

Featured

An ongoing issue for schools

>Are school boards important?

Also of concern:

>Impact of homework on students and families

>About new directions for addressing youth mental health

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.**

How are each of the following topics being discussed in your locale? Take a few minutes to tell us about what's being said so others can benefit. [Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)

For discussion and interchange:

>Are school boards important?

According to the National School Boards Association, more than 90,000 folks serve on about 14,000 elected or appointed local school boards in the U.S. Over the years, some folks have questioned whether school boards matter.

During this election season, it seems particularly important to stress that they do.

In their 2019 [research brief](#), NSBA's Center for Public Education report "It is clear that school boards in high-achieving districts exhibit habits and characteristics that are markedly different from boards in low-achieving districts." Based on their research, the following eight characteristics of an effective school board were identified:

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision
2. Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.
3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.
4. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.
5. Effective boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.
7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
8. Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.

All this said:

For those of us concerned with addressing barriers to learning and teaching, school boards don't provide sufficient attention to policy-making that enables schools to improve how they ameliorate learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

Our Center isn't suggesting that boards are ignoring such matters.

Indeed, items related to these concerns appear regularly on every school board's agenda. The problem is that each item tends to be handled in an ad hoc manner, without sufficient attention to the "Big Picture." One result is that the operational structure in most districts is not organized in ways that coalesce its various functions (programs, services) for addressing barriers. The piecemeal structure reflects the *marginalized* status of such functions and both creates and maintains the fragmented policies and practices that characterize efforts to address barriers to student learning.

Given that every school endeavors to address barriers to learning and teaching, school boards should carefully analyze how the board's committee structure deals with these functions. Because boards already have a full agenda, such an analysis probably will require use of an ad hoc committee. This committee should be charged with clarifying whether the board's structure, time allotted at meetings, and the way the budget and central administration are organized allow for a thorough and cohesive overview of all functions schools pursue to *enable* learning and teaching. In carrying out this charge, committee members should consider work done by pupil services staff (e.g., psychologists, counselors, social workers, attendance workers, nurses), compensatory and special education, safe and drug free schools programs, dropout prevention, aspects of school readiness and early intervention, district health and human service activities, initiatives for linking with community services, and more. Most boards will find (1) they don't have a big picture perspective of how all these functions relate to each other, (2) the current board structure and processes for reviewing these functions do not engender a multifaceted, cohesive, and equitable school improvement approach, and (3) the operational infrastructure at the district and schools marginalizes efforts to address barriers to learning and maintains the fragmentation that characterizes student/learning supports.

Given this state of affairs, we suggest that the board establish a standing committee that focuses in depth and consistently on the topic of how schools in the district can enhance their efforts to improve instruction by addressing barriers in a more unified, comprehensive, equitable, and effective ways. See [*Enhancing a School Board's Focus on Addressing Barriers to Learning & Teaching*](#).

From an newspaper article entitled: [*We asked nearly 200 school board candidates about their campaigns. Here's what we found.*](#)

"...Those candidates who responded to our questionnaire had different ideas of what they think is the most pressing issue in their district. Many focused on district organizational or financial problems, like declining enrollment, budget deficits and administration turnover and turmoil. Some focused on student issues, such as academic recovery, performance on state standardized tests and school safety.

There was some discussion — but not as much as I might have expected — of equity issues, such as how to address student poverty, homelessness or achievement and opportunity gaps. There was much discussion about improving student outcomes overall, but less about how to help specific student groups who have consistently lagged, such as students with disabilities, English learners and homeless and foster students..."

For discussion and interchange:

>Impact of homework on students and families

Many problems between kids and their families, the home and school, and students and teachers arise from conflicts over homework. As a result, the topic is a long standing and constant concern for those who see it as related to negative attitudes about school and mental health problems. Our Center stresses that schools need to ensure that homework is designed as "motivated practice," and school staff need to guide parents in how to positively facilitate homework, and at a minimum, avoid turning homework into a battle.

A Mental Health Clinician's Concerns about Homework

"I am curious about advocacy efforts to reduce/balance the homework burden. I have many kids who routinely have at least 2 hours of homework per night, and many who have 3-4, at least 4 days per week. I see this often affect their mental health. It reduces free time, but also interferes with sleep (they sleep less because they need to stay up to do homework). Doing anything for 10-12 hours per day for anyone is hard; it's even harder for kids. There's only so much we can do as clinicians when the demands of our kids' daily lives are working against us. Has anyone been successful communicating with schools to express concerns and then actually see changes to homework burden afterward?"

