

(12/4/24) **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) Parent wants to know what to do about daughter's disengagement with school and peers

(2) Let's face it: MTSS is not a unified, comprehensive, and equitable student support system

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

>Parent wants to know what to do about daughter's disengagement with school and peers

The following is a frequent matter we hear about. We think it underscores concerns that every school probably has discussed. We reached out to a few colleagues and share their comments here. *We hope you will share what you and others have discussed.*

Request:

I'm writing as the mother of a teenage girl who is a senior in High School. She is disengaged from school and attends sporadically. Her main struggle is lack of friends at school. She constantly complains of feeling excluded from her friend group. She is also depressed. She is planning on applying to college. Despite her mental health struggles and sporadic attendance her GPA is around a 3.9 now. I'm reaching out for suggestions.

Comments from the Field:

1. "In today's communities, even finding a mental health professional means waiting for 3 months or so to get an appointment. So in the interim, explore students who she already has a relationship with, and see if she can "pal" up for a specific time, meet with the school counselor who is assigned to her and see if there are any social groups she might join during unstructured times. and do this while waiting for an appointment with a community mental health professional because the parent needs to take their daughter's concerns seriously. I also recommend outside supports like faith based activities, recreational activities, and gyms or anything in the area of interest that the daughter enjoys. sometimes having a small part time job is helpful at a local coffee shop where she can meet people and find friendships."

2. “My best suggestion is for this mother to contact the high school counselor or school psychologist to set up an appointment. She should describe the issues facing her daughter and ask the professionals for their advice and help to develop a multi-pronged approach to re-engagement for her daughter. Students who are disengaged typically have more than one issue - such as lack of friends at school. That might be a place to start but it really sounds like this student could also use an adult at school to help her with day-to-day challenges. One on one time with a staff member for a few minutes each day could be a life-line. Maybe this could be the counselor - or maybe another teacher. Regardless, the best people to help with this student are those that know the school, know the student body, and know this mother's daughter.”
3. “My heart goes out to this mother. Considering her daughter’s age and critical need to graduate, the suggestions I have are:
 - > consider an alternative non-traditional high school setting if available- she can work toward credits to graduate in a smaller setting, blended learning, and closer adult relationships
 - > seek professional help with therapy & potential treatment options
 - > encourage participation in areas of her interest outside of schoolI really hope she has a non-traditional school option available.”

Center Comments:

Whether or not formal therapeutic counseling is involved, the school must play its role in (re)engaging youngsters who have become disengaged. This involves outreach by someone at the school who students generally value, respect, and trust and who has the ability to engage disconnected teens in a problem solving process. Often the right person for this is a student support staff member who has counseling competence and (a) knows to look at problems from the student’s perspective, (b) can explore solutions through a mutual problem solving process, and (c) doesn’t push too soon and too much with respect to limits, advice, and consequences.

Obviously, it is no easy task to decrease well-assimilated negative attitudes and behaviors. We suggest the following four general strategies for working with disengaged students:

- (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 their negative perceptions and prevent others from developing such perceptions.
- (2) **Reframe school learning** – In the case of those who have disengaged, major reframing in teaching approaches is required so that 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 the procedures are expected to be effective – especially those designed to help correct specific problems.
- (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.

- (4) ***Reestablish and maintain appropriate working relationships*** (e.g., through creating a sense of trust, open communication, providing support and direction as needed). To maintain re-engagement and prevent disengagement, the above strategies must be pursued using processes and content that:
- minimize threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others
 - maximize such feelings (included here is an emphasis on a school taking steps to enhance public perception that it is a welcoming, caring, safe, and just institution)
 - guide motivated practice (e.g., providing opportunities for meaningful applications and clarifying ways to organize practice)
 - provide continuous information on learning and performance in ways that highlight accomplishments
 - provide 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).

For more on this, see the Center Quick Find on ***Motivation and Engagement***. This Quick Find links to a variety of resources developed by the Center and from other sources. For example, from the Center, see:

>***Working with Disengaged Student***

>***Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School***

For discussion and interchange

>***Let's face it: MTSS is not a unified, comprehensive, and equitable student support system***

Recently, we stated:

A well-designed system of student and learning supports requires more than a continuum of interventions. Simply tweaking prevailing views of a multi-tier framework falls far short of planning and developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of in-classroom and schoolwide student/learning supports.

In response, a school district superintendent asked us to clarify the terms *unified*, *comprehensive*, and *equitable*.

We offered the following brief points:

>***About Unified.*** As you know, all schools devote a range of resources to coping with student learning, behavior, and emotional problems. In general, the way districts plan and implement student and learning supports to address these problems is fragmented and piecemeal, generating a variety of specialized interventions (e.g., initiatives, programs, services). Over many years, increasing concern about fragmented approaches has produced calls for "integrated services" and, recently, for "integrated support systems." The current emphasis on MTSS reflects this pursuit for integrating interventions.

However, our analyses indicate that, by focusing primarily on fragmentation, policymakers and school improvement advocates fail to deal with a core underlying problem. What drives the fragmentation is the longstanding marginalization in school improvement policy of the role schools must play in addressing barriers to learning and teaching. That is why our emphasis is on unifying rather than integrating interventions and begins with a focus on ending the policy marginalization that works against weaving interventions together.

The marginalization stems from the reality that current planning for school improvement primarily is guided by a two-component framework, namely a framework emphasizing

(a) instruction and (b) governance/management. Interventions for addressing learning barriers and reengaging disconnected students are given secondary consideration at best. See Exhibit 2 on page 8 of *Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*.

We cannot emphasize enough that the marginalization is a fundamental cause of the widely observed fragmentation and disorganization of district/school efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., student and learning supports). So, to end the marginalization, we pursue policy action to establish and institutionalize a unified component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching as a primary and essential facet of school improvement (on a par with the components for instruction and governance/management). See Exhibits 3 & 4 in the above cited document. This third component is intended to coalesce all interventions at a school that address factors interfering with learning, development, and teaching.

Because we have found that schools respond best to when we emphasize that the component is meant to support learning, it has been dubbed the “Learning Supports Component.”

Note: Learning Supports are defined as the resources, strategies, and practices that support physical, social, emotional and intellectual development and well-being to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school. They are deployed in classrooms and schoolwide to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

In sum, unifying student/learning supports involves more than integrating them. The aim is to unify (coalesce) planning and implementation of the various interventions (initiatives, programs, services) into a cohesive component that is fully integrated as a primary and essential facet of school improvement policy and practice. As indicated below, this, of course, involves restructuring the operational infrastructure at schools (and districts).

Then, the aim over several years is to develop the unified component into a comprehensive and equitable system.

>**About our use of *Equitable*.** With respect to learning/student supports, a fundamental concern is to ensure that all students have an equitable opportunity to receive the benefits of such supports. In turn, we see a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of supports as enhancing equity of opportunity for student success at school and beyond.

Our aims related to enhancing equity of opportunity are twofold:

- >>to transform student/learning supports into a system that increasingly can provide essential supports for all students at a school
- >>to replicate and sustain the system in every school in a district.

As you know, at most schools, relatively few students in need receive effective assistance. And we all are concerned about the range of widely cited inequities.

In pursuit of enhancing equity of opportunity for all students, we stress systemic changes at district and school levels in how student/learning supports are coalesced, organized, budgeted, implemented, and evaluated. Examples of what is involved include

- >>redesigning student/learning supports into a system that combines classroom and schoolwide supports into (1) an interconnected continuum of subsystems that weaves school and community resources together with (2) an organized set of circumscribed domains of student and learning supports
- >>reworking roles and functions of staff and restructuring operational infrastructures
- >>braiding existing resources designated for student/learning supports, weaving them together with available community resources, and (re)deploying them in ways that rebuild student/learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system
- >>replicating the system across districts in sustainable ways using a phased-in process.

We recognize that all this is extremely complex and that most of us who are trying to transform schools are still in the learning stages with respect to implementing major innovations effectively and sustainably.¹

>**About *Comprehensiveness*.** When we stress comprehensiveness related to a system of student and learning supports, we illustrate it with the framework illustrated below.

