Featured

An ongoing issue for schools

>*Should schools use student well-being surveys to guide policy/practice?*

Also of concern:

>*How should schools use artificial intelligence and also cope with misuses?*

And, as always:

>*Links to a few other resources relevant to continuing education*

**This Community of Practice *Practitioner* is designed
for a screen bigger than an Iphone.**

An ongoing issue for school discussion and interchange:
>*Should schools use student well-being surveys to guide policy/practice?*

From: *State to pilot student well-being survey in schools*

"The Idaho Department of Education will pilot a youth well-being assessment in school districts across Idaho this fall. The survey seeks to gather anonymous information on students' behavioral health to help shape district policy.

State officials hope the streamlined questionnaire — which will be optional for districts to use, and 'opt-in' for families within those districts — will allow administrators to gather information while avoiding controversy and adhering to the 2023 parental rights law.

In the past, district leaders have utilized surveys from their local health departments or other free resources to determine if students in their schools are at risk of drug exposure, suicidal ideation, mental health challenges, physical abuse and other concerns. Officials use the results of these questionnaires to develop targeted campaigns and policy....

But some parents said the surveys encroached on privacy and covered topics they felt were not age-appropriate. ... During the 2023 legislative session, state superintendent Debbie Critchfield attempted to combat these concerns with her parental rights bill, which requires schools to obtain permission from parents before administering surveys that inquire about a student's "sexuality, sex, religion, personal political beliefs, mental or psychological problems, personal family information, or individual or family financial information." Schools must also provide parents with the contents of the survey.

But after the parental rights bill passed, some districts were hesitant to continue surveying students.... According to the superintendent, some districts were concerned that the benefit might not outweigh the cost. Obtaining and vetting the surveys, providing them to parents and tracking parental consent would place an extra burden on staff — and if not enough parents opt in, then the survey becomes moot. So, Critchfield put together a group to develop a new survey — one made specifically for students, that can be provided to districts across the state at no cost and with no outside reporting requirements.

Streamlined survey covers mental health, physical health, drugs, and more

The state's 46-question assessment will be piloted in a small group of districts this fall. Created in partnership with Communities for Youth and the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation, the survey includes questions about: Health (mental, physical), Family presence and support, School (grades, safety, connectedness), Community safety and engagement, Peers/Friends (peer pressure, social support, bullying, sexual harassment), Leisure time (Extracurricular activity, social media use, isolation/loneliness), Substance use (alcohol, drugs, smoking/vaping), Individual factors (self-esteem, belonging, self-efficacy/awareness, empathy)

The SDE will provide the survey as a free resource to all districts, but districts are not required to administer it. Those that do utilize the survey can also administer it full or in part, choosing which

topics to question students on. Districts will administer the survey to students on an 'opt-in' basis — meaning parents have to agree in order for their student to receive the survey. If a parent says no, or doesn't respond at all, their child will not receive an assessment. All responses will remain anonymous. ... Critchfield says the survey will help schools pinpoint the issues that are most dire for their students, and develop solutions to prevent kids from falling through the cracks."

Center Comments

Universal first-level screening at schools to identify students with mental health problems and those at risk for such problems is always controversial.

The following are often heard examples of pro and con positions:

>*School staff are well-situated to keep an eye on kids who are "risky" or "at risk."*
>*Teachers can't take on another task and aren't qualified to monitor such students.*
>*Such monitoring can be done by qualified student support staff.*
>*Monitoring infringes on the rights of families and students.*
>*It's irresponsible not to monitor anyone who is "risky" or "at risk."*
>*It's inappropriate to encourage kids to "spy" on each other.*
>*Monitoring is needed so that steps can be made to help quickly.*
>*Monitoring has too many negative effects.*

As we discuss in *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*
https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mh20a.pdf
Few folks argue against the intent of efforts to find, treat, and prevent. Those arguing that schools should implement first-level screening programs emphasize that it is essential to monitor anyone who is at risk or a risk to others in order to intervene quickly. They believe that school staff are well-situated to do so and with good training can screen using effective safeguards for privacy and confidentiality. Moreover, they suggest that positive benefits outweigh any negative effects.

