

30 years &
counting



Addressing Barriers to Learning

New ways to think . . .

Better ways to link



Vol. 21, # 1

How Will Every Student Succeed?

Use the Transition from Federal to More Local Control to Transform Student and Learning Supports

With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (the “Every Student Succeeds Act”), the shift to more local control is on the way. The reauthorization mainly focuses discussion on greater subgroup accountability, adding “nonacademic” accountability indicators, and how resources are distributed.

Of particular relevance to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students, the reauthorization replaces what has been described as a maze of programs with a “Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant” that provides states and districts with flexibility in how students and families are assisted.

So now the question arises: *How should states and districts use this opportunity?*

Advocates with different perspectives undoubtedly are already thinking about how to shape what is proposed. Conflicts will arise; unsatisfactory compromises are likely. Conflicting agenda are a recipe for perpetuating the marginalization, fragmentation, and counterproductive competition that permeates prevailing efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching. We suggest that there is a way around this dilemma.

What We Advocate

Given that our home base is the national Center for Mental Health in Schools, folks often ask why our advocacy is framed in the language of *transforming student and learning supports*. Here’s what we answer:

From our perspective, school improvement policy needs to be reframed so that student and learning supports are no longer out on the margins. In this context, we advocate for embedding mental health in schools into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports. We argue against pursuing mental health as yet another health initiative for schools to adopt (see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/winter14.pdf>).

Also in this issue:

- >National Initiative for 2016
- >Addressing Attendance Problems
- >Center News

Why?

We understand that schools are not in the mental health business. Their mission is to educate the young. And that means *all* students. To accomplish their mission, schools need to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. They do this through a wide range of student and learning supports, most of which embed a focus on mental health concerns. Moreover, given concerns about mental *health* and not just mental *illness*, there is a growing interest in how such supports promote social and emotional learning and whole child development.

Schools are not in the mental health business

Furthermore, it is important to understand that our approach to mental health in schools contrasts markedly with the work of those who focus mainly on *school-based mental health*. Those advocating “school-based” usually stress individual and small group interventions for students manifesting social and emotional problems (essentially drawing on clinical models) and ideas such as linking with and co-locating agency services and community professionals on school sites and enhancing case management and service coordination/integration.

We recognize that such strategies have a place. However, our work stresses that the nature and scope of learning, behavior, and emotional problems seen at schools precludes relying on “school-based” mental health. Such a limited approach has not and cannot adequately address student and school factors contributing to so many youngsters not doing well. (In some schools at least 40% of the student body are doing poorly and eventually drop out, relatively few of these currently receive special attention.)

Adding a few more MH services at a school doesn't meet the need

Moreover, given the sparsity of services in many communities, the emphasis on enhancing linkages and co-locating what is available usually benefits a relatively few schools. And in benefitting the few, access to resources often is reduced for other schools, thereby increasing inequities. In addition, bringing a few more mental health services to any school does little to enhance the role of schools in preventing problems and promoting social and emotional well-being, empowerment, social consciousness, critical inquiry, and equity of opportunity.

Finally, the emphasis on bringing in professionals from the community tends to downplay the fact that schools employ a wide range of student and learning support professionals (e.g., psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses, dropout/graduation support staff, special educators, and others). It also often exacerbates interprofessional conflicts.

So:

By focusing on *transforming student and learning supports*, we are able to embed our concern for mental health in schools into a call for a fundamental shift in school improvement policy and practice to enhance equity of opportunity for *all* students to succeed at school and beyond. Such a focus embraces the promotion of whole child development and maintains a special emphasis on supporting those students who are not doing well at school. And it expands the framework for school accountability.

At the same time, we understand that dealing with multiple, interrelated concerns, such as poverty, child development, education, violence, crime, safety, housing, and employment requires multiple and interrelated solutions. That is another reason that just adding additional services and programs to schools is not a solution. Indeed, it is a recipe for perpetuating the current marginalized and fragmented approach that exists at school, district, and state levels. Interrelated solutions require wide-based collaboration. In particular, schools, homes, and communities need to work together strategically in pursuing shared goals related to the general well-being of the young and society.