A Researcher's Take on This

"While homework can have beneficial effects, some research suggests that too much (e.g., over 2-3 hours/day) may contribute to academic stress and problems with sleep, mood, and physical health. Advocacy: I've seen news articles on schools that have experimented with systematic homework reduction. Successful advocacy often involves presenting research-based arguments, conducting pilot programs, and gathering data on student well-being and academic performance. A broader relevant issue here is the inflexible one-size-fits-all model we often still see, which disregards diverse learning needs, equity concerns, and so on."

From: *Middle-school students and digital homework: The evolving role of family engagement*

"Successful middle schools exhibit effective practices that engage families as valued partners. However, as at-home learning increasingly shifts to digital spaces, parents may have concerns with technology and how their role shifts in digital learning environments....

Authentic assignments mirror the real world which promotes motivation, and they are meaningful to students and their parents when they embrace the various backgrounds and lived experiences of families at the school. When kids experience a motivating drive when doing homework, they will persevere longer allowing them to transform into competent learners that will progress to achieving scholarly proficiency. For middle school students specifically, tapping into their motivation is essential in keeping them focused and interested in school and homework, they will persevere longer allowing them to transform into competent learners that will progress to achieving scholarly proficiency. For middle school students specifically, tapping into their motivation is essential in keeping them focused and interested in school and homework, as these youngsters experience increasingly harder school requirements at a time where they are undergoing physical, social, and emotional changes. Digital learning tools, like

project-based learning, virtual field trips, and digital storytelling, offer unique opportunities for meaningful homework valued by both students and their parents...

As homework increasingly moves into online learning spaces, it can lead to uncertainty for parents as they support their children's learning. Educators need to acknowledge parental concerns about technology and be responsive to the questions they may have. Parents may have concerns about access, and schools and school districts will also need to be proactive, creative, and persistent in ensuring all families have digital access. Federal programs and partnerships between educators, organizations, and businesses can provide resources and access to family communities in need. It will also be important to utilize parent-teacher support networks to communicate practical tips addressing parental concerns regarding digital wellness, screen time, and social media....

Overall, parents have few sources of support when they have digital challenges supporting their student's learning, and they need the support of schools and teachers, including effective ways to communicate with teachers..."

The teacher punished me for something I didn't do!



What didn't you do?



My homework.



For more on this concern, see our Center Quick Find

>[Homework Help for Educators, Students, and Parents](#)

which includes links to such resources as

- >Homework is a Mental Health Concern*
- >Homework Avoidance*
- >Parent/Home Involvement and Engagement in Schools*
- >Authentic homework assignments: A push for making homework into meaningful learning tasks*
- >Doing homework together: The relation between parenting strategies, child engagement, and achievement*

For discussion and interchange:

>About New Directions for Addressing Youth Mental Health*

Clearly, there is increasing concern about young people's mental health. (What has been a chronic problem currently is described as a crisis.) As a result, the role of schools with respect to mental health has once again become widely debated. Unfortunately, the matter generally has been discussed from a very limited perspective that fails to appreciate the overall mission of schools and the breadth of learning, behavior, and emotional problems that arise daily at schools.

From: *Is 'Crisis' Thinking About Youth Mental Health Doing More Harm Than Good?*

"Crisis. Fatalistic. Overwhelming. That's how some experts say the current national conversation about youth mental health is framed — and counter to its goal, that lens is hurting the ability to find solutions that help adolescents better weather mental health struggles. ...

Conversations tend to focus on how individual choices students make can impact their mental health, rather than on how systemic problems and the environments where teens live contribute to stress on adolescents. ...

One solution to address public disengagement around youth mental health is changing the framing from an individual problem to one that focuses on how our environment shapes us.

Educating people on how adolescent development works is key to getting buy-in for addressing issues that will improve teen well-being. There's a need to steer conversations around youth mental health from crisis to solutions, with more talking about what positive and resilient mental health experiences look like. ..."

From: *Embracing a population health approach to improving youth mental health* — innovation in bolstering mental health at the individual, community, and society level

"...Because service demand wholly outmatches the supply of psychologists and other mental health professionals... we need more emphasis on prevention and early intervention. Otherwise, we will essentially never catch up, let alone prevent these mental health challenges.

Never has there been a more urgent need for our nation to embrace a population health approach... The current children's mental health crisis provides the field of psychology with an opportunity to rethink our approach, addressing the issue at multiple levels: individual, community, and society. We can infuse developmental and implementation science into public policy so that mental health care for children is provided in the most effective, efficient, and sustainable ways. We can foster children's resilience by equipping schools and communities with tools to nurture them and build them up. We can advance a research agenda with a greater focus on the systemic and social determinants, like education and housing, that underlie and heavily influence children's health status.