A central argument against such screening students to identify threats and risks is that the practice infringes on the rights of families and students. Other arguments stress that teachers should not be distracted from teaching; teachers and other non-clinically trained school staff are seen as ill-equipped to monitor and make such identifications; students are inappropriately encouraged to play a role in screening peers; existing monitoring practices are primarily effective in following those who have already attempted suicide or have acted violently; and that monitoring others has too many negative effects (e.g., costs are seen as outweighing potential benefits).

For more on this, see our Center's Quick Find
>*Assessment and screening*

Another increasing concern for school discussion and interchange:
        >How should schools use artificial intelligence and also cope with misuses?

As **Forbe notes:**

"In recent years, the meteoric rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has sent shockwaves through society on both economic and cultural levels. Seemingly poised to become as ubiquitous as email, this rapidly evolving technology is transforming many aspects of daily life—including how we teach and learn."

Here a few excerpts from what others are saying about AI:

From: *Washington State Department of Public Instruction*

"Artificial Intelligence (AI) is here to stay. As this new technology continues to evolve, educators must prepare students to understand and use these tools. In Washington state, educators are already integrating AI-assisted technologies in schools and empowering students to do the same. The state's responsibility is to provide students, educators, and school district administrators with the resources and tools they need to understand how to use these technologies effectively, ethically, and safely."

From: *AI's parent-teen knowledge gap*

"Generative AI is demonstrating one of the most enduring laws in tech: Teenagers are always a lap ahead of their elders.

>Why it matters: Efforts to keep kids safe from potentially harmful or dangerous technology regularly falter because adults don't understand what youngsters are actually doing.

> Many teens use generative AI tools like ChatGPT, but less than half (37%) of their parents think they do. Another 40% are not sure whether their teens have used genAI or not. Almost half (49%) say they have not talked to their teens about their genAI use.

> Legislators, educators and parents today are still struggling to place appropriate boundaries around young people's use of social media, which has been at the center of many teen lives for nearly two decades. Now AI is racing into homes and schools faster than parents can keep up.

> GenAI is creating a brand new knowledge gap between teens and adults.

Many schools have adopted a genAI abstinence policy in the classroom — but that just means students aren't learning skills they will need in the future....

Since the advent of the personal computer, parents have misunderstood their kids' tech use — and also misinterpreted the dangers.

Parents and pundits have also spent years decrying violence in video games, even though the research is actually inconclusive — with many studies showing gaming can be beneficial to kids' health.

> The arrival of every new wave of technology and media — from the internet back to television, and from movies back to the rise of the novel — has triggered a "moral panic" among experts and elders.

The bottom line: Since teens are going to use genAI no matter what, the adults around them need to understand and educate themselves and their kids about the technology's flaws and biases."

From: *Chatbots pose unique risks to teens*

"Leading AI chatbots have started including citations as part of their responses, but that hasn't solved the underlying issues around bias and misinformation, according to new research from Common Sense Media... Chatbots can save time with research, but everyone — especially kids — still needs to know that all bots should be fact-checked.

Common Sense, which has been offering nutrition label-style assessments of various AI platforms since last year, is adding new report cards covering Anthropic's Claude, Google's Gemini experience for teens and Perplexity..

The teen version of Google Gemini was rated "low risk," with *Common Sense* noting a number of safety measures above those offered with the standard Gemini, including stricter content policies and safeguards and information on the limitations of generative AI.

Perplexity, on the other hand, was rated as "high risk." *Common Sense* cited an "irresponsible" lack of transparency as well as concerns that its results are presented as definitive answers even though they can contain the same sorts of misinformation and bias as other chatbots.

Common Sense says a number of AI players have made strides to eliminate the most glaring risks. "These chatbots are doing a better job of addressing obvious stereotypes and blatant misinformation," *Common Sense* senior AI adviser Tracy Pizzo Frey told *Axios*. However, she said, such improvements can easily overshadow the more subtle biases and problems that remain in these systems. "We think about these tools as a way to save time," Pizzo Frey said. But, she added, given the tools' limitations, that saved time "then really needs to be dedicated to verifying the results." Pizzo Frey said it's important for parents to sit down with their teens and use the tools and have a discussion on the benefits and risks of generative AI, discussing issues like bias as well as the line between research and plagiarism."

From: ***Students' perceptions of Artificial Intelligence Coach adoption factors***

"...Artificial intelligence (AI) is gaining momentum and prominence in many domains including the helping professions such as psychology, healthcare and recently coaching. While AI is not yet comparable to human intelligence, AI coaching holds the potential to scale coaching and offer basic coaching services to a much wider audience including the student community, and at a significantly reduced cost...