With this as an aim, schools first need to rework how they address student and school factors contributing to so many students not doing well. Then, after identifying critical gaps in the student and learning support system, they can outreach to a wide range of community and home stakeholders to weave in available external sources of economic and social capital. Doing this effectively involves strategic rethinking of school improvement policy and planning and development of a sophisticated operational infrastructure for school, home, and community collaboration.

In sum:

With passage of the “Every Student Succeeds Act,” state and local policy makers can and need to move forward in ending the marginalization of student and learning supports. We suggest that the type of transformation described by the Center’s frameworks is essential for moving beyond the current fragmented state of affairs toward the multi-year development of a student and learning supports intervention system that is cohesive, comprehensive, and equitable and that fits the mission of schools.

Moving Forward Involves Revisiting School Improvement Plans

The “Every Student Succeeds Act” will lead to revisiting school improvement plans. With the increased accountability focus on disaggregating data on subgroups and with goals set to close gaps in achievement and graduation rates for each subgroup that is significantly behind, the emphasis on equity of opportunity will increase. And with the addition of at least one, additional indicator, such as student engagement, educator engagement, post-secondary readiness, school climate/safety, school-wide concerns will be more prominent.* Moreover, for the bottom 5 percent of schools, for schools where less than two-thirds of students graduate, and for schools where subgroups of students are chronically struggling, the focus on school turnaround will remain intensive and focused on evidence-based interventions. And block grant funding will open up discussions about the best way to allocate resources.

Not surprisingly, analyses of school improvement guides and plans usually find a primary focus on what is mandated and measured. Specifically, such guides stress meeting the demand for standards-based and results-oriented improvements mainly by elaborating on prevalent thinking, rather than considering fundamental systemic change.

*We advocate for an expanded accountability framework for schools that encompasses greater attention to social and personal functioning and addressing barriers to learning and teaching – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/account.pdf> .

These demands reflect the assumptions that continuous progress in raising test scores and reducing the achievement gap can be accomplished by intensifying and narrowing the focus of school improvement to matters directly related to instruction and behavioral discipline. Such failed assumptions ignore the necessity of fundamentally restructuring school and community resources in ways that enable learning.

Understanding the crucial facets that are missing in school improvement policy and practice, requires revisiting current plans using three critical lenses. These lenses focus on:

- *All students* – conceived in terms of differences in current motivation and abilities.
- *Barriers to learning and teaching* – emphasizing extrinsic and intrinsic factors.
- *Engaging and re-engaging students* – stressing the importance of maximizing intrinsic motivation and minimizing behavior control strategies.

Moving Forward Requires Escaping Prevailing Notions about Providing Student & Learning Supports

As John Maynard Keynes stressed:

*The real difficulty in changing the course of any enterprise lies
not in developing new ideas but in escaping old ones.*

So, here are six notions about providing student and learning supports that need to be left behind as schools move forward to enhance equity of opportunity.

- (1) Escape the idea that effective school improvement can be accomplished without ending the ongoing marginalization in school policy of efforts to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports.
- (2) Escape the idea that addressing barriers for the large number of students in need can be accomplished through providing direct services and wrap-around practices. (Much greater attention must be given to classroom, school-wide, home, and community interventions that can reduce the need for such services.)
- (3) Escape the idea that improving student and learning supports mainly involves enhancing coordination/integration of interventions. (The focus must be on transforming student and learning supports into a unified and comprehensive system that is fully woven into school improvement policy and practice.)
- (4) Escape the idea that adopting a *continuum/pyramid* of interventions is a *sufficient* framework for transforming the nature and scope of school-based student/learning supports. (The *content* focus of such supports must also be framed along with the continuum.)
- (5) Escape the idea that co-locating community resources on a school campus will significantly improve student and learning supports. (The need is for systematically weaving school, home, and community resources together with a view to filling critical intervention gaps and enhancing home and community engagement.)
- (6) Escape the idea that development of a system that transforms and sustains how schools address student and learning supports can be accomplished without a well designed strategic plan for systemic change and by personnel who have the capacity to effect the changes.

