing from you!

Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF ENEWS

Who Are We? Recently renamed the Center for MH in Schools and Student/Learning Supports, our national Center was established in 1995 under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project (which was established in 1986). We are part of the Department of Psychology at UCLA. The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor.

For more information about the Center and its many resources, go to the website at <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> or email Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu

Send info to share with others or ask for specific resources by email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu