

(11/13/24) **This continuing education resource is from the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

Featured

Some ongoing issues for schools

(1) A colleague asks about:

Demonstrating that mental health in schools is worth the investment

(2) Promoting positive mental health in schools

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.

For discussion and interchange:

>A colleague asks about:

Demonstrating that mental health in schools is worth the investment

"I am the Executive Director for a non-profit agency that provides school-based mental health support to students in schools K-12. At one of the districts, the school board wants us to demonstrate that what we are doing is "working" i.e., show them that this program is worth the investment. Do you have suggestions for this? We currently provide survey data from students, staff and parents as well as record Children's Global Assessment Scale before and after scores."

Center Comments:

Evaluating mental health interventions is difficult; evaluating mental health in schools is even more complex. We suggest approaching the matter from a broad framework so that folks start thinking in an expanded way about mental health in schools. See, for example, Chapters 20 and 21 in [*Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*](#)

In responding to a school board, we indicate that there are two matters to be evaluated.

The first matter is to answer the question: ***How adequate is what the school has in place for addressing students' learning, behavior, and emotional concerns?***

This encompasses assessing factors essential to promoting positive mental health development (not just problems manifested by students). To do less is to ignore the school's (and the community's) responsibility for youngsters' social-emotional development and well-being. See <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/8-8-24.pdf>.

While the pressure on school staff concerned with mental health is to identify students who show indications of "depression," anxiety, frustration, lack of engagement, suicide, substance abuse, etc., this focus reifies the trend to pathologize the term mental health. (Too many people currently perceive the term as synonymous with mental illness.) And when assessments only look for factors in the environment that cause and contribute to problems,

they collude with tendencies to deemphasize the promotion of positive mental *HEALTH* and with tendencies to “blame the victim.”

So, the first assessment focus is on the context to see what is in place and what needs to be changed/improved with respect to the way a school (a) promotes well-being and prevents problems, (b) responds as soon as problems arise, and (c) plays an appropriate role related to addressing severe and chronic problems. Promoting well-being and preventing problems reduces the number of students in need of special assistance and improves processes for identifying those who do need special assistance. Responding quickly when problems arise helps prevent problems from worsening. Then, a well-designed response to intervention process provides authentic individual assessments that can help schools clarify the nature and scope of a student’s problems, and as necessary, play a role in treating the most serious problems.

The second matter is to answer the question: ***How effective are the interventions being used?***

Regarding the Student, the focus is on indicators of:

- >symptom reduction
- >positive development (capabilities and attitudes)
- >improved behavior at school (reduced misbehavior, increased attendance, fewer tardies)
- >academic improvement

Regarding the School, the focus is on such indicators as

- >how many students are doing better behaviorally and academically and to what degree
- >fewer inappropriate referrals for special assistance/special education
- >fewer suspensions, expulsions, dropouts
- >improved school/classroom climate
- >increased family involvement (with child, with schooling)
- >cost-effectiveness

Data include the general evidence base supporting programs and services, any data the school/district is already gathering, and any additional measures that are deemed worth the cost. Sources include: students, special intervener(s), parents and other caretakers, teachers, peers, school records. Minimally, pre and post data are gathered.

NOTE: Descriptors of the student (e.g., demographics, referral information, diagnosis if applicable), characteristics of services provided (type of intervention, number of visits, and provider, fees, payer), and anything about the school that makes it different from others (low performing, urban, rural, etc.) all are needed for various purposes. These include planning, reporting, billing, and accountability, and carrying out such functions with disaggregated data.

With respect to the two questions discussed above, here are a few examples of established instruments for gathering data related to some key concerns.

- >School climate (e.g., see measures at reviewed by the *National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments* (NCSSLE))
- >Student symptoms/problem behaviors (e.g., *Child Behavior Checklist*)
- >Student functionality (e.g., *Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale*)
- >Family environment (e.g., *Family Environment Scale*)
- >Family functioning (e.g., *Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale*)
- >“Client” satisfaction – youngster, family (e.g., *Youth Satisfaction Questionnaires*)

For discussion and interchange:

>Promoting positive mental health in schools

When we mention mental health in schools, folks tend to think mostly about problems. But as discussed above, mental *health* also is about positive development.