Don't Wait – Move Forward and Lead the Way

Start by browsing the introductory resources the Center has developed:

- (1) See the 30 minute introductory power point with narration and an accompanying set of handouts.
 - >The introductory presentation is online at
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/powerpoint/briefintroslicesrec.pptx>
 - >The accompanying handouts are at
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/intropphandouts.pdf>
- (2) Then, if you want a brief overview document, download
 - >*Toward Next Steps in School Improvement: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/towardnextstep.pdf>
- (3) When you are ready for an in-depth presentation, see
 - >*Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf>
- (4) For more, go to the
 - >*National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>
 On the initiative's webpage, there are links to *Where It's Happening*, the *System Change Toolkit*, and more.
- (5) And feel free to let us know what else would be useful. Contact adelman@psych.ucla.edu or Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Note: For those ready to move forward, we provide distance coaching and technical assistance.

What will you be advocating? Let us hear so we can facilitate a dialogue and see if there is any way to minimize counterproductive competition in advocating for improving how states and districts guide schools in addressing concerns related to learning, behavior, emotional, and physical health problems.

Send your comments for sharing to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

***You missed another day of school.
Aren't you worried that you'll fail?***

***Nope – Congress just passed a law
/ ensuring Every Student Succeeds.***



States and Districts Draw on the National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

About the “Every Student Succeeds Act,” Diane Ravitch cautions: *I don’t want to sound cynical, but I’m prepared to wager any sum that 7 years, 10 years, or 15 years from now, no one will say that every student is now succeeding. So long as nearly a quarter of our nation’s children live in poverty, ‘success’ will remain elusive.*

Will the shift to more local control lift all children out of poverty? *No!* But, schools do have a role to play in addressing the impact poverty can have on students. *Yes!*

In 2016, the National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports will focus on the transition to more local control as an opportunity to help transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. To this end, we will continue to assist state departments of education and school districts in moving toward a system of learning supports that enhances equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school and beyond. We will continue to stress that equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights, and transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to enabling equity of opportunity and promoting whole child development.

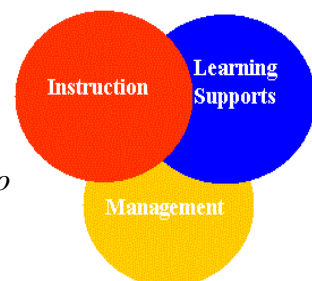
What the National Initiative Advocates

- **Ending the disorganization of student and learning supports** (i.e., by unifying student and learning resources into a component to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students)
- **Expanding school improvement policy from a 2 to a 3 component framework** (i.e., making student and learning supports a third primary and essential component that is fully interwoven with the instructional and management components)
- **Operationalizing the third component into a unifying, comprehensive, and equitable intervention framework** (i.e., designing a cohesive intervention framework that encompasses both a full continuum of subsystems and organized set of content)
- **Reworking the existing operational infrastructure** (i.e., ensuring leadership and workgroups dedicated to planning, daily implementation, and multi-year development of the intervention framework)
- **Facilitating implementation of essential systemic changes** (i.e., ensuring stakeholder readiness, initial implementation, institutionalization, sustainability, and renewal).
- **Facilitating development of an effective school, home, and community collaborative infrastructure** (i.e., ensuring leadership and workgroups to work on weaving together existing resources used to confront barriers to equity of opportunity)

See

> *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf>

> *First Steps in Transforming Student and Learning Supports into a Unified and Comprehensive System to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/1ststeps.pdf>



Advances During 2015

In general, the 2015 Initiative has generated a great deal of interest and opportunity. The weekly listserv outreach has risen to over 110,000 stakeholders. Use of the Center's website is steadily increasing with current use at well over a million visits a year worldwide. The online System Change Toolkit is continuously developing.

Over the year we have been contacted by staff in state departments of education, staff working with state boards of education, staff from national organizations concerned about school improvement, and many superintendents, principals, and school leaders. Moreover, our collaboration with Scholastic has resulted in the company building an infrastructure – including a cadre of implementation coaches and hiring a senior vice president to move the new learning supports work forward.

