

Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(November, 2024, Vol. 29 #2) 38 Years & Counting

Featured

Want to reduce the achievement gap?

Also in this issue

>Quick links to online resources

>A Few Stories Excerpted from Various News Sources

>Comments and sharing from the field

Want to reduce the achievement gap?

Doing so remains such an intractable problem because of the increasing number of learning, behavior and emotional problems at too many schools. *Schools need to reduce the opportunity gap in order to reduce the achievement gap.*

And reducing the opportunity gap means facing up to the necessity of transforming the way schools provide student/learning supports to address factors that interfere with learning and teaching.

What's wrong with what schools are doing now?

As we stress in our recent [EdSource](#) commentary:

All schools devote resources to coping with student problems. Some are able to offer a range of student and learning supports; others can provide only what is mandated. In the majority of schools, what is available usually covers relatively few students. More resources would help. But school budgets always are tight, and adding the number of student support staff that advocates call for is really not in the cards.

In general, districts plan and implement student and learning supports in a fragmented and piecemeal manner, generating a variety of specialized programs and services. Over many years, increasing concern about fragmented approaches has produced calls for "integrated services" and, recently, for "integrated support systems."

However, by focusing primarily on fragmentation, policymakers and school improvement advocates fail to deal with a core underlying problem. What drives the fragmentation is the longstanding marginalization in school improvement policy of the role schools must play in addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

A fundamental challenge for education leaders and policymakers is ending this marginalization. Meeting the challenge requires escaping old ways of thinking about how schools address learning, behavior and emotional problems.

What might a transformed approach look like?

Addressing the pervasive and complex barriers that impede effective teaching and student learning requires a systemwide approach that comprehensively and equitably supports whole-child development and learning. This involves districts and schools rethinking how they frame the practices they use to address learning, behavior and emotional problems.

In this respect, the current widespread adoption of some form of a multitiered "continuum of interventions" (commonly known as MTSS) is a partial step in the right direction. This framework recognizes that a full range of intervention must include a focus on promoting whole-student healthy development, preventing problems, providing immediate assistance when problems appear, and ensuring assistance for serious and chronic special education concerns. But moving forward, our

research has clarified the need to reframe each level of intervention into subsystems designed to weave together school and community resources.

Moreover, our research indicates that the various programs, services, initiatives and strategies can be grouped into six domains of classroom and schoolwide student and learning support. The six arenas encompass interventions that:

- Embed student and learning supports into regular classroom strategies to enable learning and teaching
- Support transitions (e.g., new grade, new school, before/after school, during lunch and other daily transitions)
- Increase home and school connections and engagement
- Respond to — and, where feasible, prevent — school and personal crises
- Increase community involvement and collaborative engagement
- Facilitate student and family access to special assistance.

Organizing the activity in this way helps clarify what supports are needed in and out of the classroom and across each level of the continuum to enable effective teaching and motivate student learning. We recognize that the changes education leaders are already pursuing represent considerable challenges and that the changes we discuss can be daunting.

But maintaining the status quo is untenable, and just doing more tinkering will not meet the need. Transforming how schools play their role in addressing barriers to learning and teaching into a unified, comprehensive and equitable system that is fully integrated into school improvement policy and practice is essential to enhancing equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school and beyond.

Guides to Transforming Student and Learning Supports

A transformed system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching is essential for enabling all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school. Such a system encompasses resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and cognitive supports in the classroom and school-wide. Such a system is essential to improving schools and narrowing the achievement gap.

This month is the time to start a process to enhance the role schools play in addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

Through the [***National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports***](#), our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools provide student/learning supports and reengage disconnected students. See

>Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions.

To provide a roadmap for moving in new directions, we also have developed a companion document to this guide that details first steps for moving forward, suggests a monthly schedule, and provides links to resource aids for pursuing them. See

>Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Starting the Process.

