
Thursday, May 14, 2020 1

- From Center at UCLA: Schools, COVID-19, and Mental Health

Call to Action

Schools, COVID-19, and Mental Health

As planning proceeds for when schools re-open, leaders are zeroing in on ways schools will deal with the many management and instructional difficulties that lie ahead.

But while there are widespread statements anticipating the growing number of mental health problems schools will confront, not much is being discussed about how schools plan to address the situation.

In the past, there have been many well-intentioned initiatives and policy reports focused on expanding mental health services in schools. However, schools have never had the resources to scale-up a clinical approach for responding to students manifesting emotional problems. And with tightening budgets, thinking in these terms simply is unrealistic.

The challenge and the opportunity at this time is to be innovative and revamp available student and learning supports, including mental health interventions.

Big picture planning must now focus on how schools will address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. Teachers know that emotional, behavior, and learning problems overlap and interfere with the best laid plans for instruction. And they know they will need in-classroom and schoolwide assistance to enhance equity of opportunity for success at schools for many students.

Before the pandemic, we laid out prototypes for reframing student and learning supports. See the two books we make free and accessible online:

> *Improving School Improvement* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

> *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

The prototypes provide blueprints for adapting current policy and practices to unify and weave together available resources and rework the operational infrastructure at schools and districts.

In response to the current situation, we are incorporating the frameworks into a work tentatively entitled: *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*. It will be available for free access on our website sometime next month. If you want online access to a pre-publication draft, let us know, and we will inform you when it is in good enough shape to share. (Send requests to Ltaylor@ucla.edu)