And trailblazing work is underway across the country. Here are links/information to provide some examples of what's happening around the country:

Alabama Department of Education. Adopted a three component approach to school improvement and is well underway in guiding districts across the state in developing a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports. 50 districts and approximately 300 principals are currently involved in the initiative. See October 2, 2015 press release – <https://www.alsde.edu/sec/comm/News%20Releases/10-2-15%20Principals%20Path%20to%20Leadership%20Grant%20Press%20Release.pdf> and see their design document at <http://www.alsde.edu/ofc/ols/Documents/ALDOEDesignDocument.pdf>

Georgia -- Gainesville City Schools. Since 2009, Gainesville City School System has utilized the Comprehensive System of Learning Supports as an intervention framework designed to address and prevent student barriers to teaching and learning and promote healthy development. The framework guides reworking operational infrastructure at the school and district level in such a way as to address the instructional, operational, and learning support needs of all students. See the district website –

<http://www.gcssk12.net/teaching-and-learning.html>

and for more, see the overview provided by Merrienne Dyer, former superintendent – <http://pt.slideshare.net/MerrienneDyer/improving-schools-and-communities>

Also see the updated the case study of its transformative work on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging students --

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/face/pdf/my-books/gacasestudy2013.pdf>)

Nevada State Department of Education. In turning around low performing schools, the Nevada State Department of Education has included Scholastic's Learning Supports professional development in its list of external providers; see

http://www.doe.nv.gov/SchoolImprovement/External_Providers/SholasticSCCG-RFQ

Wisconsin – School District of La Crosse, WI. See video -- http://youtu.be/-QmhekE7_k

Minnesota – Bloomington Public Schools. Developing a comprehensive system of learning supports to help overcome barriers to learning. See

<http://www.bloomington.k12.mn.us/node/3117127>

Colorado – Jefferson County Schools &

South Carolina – Sumter School District. Scholastic, Inc. reports having initial overview sessions as well as three-day summer institutes to begin communicating the concepts to district level staff in Jefferson County, CO and Sumter, SC. They also had a featured roundtable at the ECS conference in Denver focusing on the need for a systems approach that ties to Learning Supports to Early Childhood Learning and stresses the need for federal, state, and district policy.

(cont.)

California. Several districts are beginning to move toward a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports. In the last few months, we have heard from San Juan Unified School District and Mountain View School District about how they are taking first steps.

Louisiana – Grant Parish – See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/grantpolicy.pdf>

Massachusetts. The Boston superintendent and an associate superintendent recently came to the Center for a briefing. And a consortium of 15 districts in Massachusetts contacted the Center indicating: “We have been using the Center frameworks to support a multi-district, multi-year project We have particularly been interested in the survey/assessment tools ... because the bulk of our work has been studying ways to assess the implementation of the systems of support in schools.”

Arizona. A number of district and state department people in Arizona have indicated interest. In addition, a colleague in the state who directs facilities for families experiencing domestic abuse is using the Center’s frameworks with modifications for application in domestic violence facilities to provide greater learning supports for the children who come to the facilities.

Iowa. See

>**Cedar Rapids** – <http://www.cr.k12.ia.us/departments-services/learning-supports/>

>**Iowa City School District** – http://www.iowacityschools.org/pages/ICCS/Departments/Health_Services/Youth_and_Family_Development

>**Grant Wood AEA** – <https://www.gwaea.org/curr/lrngsupports/learningsupportsoverview13-14.pdf>

In addition, see the state’s design document developed in 2004 –

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

For a look at how some other states have explored moving toward a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports, see –

Illinois. <http://www.isbe.net/learningsupports/default.htm>

Ohio. <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Other-Resources/School-Safety/School-Safety-Resources/Comprehensive-System-of-Learning-Supports-Guidelin/Brochure-fulfillingthepromise.pdf.aspx>

Hawaii. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/csss2012.pdf>

For more, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>

From One of the Alabama’s Districts

The accomplishments that were achieved with our five pilot schools and with our district learning supports initiative have resulted in our school system launching the Learning Supports Model district-wide for the 2014-2015 school year. We believe by mapping our resources both at the district and local school level, identifying our continuum of interventions, and developing a unifying framework that brings instruction, management, and learning supports together will provide us with the framework and strategies to help remove the barriers to learning and support our students and staff as we continue our mission of every student a graduate and every graduate prepared.

See their Long Range Strategic Planning Learning Supports Goal Action Plan 2014-15
<http://www.shelbyed.k12.al.us/accreditation/At-Risk/14-15GAPS/LearningSupports.pdf> and district profile
<http://www.shelbyed.k12.al.us/accreditation/Documenting/14-15DistrictProfile.pdf>

Tell us what’s happening to transform student/learning supports. We will include the news in communications about the National Initiative. Send information to ltaylor@ucla.edu .