This resource details a series of steps and tasks. The first step can be initiated in November (and accomplished in a month or two). It involves delineating what is in place and developed a set of recommended system changes. Resources are provided to aid each of the following initial tasks:

- (a) mapping existing student support activities and operational infrastructure,
- (b) analyzing what has been mapped,
- (c) identifying priorities for and clarifying the benefits of system changes,
- (d) developing recommendations for system changes,
- (e) building a critical mass of support

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*School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students.
But when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.*

– Carnegie Task Force on Education

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>Quick Links to Online Resources

- >>**Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioral Engagement Strategies That Work**
- >>**Addressing Working Conditions to Improve Teacher Retention**
- >>**School Climate Assessment and Continuous Improvement**
- >>**The Complicated Rise of Social Emotional Learning in the United States: Implications for Contemporary Policy and Practice**
- >>**Talking back to the failing-schools narrative**
- >>**Teachers of Color & Self-Efficacy in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): Strengthening Equity-Based Approaches to SEL**
- >>**Section 504 Protections for Students with Bipolar Disorder**
- >>**Teachers: Kindergarten readiness tests are time-consuming, cut into instruction**

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Using ChatGPT to complete assignments is like bringing a forklift into the weight room; you will never improve your cognitive fitness that way. -Ted Chiang

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Here's what was discussed in the *Practitioner* during October

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

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

- >Should schools use student well-being surveys to guide policy/practice?
- >How should schools use artificial intelligence and also cope with misuses?
- >What do you think about online/telephone counseling for students?
- >Rethinking universal mindfulness programs in schools
- >Will Tier 3 interventions reduce school shootings?
- >About Relationship Building at School
- >Are school boards important?
- >Impact of homework on students and families
- >About new directions for addressing youth mental health

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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Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.

Verna Myers

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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

Our teacher is worried that the class will use AI in doing homework.

Well, so she doesn't have to worry, maybe she should stop assigning homework



A Few News Stories (excerpted from various news sources)

Schools set for post-storm return. Madison County Schools will be the first Western North Carolina school system to reopen its doors after Tropical Storm Helene. Madison County Schools Superintendent Will Hoffman, said one of the most important tasks laid out before school administrators is ensuring all the students can make it into school, as a number of students are still without reliable road access following Helene's devastation. According to Hoffman, "many" of the schools will not only provide shower access to students on site, but also laundry facilities. Madison Early College High School served as an emergency shelter and Madison High School served as a community distribution site and free clothing center. Serving as community resource hubs and providing social services for families is something that the superintendent said he feels is a crucial undertaking for the school system.

Families, advocates ask district to spare small schools. Students, parents and the nonprofits supporting them are pressuring San Francisco Unified School District to directly engage with the communities of soon-to-close schools. SFUSD said this week it would delay until October releasing the list of schools the list of schools set to close or merge at the start of the 2025-26 school year. Organizers said that Black and brown families have not been invited to participate in the district's process of closing, merging and consolidating schools. The nonprofit student-advocacy group continued to raise concerns over how the closures will affect students with the highest needs. Officials have said the closures are necessary following the expiration of pandemic-era relief funds and years long enrollment declines. The latter have pushed the district toward financial insolvency and a potential state takeover, which state auditors say necessitates school closures.

Schools and corporations join forces to meet workforce demands. The East Valley Institute of Technology (AZ) is launching a training program for high school students and adults that will provide the experience required to enter STEM fields, in hopes of meeting the expanding workforce demands brought up by Arizona's expanding technology industries. In partnership with Boeing and Honeywell, EVIT is kickstarting the program in an effort to supplement workforce needs as Arizona's technology industries grow. The program takes a nontraditional approach by preparing high school students for the working world before graduation, while providing STEM-focused education.

Average U.S. students have recovered some of their pandemic-era learning losses in math and reading — but the recovery has been slow and uneven, according to a new report. The pandemic exposed deep racial and income inequalities in the nation's public school system, and the uneven recovery is showing few of those inequities have been addressed enough. The typical U.S. student has recovered about a third of pandemic-era learning losses in math and a quarter in reading, according to a 30-state analysis. But a new analysis found that the students who were already furthest behind have fallen even more. Tightening fiscal realities, educator fatigue, and student disengagement are threatening many efforts to make up for learning loss. Researchers urged states and school leaders to immediately prioritize students with disabilities and English learners. They recommended prioritizing real accountability and said school districts should use AI and other technologies creatively amid an ongoing teacher shortage.