Our science can shape policies, improve systems, and open minds. Our practice can break down seemingly intractable barriers and change people's lives. We need to bring the breadth and depth of psychology to bear in promoting a population health approach. The future of our youth depends on it."

Based on our Center's work on transforming schools, we were asked by EdSource to write the following commentary:

>*Let's stop tinkering and really change how schools address mental health*

*These matters always have been a central focus for our Center work. See:

>*Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

>*Common Psychosocial Problems of School Aged Youth: Developmental Variations, Problems, Disorders and Perspectives for Prevention and Treatment*

>*About Positive Psychology*

>*Countering the Over-pathologizing of Students' Feelings & Behavior: A Growing Concern Related to MH in Schools*

>*Protective Factors (Resiliency)*

>*Transforming Student/Learning Supports & Enhancing Equity of Opportunity*

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

First, here again are resources for responding to and coping with hurricane related events:

- >>[A list of resources for students, mental health practitioners and school staff dealing with the hurricane's aftermath](#)
- >>[Hurricane Resources from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
- >>[The Ultimate Guide To Hurricane Preparedness, Recovery & Relief](#)
- >>[Helping Students Cope with the Preparation and Aftermath of Natural Disasters](#)

Other Matters:

- >>[To Address the 'Homework Gap,' Is It Time to Revamp Federal Connectivity Programs?](#)
- >>[Section 504 Protections for Students with Eating Disorders](#)
- >>[Supporting Students' Re-Entry and Reintegration After Crises](#)
- >>[Adolescent social learning within supportive friendships](#)
- >>[Supporting Students Who Are Grieving: Interventions and Practices](#)
- >>[Adverse childhood experiences prevention toolkit](#)
- >>[Treating chronic absenteeism like a public health emergency](#)
- >>[Neurodivergent Kids and Screen Time](#)
- >>[When Are Kids Ready for Social Media?](#)

Note: The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) is offering resources to families, educators, caregivers and others to support student mental health.

[ParentGuidance.org](#), a 24/7 online platform, assists those who care for children to address and elevate mental health wellness and self-care.

A Few Upcoming Webinars*

- 10/23 Moody or depressed youth?
- 10/23 Addressing challenging behaviors
- 10/23 Protective factors and social development
- 10/24 Effective communication with the IEP team
- 11/4 Anxiety in children and youth
- 11/7 How to get all teachers to be the best teachers
- 11/13 Addressing at risk factors for youth
- 11/14 Understanding stigma and bias
- 11/14 Balancing academics, extracurriculars and college application stress
- 11/19 Understanding social anxiety
- 11/20 Creating an evaluation plan for your child with mental health needs
- 11/20 Coordinated care for eating disorders
- 12/4 Shaping AI for human centered education
- 12/18 Understanding anxiety
- 1/23 Leveraging evaluation for transformative growth

*For links to the above and for more webinars, go to [Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts](#)

To Listserv Participants

Re: Online Therapy and Schools (FYI and also a request)

Our Center is starting to gather more information from sources across the country about what rapidly is becoming a tidal wave of change related to how schools are responding to what many across the country have labeled a "mental health crisis."

We are finding that more and more schools are contracting with commercial entities to provide students with access to online therapy.* There are many reasons underlying this trend.

And there are concerns (e.g., about over-commercialization, personnel training and quality of service, lack of connection with school-based interventions, parental consent, privacy, impact on impact on district/school student support staff).

If you have information and/or views about this,
please send to Howard (adelman@psych.ucla.edu) or Linda (Ltaylor@ucla.edu).

Guides to Transforming Student and Learning Supports

Hurricane impact on schools and communities – We have include links to some resources for responding to and coping with hurricanes. Natural disasters are another indicator of the need for education leaders and policy makers to end the longstanding marginalization in school improvement policy related to the role schools must 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 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:

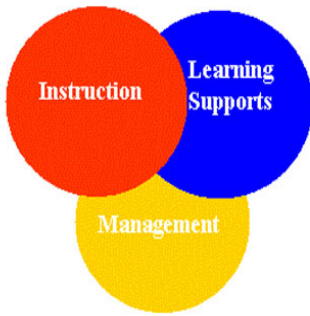
(1) ***Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions***

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

(2) ***Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Starting the Process***

To begin with, this resource details STEP 1 which can begin in November and should take about a month or two to complete. It involves delineating what is in place and recommending system changes and provides resources for each of the following Step 1 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



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.

- **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

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 & 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.