Addressing Attendance Problems: Focusing on Engagement and Re-engagement

Reducing school absences is one of the most challenging matters facing many schools. Prevailing policies that simply mandate attendance and spell out increasingly harsh punishments for unexcused absences fail to take into account the range of underlying causes of attendance problems and the range of prevention, early intervention, and ongoing support that might more effectively address the problems.

In addressing attendance concerns, it is important to begin by exploring two questions: *What factors lead to student absences? Given these factors, how can schools more effectively address the problem?*

Why are Students Absent?

In their 2008 report *Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, Hedy Chang & Mariajose Romero stress that while the reasons children are absent vary, poor and low-income children are especially vulnerable because their families often lack resources such as transportation, food, clothing, and social supports that help ensure regular attendance.

Attendance suffers when families are struggling to keep up with the routines of school in the face of a lack of reliable transportation, working long hours in poorly paid jobs with little flexibility, unstable and unaffordable housing, inadequate health care and escalating community violence. Other common contributors to absenteeism stressed in the report include teen motherhood, single motherhood, low maternal education, welfare, unemployment, food insecurity, poor maternal health, having multiple siblings, or other serious family concerns (such as mental illness, homelessness, child or domestic abuse, incarceration of a parent) that make school attendance difficult for children. http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html

So What Needs to be Done?

From an intervention perspective, current policy is mainly reactive. There is a clear need for greater attention to prevention and intervening as early as feasible after attendance problems are noted. And such activity needs to be embedded into a system that weaves together school and community resources. As the folks at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory noted in discussing dropouts in their School Improvement Research Series:

“Children at-risk need to be identified at a young age (as early as preschool) so that early sustained intervention can be applied. Success in the elementary grades diminishes the possibility of later dropping out in high school. The key ... is helping youth to overcome their sense of disconnectedness. It is imperative not to isolate or alienate any students from the school. Not all factors related to dropout [and truancy] reduction are school controllable, and solutions to the complex problem[s] of dropouts [and truancy] cannot be achieved by the schools alone. ... It requires resources that go beyond the school, and solutions require a team approach – the combined efforts of students, parents, teachers, administrators, community-based organizations, and business, as well as the federal, state, and local governments.”

What Schools Can Do Now

Over the long-run, schools must develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. Such a system includes a range of supports for *transitions* and classroom and school-wide programs designed to *re-engage* students who have become actively disengaged from schooling. Our focus here is on immediately addressing these two major intervention concerns.

Transition Interventions

Periods of transition can increase school attendance problems. For example, each of the following are risky times:

- >Entry into school at kindergarten
- >Moving to a new home and entry into a new school
- >Beginning a new year in a new class
- >Articulation from elementary to middle or middle to high school
- >Re-entry from suspensions, expulsions, juvenile detention
- >Inclusion from special education to regular education

While the nature and scope of transitions vary, the core concern is developing a range of practices to address barriers that make it hard for students in transition to function effectively. In planning and implementing supports for transitions, it is useful to think in terms of three overlapping facets of intervention. These are:

- Welcoming**
Social supports

 - Broad-band practices – often designated universal approaches (e.g., orientations, welcoming, social supports, induction into peer groups and classroom activities, enhancing options, facilitating ongoing interpersonal connections and social-emotional development).
- Induction**
Facilitating connections

 - Enhanced personalization to accommodate minor differences – watching for and monitoring of those having minor adjustment problems and providing just a bit more personalized assistance (e.g., aid in overcoming minor barriers to successful adjustment, a few more options and accommodations to enable effective functioning and make participation more attractive).
- Enhanced options**
Addressing interfering factors
Accommodations

 - Special assistance – identifying as early as feasible those who have not made an effective adjustment or who remain uninvolved due to major barriers, an intense lack of interest or negative attitudes, and/or lack of capability. (e.g., this requires continued use of personalized approaches, as well as intensive outreach and special assistance).

The range of practices requires a workgroup that can plan, develop, implement, build capacity, evaluate, maintain, and ensure creative renewal. As with every intervention, considerations about time, space, materials, and competence arise at every step of the way.

With respect to personalized and special assistance, it is essential to maintain monitoring until problems are corrected. Assistance from student/learning support personnel can provide the safety net that enables students to increase regular attendance.