US schools still struggle with segregation 70 years after Brown v. Board of Education. More than a third of students attend schools where 75% or more of those in attendance are of a single race or ethnicity. Despite the billions of dollars invested in desegregating public schools over the past few decades, school segregation has returned to the same level as it was in the 1960s. Between 2022 and 2023, among 100,000 public schools across the country, about 83% of all Black public school students and 82% of all Latino students attended a majority non-white school. At the same time, 75% of all white public school students were enrolled in a majority-white school.

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One of the biggest predictors of success is not fancy schools or tutors. It's how often did you get read to as a kid? How many books were in your house? - Nani Azman

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>Comments and sharing from the field

Response to 10/8/24 Practitioner – *What do you think about online/telephone counseling?*

1. “I think that online/telephone counseling should be possible although in person counseling has to be part of the support process, meaning by phone/online only for the first two contacts and after good therapeutic relation is established student could agree with some counseling by phone/online. Kind regards and impressed by your work for the mental health of students and many more.”
2. “...The primary concern would be the type and quality of the service (e.g., self-administered, group sessions, face-to-face) and the degree of quality monitoring.... My main concern with school based mental health overall is that it ignores the school context and the importance of relationships that bind kids to school. Also, depending on the type of concern, these services will not contribute to helping teachers know how to support their students. This is especially true for disruptive behavior which simply cannot be outsourced to therapy without also addressing classroom issues. But even with anxiety and depression it is important that teachers know how best to support these students. I doubt that online services address these issues.... Two other issues that comes to mind are the role of parents and the need to establish confidentiality of notes and the degree to which youth have a safe and secure place to receive services...”

Responses to 9/26 email – *About School Shootings*

Several responses felt Dewey Cornell’s comments minimized a serious problem. The following came from student support staff:

1. “This ‘extraordinarily unlikely event’ became an unfortunate reality for our school district three weeks ago.”
2. “I think this is irresponsible. One shooting is too many. We just experienced a school shooting here a few weeks ago and those drills and preparation that he's calling fantasy and misguided saved a child's life.”
3. “I don’t think it matters that the occurrence rate is only 25 or that school shootings in relation to other types of homicides is ‘low’. The bigger issue is that they should not be happening at all. No one needs high powered rifles and how do these kids keep getting their hands on them. Kids need support, parents need support. The world needs to be more kind. 25 seems low unless it’s your school and it’s your kid who never comes home.”
4. “This is important information AND looking at comparative safety data in the United States is questionable because there is so much gun violence overall. Saying that schools are the safest place statistically doesn’t mean that they are safe. It just means that there is less gun violence in schools than elsewhere. “
5. “I am guessing this person does not work in a school especially a public school or does not even have children in a school! I think the problem is not the probability of our students being at risk of being shot in a school setting as much as the occurrence has happened more and more and we would rather protect children before the fact then be up to our ears in damage control and loss of life! I think it is a matter of perspective, I would rather pool our efforts in protecting the precious lives of our next generation!”

Other respondents indicated the information was important for districts to know:

1. *From a Superintendent:* “This perspective on school violence is absolutely essential to share more widely with parents, staff and students. With the best intentions, schools are inadvertently increasing the traumatic effects of gun violence in our society by failing to assert how safe our schools are on a regular basis. Instead of providing reassurance to parents we are causing more fear and concern. I think the argument being made is also bolstered by the ‘fine print’ of the now prolific ‘School Shooting Database’. This database professes to track all school shootings in the country. It is often cited by writers and the number of incidents (usually in the hundreds) is commonly noted in the news. The careless and undisciplined use of the term "school shooting" dramatically inflates the number of random, mass shootings like Columbine, Sandy Hook, Parkland and Uvalde. The fact that the database treats any incident where a gun is discharged on school property as a ‘school shooting’ is misleading. The vast majority of these incidents happen outside of school hours and are the result of personal disputes, suicide/attempted suicide and/or accidental discharge. These are bad situations, but they do not reflect what most people think and feel when they see the ‘number of school shootings’ in a given year. Thank you for sharing and asking the question.”
2. *From a Superintendent:* “Thank you for this email. I couldn't agree more with the data that Professor Cornell shares. We do use his threat assessment tool when looking at our students. We have come a long way with this work and I am encouraged to see where we are heading with our efforts. Companies are making a fortune off the hysteria around school shootings. As a school leader, we find ourselves with the onslaught of media, social media, and community voices who want schools to protect their children. The number of homicides indicated in the graph speak to the deaths. My concern, as a 20 year survivor of a school shooting, are all the students that were exposed to the senseless gun violence. All these students have been exposed at a very important developmental age. Those are the students that I worry for. As a contributor to the article in the USA Today piece, I worry about students and their families, and the faculty/staff that continue to show up to work in our schools, despite their worry.
3. *From a Student Support staff:* “As a school psychologist for over 20 years who also teaches crisis response and threat assessment to graduate students in school psychology, it is incredibly frustrating how the low probability of a school shooting has been both politicized AND exploited for commercial gain. The leveraging of community/parental fears for profit is emblematic of the problems of capitalism and fear-mongering governing so many bad school decisions.”
4. *From a school board member:* “Dewey Cornell is spot on! Every community is unique with respect to safety concerns and risks. But we have seen first hand in our district how children pay the price for adults’ overreactions and knee-jerk reactions, including from law enforcement. Initiating a crisis response when no crisis exists can have traumatic and lasting consequences for the entire community.”
5. *From a Center listserv member:* “I find this interesting because I disagree with schools becoming lockdown zones for kids AND I understand people have reasonable concerns about gun violence. In terms of best next steps for schools I do agree that making it more prison like and instilling more fear is not the solution. At times I reflect on previous moral panics in schools or with children and wonder why we keep repeating ourselves (ex: LGBTQ education in schools being another current moral panics). I think it comes down to policy and having similar gun policies around the United States instead of individual actions or actions only in the hands of school districts and administrators. I also think more collective action and collaboration on how to make schools safe, how to work with people who pose a risk of violence to others and make sure they are getting the support they need, and providing parents with education and support is needed.”

6. *From a college student:* “This post from Professor Cornell was fascinating to read and I am attaching my thoughts regarding it with this email. I was surprised to read the FBI statistics cited since it seems that school shootings are extremely prevalent in our society. When I thought about this, it made sense to me that shootings would be exaggerated to increase awareness, because people would respond more when the lives of children are at stake. A singular shooting in a school causes massive news coverage since people find it terrible for someone to harm those that society sees as the most innocent. It is seen to be among the worst of crimes due to the young age of the victims.

This may be a good thing since it brings awareness to this topic and makes people think more favorably about stricter gun control laws. School shootings are one of the first things that comes up during advocacy for gun laws.

Additionally, I do believe that it is necessary to be prepared for shootings, as it is for earthquakes, tornadoes, etc. However, I agree that it is traumatizing to be subjected to repeated drills and fear-mongering especially at such a young age, and that it would be better to increase transparency about the rates of occurrence of such events. Thank you for sharing this post. “

7. *From a college student:* “The information posted was very interesting. I had no idea school shootings were so much rarer than they are made out to be in the media. After reading everything through, here are my general thoughts on the matter:

I think that the wide coverage of school shootings by the media makes sense from a purely business-related perspective. Parents worry about their children constantly, so even the smallest chance that a school shooting might occur terrifies them. This makes people very likely to tune in to any reporting done on school shootings.

Given the data Professor Dewey posted about the mismatch between the advertised threat of a school shooting and the actual probability of the shooting occurring, I wonder if all the lockdown drills the students are being subjected to harm their mental well-being and academic performance. After all, it is difficult to fully concentrate on the material being taught if one is even subconsciously preoccupied with the possibility of being shot.

At the same time, though, I think heavy reporting on school shootings could be a necessary means to an end. Increased focus on school shootings is probably the most effective way to encourage people to support stricter gun regulation, which should help reduce incidences of all shootings, not just those that occur in schools.”

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