

School Practitioner Community of Practice
(A network for sharing & exchange)
March 11, 2020

Topics for discussion –

>Transforming Schools to Better Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Links to a few other relevant resources & other topics of concern

Note: Go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla> for links to other Center resources including

- >Upcoming initiatives, conferences & workshops
- >Calls for grant proposals, presentations, and papers
- >Training and job opportunities
- >Upcoming webcasts & other professional development opportunities

**This resource is from the
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports, UCLA**

Given education budgets, we have been asked to increase our outreach to make our free resources more available (e.g., for planning, professional development, etc.).

So please feel free to share with anyone you think might benefit (e.g., forward our resources to individuals and share on listservs and websites).

For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

For previous postings of community of practice discussions, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

Topic for Discussion –

>Transforming Schools to Better Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Here is an excerpt from the commentary:

In response to our Center's emphasis of transforming school improvement policy to better address barriers to learning and teaching, a superintendent recently told us his district was doing well without making changes. We note that his district is rather small and serves a predominately white and economically advantaged student body. So he, of course, is right. (We do wonder, however, how well the current system in his district is working for whatever number of students are experiencing learning, behavior, and emotional problems.)

At any rate, it is clear that things are not working well at many urban and rural schools serving students from economically disadvantaged communities. Remedies have tended to amount to adding one or two support staff, tinkering with current practices, adding another program, and delineating yet another set of things for teacher to learn how to cope with. The proposed changes stem from real needs and usually follow any event that increases public concern about matters such as violence at schools, bullying, dropouts, toxic stress, student trauma, depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns, etc....

In terms of public education policy, a considerable part of the problem in improving student/learning supports in substantive and sustainable ways lies with the reality that prevailing policy stresses a two component framework for school improvement. One component emphasizes

enhancing instruction; the other intends to improve the management/governance of schools. Some attention, of course, also is given to student and schooling problems.

However, in most school districts, these matters are at best a secondary concern in school improvement planning and practice.

What most schools need to do is transform their policies and practices for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students. Such a transformation involves (1) adopting a school improvement policy framework for unifying (not just coordinating and integrating) school approaches to providing student/learning supports and then (2) working on developing the supports into a comprehensive and equitable system that weaves together school and community resources...."

Colleagues' responses to the Center's commentary:

(A) "In regard to the small, predominantly white, affluent district you mentioned, we also see this situation and yet also wonder how "well the current system is working for whatever number of students are experiencing learning, behavior, and emotional problems." And we know these students exist and are especially experiencing much stress and pressure to succeed and preserve their social status, privilege, and advantage. I agree that a priority of equity and opportunity is the situation in many rural and urban schools serving students from economically disadvantaged communities. Yes, we see an emphasis on tinkering with current practices and executing a sole or primary focus on improving teaching and management that is thought can eventually solve ongoing social, learning, behavioral, and emotional problems. We also see veteran Student & Learning support people touting new save-all, therapies, methods, techniques as the answer, sine quo non, now including the new "trauma informed jargon" such as TF- CBT, and so many others. All probably are helpful and have their place in the third component but they are often see as the answer. Hard to believe we are still stuck there!"

(B) Excerpt: "I currently work in what I call a "mini United Nations" or "suburban-urban" school, due to the heterogeneous diversity and economically disadvantaged status of our students. We are often confronted with conflicting approaches to removing learning, behavioral, and emotional barriers for our students as multiple district initiatives are filtered through additional school approaches. Your article echoes some of our challenges.

What especially struck me, though, was the first paragraph about the superintendent who feels his school is doing well without making changes. I had a student whose family had moved into our school boundaries without fully understanding our demographics. The child was white and had come from a district perhaps not unlike the one described in the first paragraph, and the parent showed initial concern at having her child attend the school. I encouraged her to keep her son in the school because it would broaden his understanding of our world. Our school has much to offer that cannot be captured by a standardized test or school grade.

Could districts with a predominately white and economically advantaged student body who are "doing well" be contributing to the maintenance of existing inequitable systems? When adopting a school improvement policy framework for unifying school approaches, how careful are we to ensure we are not simply maintaining our socially-constructed status quo of what is considered appropriate student behavior and learning norms? ...

Our socially constructed status quo creates expectations for normalized behavior in schools. These expectations still largely rely on a 1950s, Puritan-derived construct of student behavior. For example, at my current school, the behavioral expectations (part of PBIS--a district initiative) are KYHFOOTY (keep your hands, feet, and other objects, to yourself), stay on task, follow directions the first time given, and smile and be respectful. These rules seem logical enough, but examples of how these rules are molded by assumptions include quiet classrooms as the ideal, where students raise their hands and respond in orderly ways and don't question authority, walking the halls in silent lines (three tiles from the wall)

Our current social norms are more easily maintained by students who have been raised with similar cultural expectations, such as perhaps the student-body described as being predominantly white and economically advantaged. When we normalize such social constructions, we render as "other" different perspectives and approaches. With reflection and within context, behaviors such as those listed above are fine. They're just not normed, and

teachers are not taught how to incorporate them into instruction in meaningful ways.