To make it happen, we recommend establishing a development workgroup. Most schools have teams that react when an individual student is identified (e.g., a student support team, an IEP team). These teams focus on such functions as

referral, triage, and care monitoring or management. In contrast to this *case-by-case service* focus, such a team or another designated group (e.g., a Learning Supports Leadership Development Team) can take responsibility for ensuring that necessary functions for establishing supports for transitions are carried out (e.g., planning and development, implementation, capacity building, etc.). Sometimes these functions are left to a school improvement team or a specific student support staff member.

Whatever the mechanism used to develop transition supports, it is essential to fully incorporate what is developed into school improvement plans. Accomplishing this is aided when a commitment is made to move, over time, toward developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable approach for addressing barriers to learning.

Mapping and Analyzing Transition Programs at a School

As a school sets out to enhance the usefulness of learning supports for addressing barriers to learning and teaching, it helps to clarify

>*what is in place* >*what needs improving* >*what is missing*

This provides a basis for resource and gap analyses. Such analyses are key to deciding what is worth continuing as is, what is not worth continuing, how resources can be deployed to strengthen current activity, and what the priorities are for developing additional programs. In the process, recommendations can be made about (a) what procedures are in place for enhancing resource usefulness and (b) how to improve resource use and effectiveness.

A self-study survey provides a starting point. See the Center’s self-study survey of supports for transitions <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/transitionssurvey.pdf> . Each item is rated in terms of whether the intervention currently exists, whether it needs enhancement, and if it doesn’t exist, whether it is something that should be established. Based on the self-study, staff, families, and communities are in a better position to establish priorities and plan and implement essential supports for transition. In doing so, the emphasis is not to establish another piecemeal “add-on” or special project. The point is to take another step in developing an effective, sustainable, comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

Connecting with the Disengaged

For motivated students, facilitating learning is a fairly straightforward matter and fits well with school improvements that primarily emphasize enhancing instructional practices. The focus is on helping establish ways for students who are motivationally ready and able to achieve and, in the process, maintain and hopefully enhance their motivation. The process involves knowing when, how, and what to teach and also knowing when and how to structure the situation so they can learn on their own.

Students who manifest learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems, however, often have developed extremely negative perceptions of teachers, programs, and school in general. Any effort to re-engage these students must begin by recognizing such perceptions. That is, the first step in addressing the problem is for the school leadership to acknowledge its nature and scope. Then, school support staff and teachers must work together to re-engage those who have become disengaged and reverse conditions that led to the problem.

Given appropriate commitment in policy and practice, the following are general strategies we recommend for school staff (e.g., teachers, support staff, administrators) working with disengaged students :

- Open dialogue**
- (1) *Clarify student perceptions of the problem* – Talk openly with students about why they have become disengaged so that steps can be planned for how to alter the negative perceptions of disengaged students and prevent others from developing such perceptions.
- Not the same old thing**
- (2) *Reframe school learning* – In the case of those who have become disengaged, it is unlikely that they will be open to schooling that looks like "the same old thing." Major changes in approach are required if they are even to perceive that anything has changed. Minimally, exceptional efforts must be made to have these students (a) view the teacher as supportive (rather than controlling and indifferent) and (b) perceive content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable. It is important, for example, to eliminate threatening evaluative measures; reframe content and processes to clarify purpose in terms of real life needs and experiences and underscore how it all builds on previous learning; and clarify why procedures can be effective – especially those designed to help correct specific problems.
- Willingness to renegotiate**
- (3) *Renegotiate involvement in school learning* – New and mutual agreements must be developed and evolved over time through conferences with the student and where appropriate including parents. The intent is to affect perceptions of choice, value, and probable outcome. The focus throughout is on clarifying awareness of valued options, enhancing expectations of positive outcomes, and engaging the student in meaningful, ongoing decision making. For the process to be most effective, students should be assisted in sampling new processes and content, options should include valued enrichment opportunities, and there must be provision for reevaluating and modifying decisions as perceptions shift.
- Note: In all this, it is essential to remember that effective decision making is a basic skill (as fundamental as the three Rs). Thus, if a student does not do well initially, this is not a reason to move away from student involvement in decision making. Rather, it is an assessment of a need and a reason to use the process not only for motivational purposes but also to improve this basic skill.
- Maintaining trust and open communication**
- (4) *Re-establish and maintain an appropriate working relationship* (e.g., through creating a sense of trust, open communication, providing support and direction as needed).