   Coaching continues to grow as a profession and research discipline. The increase in high-quality meta-studies that examine the efficacy of coaching helps us understand the areas where coaching assists people and organizations. Coaching has been shown to improve relationships, goal setting and prioritization, engagement, productivity and communication performance and skills, wellbeing, coping and self-regulation, work/life balance, psychological and social competencies, self-awareness and assertiveness, confidence and changing behaviors ... The role of coaching in helping students have been studied in some detail. It is suggested that coaching could help students with resilience and mental toughness which in turn leads to higher performance, wellbeing, aspiration, positive behaviors, lower drop-out rates and higher employability... Students who participated in a student coaching program were more likely to continue their studies in the following semester than student who did not receive coaching. ...Coaching improved students' confidence and belief in their own potential. Students reported increased resilience and ability to think differently about their options, making them more realistic in their career plans....

   The AI coach used in this research was a text-based, non-directive chatbot deployed on the Telegram instant messaging platform. The chatbot coach asked open-ended questions to help students define the goals they wanted to achieve and helped them to think through the importance, duration and feasibility of the goals. Once a goal was decided, the bot helped students to create an action plan to reach the goal. Students could check in with the chatbot at any time to report back on goal and action progress and reflect on reasons for their current progress. The chatbot was available 24/7 to the students...."

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For more, see our Center's Quick Find on

>Mental Health Related Software

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Are the above matters being discussed in your locale?

Please let us know so we can share the info widely. Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu

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>Links to a few other relevant shared resources
   >>**2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results**
   >>**Positive youth development empowers young workers**
   >>**Strategies for successful scaling in districts: breaking the cycle of the 'next new thing'**
   >>**Peer groups, academic achievement and the behavior of elementary school-aged children: A strength-based perspective**
   >>**Students helping students**
   >>**Youth perspectives on technology ethics: Analysis of teens' ethical reflections on AI in learning activities**
   >>**Student population has significantly diversified, but many schools remain divided Along racial, ethnic, and economic lines**
   >>**A comprehensive approach to wellness for all school staff**
   >>**Lighthouse parenting**

A Few Upcoming Webinars

For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts

10/2 Scaling tutoring through work study partnerships
10/2 Youth protective factors
10/3 Remote therapy and IEPs
10/9 Use data to combat bullying
10/9 State planning for education technology
10/16 Cooperative activities
10/16 Principal pipelines
10/17 Promoting the wellbeing of students
10/17 Wellness and resilience
10/23 Addressing challenging behaviors
10/24 Effective communication with the IEP team
11/14 Balancing academics, extracurriculars and college application stress

How Learning Happens (Edutopia's updated series of videos explores how educators can guide all students, regardless of their developmental starting points, to become productive and engaged learners.

Webinar recording: *Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth*

For more webinars, go to the our Center's links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm

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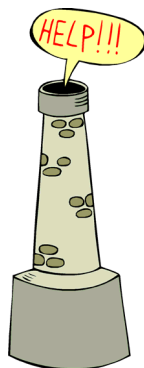
For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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
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Schools committed to the success of all children must be redesigned so that teachers, student support staff, and others at the school can help students as early as is feasible when they become aware of a behavior, emotional, learning, and/or physical problem. Such a redesign can minimize the impact of such problems and appropriately stem the tide of referrals for out of class specialized assistance (e.g., mental health services) and special education.

Through the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*, our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

If you are aware of efforts underway to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching, please share with us.

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 have many resources to help in moving forward. For example, see our recent guides:

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

>*Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Starting the Process*

Send all info and requests to ltaylor@ucla.edu

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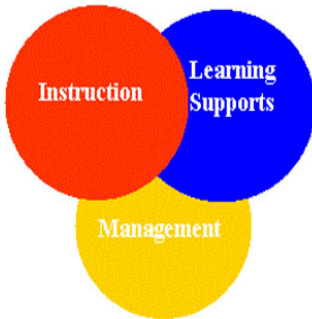
Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to promoting whole child development, advancing social justice, and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.

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

For new sign-ups – email Ltaylor@ucla.edu
Also send resource ideas, requests, comments,
and experiences for sharing.

THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER

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.