Promotion of positive mental health encompasses enhancing knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to foster social and emotional development, a healthy lifestyle, and personal well-being. Interventions to promote positive mental health encompass not only strengthening individuals, but also enhancing nurturing and supportive conditions at school, at home, and in the neighborhood. All this includes a particular emphasis on increasing opportunities for personal development and empowerment by promoting conditions that foster and strengthen positive attitudes and behaviors (e.g., enhancing motivation and capability to pursue positive goals, resist negative influences, and overcome barriers). It also includes efforts to maintain and enhance physical health and safety and inoculate against problems (e.g., providing positive and negative information, skill instruction, and fostering attitudes that build resistance and resilience).

From: *Early Adolescence:
A Window of Opportunity for Educators to Support Positive MH*

“The middle school years provide an amazing opportunity to promote positive mental health. It will come as no surprise to educators that this is a unique time period in development. Youth face a number of new experiences, including greater independence, different kinds of relationships with friends and classmates, and changes to their bodies and brains....

Recommendations for Educators ...

>Support Positive Experiences of Independence, Exploration, and Learning

Educators can provide opportunities for youth to take initiative in their learning, make their own decisions, and engage in age-appropriate exploration. Educators can help their students successfully collaborate with and learn from peers. Teachers can help address inequities in opportunities for students to practice independence and exploration during early adolescence.

>Implement Strategies to Support Healthy Regulation of Emotion and Behavior

Teachers can help early adolescents recognize and manage their emotions and behaviors in healthy ways as a part of daily classroom activities. Classroom-based mindfulness interventions implemented using research-based methods can be an equitable and effective strategy to help students regulate their emotions and behavior. Teachers can take advantage of existing resources to help students learn to successfully regulate their emotions and behavior.

>Encourage Youth to Build Strong Relationships

Teachers should be intentional in building strong relationships with their students. Teachers should help students develop social skills and build strong peer relationships. By helping students form strong relationships at school, teachers can contribute to a more positive school environment overall.

>Implement Practices That Support Healthy Sleep Habits

Teachers, students, and parents should be given more information about young people’s need for sleep during early adolescence....”

Here are a few resources from the Center on this matter:

>[*About Positive Psychology*](#)

>[*Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH*](#)

>[*Promoting Mental Health and Preventing Problems at School*](#)

Are the preceding discussions taking place in your locale?

Please let us know some details so we can share the info widely.

Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

- >>[A Toolkit for Safe, Ethical, and Equitable AI Integration: US Department of Education](#)
- >>[State Education Policy and the New Artificial Intelligence](#)
- >>[Which Language 'Superpowers' Do Bilingual Students Bring to U.S. Schools?](#)
- >>[Youth Hate Crimes and Identity-Based Bullying Prevention Curriculum](#)
- >>[Urban Middle Schoolers' Opportunities to Belong Predict Fluctuations in Their Engagement Across the School Day](#)
- >>[Student Change Agent Model](#)
- >>[State Policy Levers for Reducing Early Childhood Maltreatment: The Importance of Family Planning and Economic Support Policies](#)
- >>[How Are States Approaching Cell Phone Use in Schools?](#)

A Few Upcoming Webinars

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

- 11/13 AI in education: promise and peril
- 11/13 Spark career interest in a new way
- 11/13 Addressing at risk factors for youth
- 11/14 Understanding stigma and bias
- 11/14 Balancing academics, extracurriculars and college application stress
- 11/14 Coordinating across state and local levels
- 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
- 11/26 Family involvement
- 12/3 Managing holiday stress
- 12/4 Shaping AI for human centered education
- 12/18 Understanding anxiety
- 1/23 Leveraging evaluation for transformative growth /

[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](#)*

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! Contact: ltaylor@ucla.edu



Guides to Transforming Student and Learning Supports

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.

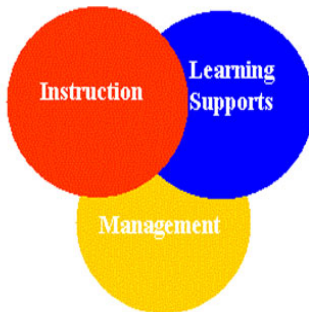
For example, see our recent guides that provide a roadmap for moving in new directions:

- (1) *Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*
- (2) *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Starting the Process*

These provide prototypes for new directions and first steps for moving forward on a monthly schedule. The first steps outlined involve

- (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

Links to resources are provided to aid in carrying out each task.



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.

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/>)