Re-engagement, maintaining re-engagement, and preventing disengagement requires:

- ensuring that processes and content minimize threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others, maximize such feelings, and highlight accomplishments (included here is an emphasis on a school enhancing public perception that it is a welcoming, caring, safe, and just institution)

- guiding motivated practice (e.g., providing opportunities for meaningful applications and clarifying ways to organize practice)
- providing continuous information on learning and performance
- providing opportunities for continued application and generalization (e.g., ways in which students can pursue additional, self-directed learning or can arrange for additional support and direction).

Conclusions

It is often said that school attendance is both a right and a responsibility. Certainly, those of us who value education can readily agree with this. From this perspective, we recognize that some students are absent frequently from school because of circumstances over which they have no control, and for these youngsters, there is easy agreement that society *should* play a greater role in addressing the barriers that are abridging their rights.

At the same time, we know that there are some students who do not experience school as a good place for them. These youngsters aren't thinking about schooling as a right or a responsibility. More often, they experience compulsory education as coercive and as an infringement on their self-determination. From a psychological perspective, the problem in such instances becomes motivational (e.g., avoidance motivation, reactance). Therefore, addressing the problem requires strategies that are more psychologically sophisticated than the prevailing ones used by most schools and the society in general. There is, however, little agreement about best practices.

Given the variety of factors that play a role in school attendance problems, it seems essential at least to avoid lumping all youngsters together. For instance, when students are truant, the underlying motivation for not coming to school can vary considerably. Some truancy is *reactive*, and some is *proactive*, and this calls for differences in intervention.

Specific ideas for developing more sophisticated approaches can be adapted from current efforts. But, policy and practice must now evolve so schools, families, and communities are working together to develop approaches that reflect the complexity of attendance problems. That complexity demands moving to more comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive solutions. Focusing only on "What's wrong with that kid!" often is tantamount to blaming the victim and contributes to policies and practices that not only don't work, but often make things worse.

School attendance problems provide another indication of the need to move forward in transforming student and learning supports.

Gateway to Resources

The Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds provide easy access to a variety of resources relevant to intervening to enhance school attendance. Start with the Quick Finds on

>Attendance – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/attendance.html>

>Motivation – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

>Transition Programs/Grade Articulation – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm

If the weather is extremely bad, school attendance will be down.

If the weather is extremely good, school attendance will be down.



Latest Center Resources

(For regular updates about new Center resources, go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> and click on *What's New.*)

Center Update

New article

- >“Immigrant Children and Youth in the USA: Facilitating Equity of Opportunity at School” <http://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/5/4/323/pdf> In *Education Sciences*.

Examples of Recently Updated Resources

- >Resource mapping and management to address barriers to learning: *An intervention for systemic change* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resourcemapping/resourcemappingandmanagement.pdf>
- >Transitions: *Turning risks into opportunities for student support* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transitions/transitions.pdf>
- >Parent and Home Involvement in Schools – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/parenthome/parent1.pdf>
- >Least intervention needed: *Toward appropriate inclusion of students with special needs* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/leastint/leastint.pdf>
- >Understanding and minimizing staff burnout – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/burnout/burn1.pdf>
- >Affect and Mood related to school aged youth – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/affect/affect.pdf>
- >Attention problems: *Intervention and Resources* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/attention/attention.pdf>
- >Anxiety, Fears, Phobias, and Related Problems: *Intervention and Resources for School Aged Youth* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/anxiety/anxiety.pdf>
- >Conduct and Behavior Problems in School Aged Youth – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/conduct/conduct.pdf>
- >Dropout Prevention – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/dropoutprev/dropout.pdf>

Want resources? Need technical assistance? Coaching?

Use our website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>
or contact us – E-mail: smhp@ucla.edu or Ph: (310) 825-3634

Not receiving our monthly electronic newsletter (*ENEWS*)?
Or our weekly *Community of Practice Interchange*?

Then, send your request to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

The Center for Mental Health in Schools operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project in the Dept. of Psychology, UCLA.

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... and a host of students