Labeling schools that easily meet these expectations as "doing well" threatens to ignore two implications, First, labels of "doing well" reinforce and condone such social constructions as being "right," which implies that other perspectives are "wrong" and require intervention. Second, is that our children in schools that are "doing well" learn these social constructions of acceptable behavior and pass them on as they become adults and begin leading future generations of students in schools.... Some of what we teach our children may be explicitly hateful, but much of it is taught through our seemingly benign systems that reinforce certain behaviors as "right" and others as "wrong." As such we, as adults, don't think about how different behavioral norms could be an asset to all students' learning, not just to those in schools within economically disadvantaged communities.

As an administrator, I hope to broaden the perspective of teachers through school-wide policies that reinforce the wholeness of every child. Teachers value what Principals value, so setting expectations for how we address student learning and behavior in schools is vitally important. Expectations aren't enough though, because the majority of our teachers were raised in schools that were 'doing well,' and as a result lack the skills needed to change the status quo. I want to provide teachers with skill sets that empower them to address student misbehavior in problem-solving ways. I would also seek to provide teachers with skills on how to incorporate non-normed behaviors (such as blurting, movement, questioning authority, and such) into their instruction in order to improve student-teacher relationships and increase the engagement of their students.

In addition to working with teachers, I would hope to work with district personnel to replace--not overlay--behavior documentation systems that label non-normed student learning and behaviors as disruptive, defiant, and disrespectful (what I call the three Ds) with more objective systems that align with problem-solving approaches to learning and behavior. It wouldn't matter what school I am at--economically advantaged and disadvantaged student bodies would equally benefit from a solutions-based approach to learning and behavior in the classroom and in the school.

We did not socially construct our current assumptions in a moment, and it will take us time to deconstruct them. If we are to 'successfully improve student/learning supports in substantive and sustainable ways,' however, we must look beyond what is 'not working well at many urban and rural schools serving students from economically disadvantaged communities' and instead create systems that work well for all schools by disrupting the status quo in economically privileged schools and teaching all students how to unlearn these assumptions. All of our children deserve this opportunity."

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Please let us hear from you

What's your take on this?

Share your perspective about these concerns!

And send them and any other comments to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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*Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
enabling equity of opportunity, promoting whole child development,
and enhancing school climate.*

Links to a few other relevant resources & other topics of concern

Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus

https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Talking%20to%20Kids%20About%20the%20Coronavirus&utm_campaign=Weekly-03-03-20

Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus

https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=A%20Comic%20Exploring%20the%20New%20Coronavirus&utm_campaign=Weekly-03-03-20

Developing Inclusive Youth <https://www.aft.org/ae/fall2019/killen>

Organizing Schools to Serve Students with Disabilities <https://edpolicyinca.org>

Promoting Positive Adolescent Health Behaviors and Outcomes <https://www.nap.edu/>

Education For Homeless Children And Youth Federal Data Summary

<https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Federal-Data-Summary-SY-15.16-to-17.18-Published-1.30.2020.pdf>

Guidance for Schools About the Coronavirus

Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html>

Coronavirus: Guidance for schools

<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/GuidanceForSchools.pdf>

Coping with stress during infectious disease outbreaks

<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/CommunicableDisease-StrategiesForCoping.pdf>

Coronavirus: State guidance for schools (CA)

<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/StateGuidanceForSchools.pdf>

Coronavirus: Multilingual Resources for Schools

<https://www.colorincolorado.org/coronavirus-resources-schools>

Watch for the Center's quarterly e-journal next week. It has articles on:

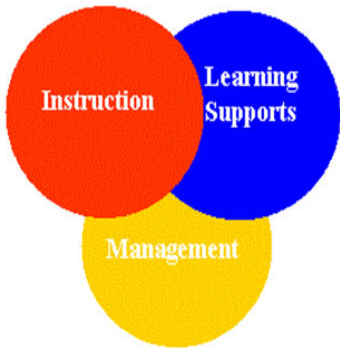
> *Embedding Concerns for School Safety and Mental Health into an Expanded MTSS Framework*

> *The Role of Schools in Promoting Whole Child Development and Learning*

Why do you say education reform is a paradox?



Because everyone supposedly is going down the same road ... but they are going in different directions!



For information about the

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

Also online are two related free books

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 MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!

For new sign-ups – email Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.

We post a broad range of issues and responses to the Net Exchange on our website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm> and on Facebook (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>)