Exhibit 4

Intervention Framework for a Third Component of School Improvement*

		Integrated Intervention Continuum (levels)		
		<i>Subsystem for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems</i>	<i>Subsystem for Early Intervention</i>	<i>Subsystem for Treatment (“System of Care”)</i>
Categories of Classroom and School-wide Student/Learning Support Domains	<i>Classroom-based learning supports</i>	(e.g., personalized instruction)	(e.g., special assistance in the classroom provided as soon as a problem arises)	(e.g., referral for <i>specialist</i> assistance)
	<i>Supports for transitions</i>	(e.g., welcoming newcomers & providing social/academic supports)	(e.g., when problems arise, using them as teachable moments to enhance social-emotional development and learning)	(e.g., personalized supports for students returning to school from incarceration)
	<i>Home involvement & engagement</i>	(e.g., outreach to attract and facilitate participation of hard-to-reach families)	(e.g., engaging families in problem-solving)	(e.g., support services to assist family in addressing basic survival needs)
	<i>Community involvement & collaborative engagement</i>	(e.g., outreach to recruit volunteers)	(e.g., developing community links and connections to fill critical intervention gaps)	(e.g., outreach to reengage disconnected students and families)
	<i>Crisis response/prevention</i>	(e.g., promoting positive relationships)	(e.g., immediate response with physical and psychological first-aid)	(e.g., referral for follow-up counseling)
	<i>Student & family special assistance</i>	(e.g., enhancing coping & problem solving capability)	(e.g., providing consultation, triage, and referrals)	(e.g., ongoing management of care related to specialized services)
		Accommodations for differences & disabilities		Specialized assistance & other intensified interventions (e.g., Special Education & School-Based

*The above matrix provides a guide for organizing and evaluating a system of student and learning supports and is a tool for mapping existing interventions, clarifying which are evidence-based, identifying critical intervention gaps, and analyzing resource use with a view to redeploying resources to strengthen the system. As the examples illustrate, the framework can guide efforts to embed supports for compensatory and special education, English learners, psychosocial and mental health problems, use of specialized instructional support personnel, adoption of evidence-based interventions, integration of funding sources, and braiding in of community resources. The specific examples inserted in the matrix are just illustrative of those schools already may have in place. For a fuller array of examples of student/learning supports that can be applied in classrooms and schoolwide, see the set of surveys available at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/surveys/set1.pdf>

We emphasize that a well-designed system of student and learning supports requires more than a continuum of interventions. Simply tweaking prevailing views of a multi-tier framework falls far short of planning and developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of in-classroom and schoolwide student/learning supports. Moving toward

such a system involves reframing MTSS into a cohesive, multifaceted, and systemic approach. For us, a comprehensive approach involves both

- >an interconnected continuum of subsystems that weaves school and community resources together and
- >student and learning support that are organized cohesively into a circumscribed set of domains (rather than the current trend just to generate laundry lists of programs and services at each level).

Analysis of typical “laundry lists” of district initiatives, programs, and services used to address barriers to learning and teaching indicates they can be grouped into six domains reflecting basic concerns that schools confront regularly. In organizing the activity across the continuum, it becomes clearer what supports are needed in and out of the classroom to enable the learning of all students, and it promotes efforts to reduce fragmentation and redundancy.

Note: we are not calling for more domains; we are calling for analyzing the “laundry lists” so that interventions are grouped. The number our analysis arrived at is six domains. Your analyses may produce another set of categories, but hopefully, a reasonably circumscribed set.

Obviously, over time, more interventions will be developed within each domain. In this respect note that the above framework has been found useful by districts/schools in

- (a) mapping existing student support activities, resources, and operational infrastructure,
- (b) analyzing what has been mapped,
- (c) identifying gaps and discussing priorities for filling them in ways that fit.

Contrast what we discuss as a comprehensive system of student/learning supports with the narrowness of focus covered by the term “Comprehensive School Mental Health.” Rather than settling for this way of thinking about mental health in schools, we want the school’s focus on mental health problems fully embedded into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of in-classroom and schoolwide student/learning supports (i.e., the learning supports component). And we want the instructional component to fully embed the facilitation of social and emotional development. That is the way to develop a comprehensive focus on mental health at a school.

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

Also see

- >*Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Starting the Process*
- >*Implementation Science and School Improvement*
- >*Schools and Mental Health: A Position Statement*
- >*Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

Are these topics being discussed in your locale?

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

Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

Quote attributed to Albert Einstein

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

- >>[Strengthening youth mental health: A playbook for governors](#)
- >>[How social emotional learning can unify your school community](#)
- >>[What are we learning from school suspension bans?](#)
- >>[Leveraging Instagram to Engage Adolescents With Depression: The Use of Evidence-Based Brief Video Interventions](#)
- >>[The Future of Artificial Intelligence in Special Education Technology](#)
- >>[Braiding and layering funding for adverse childhood experiences prevention](#)
- >>[West Virginia online support for families](#)
- >>[Zero tolerance: Effects, bias, and more effective strategies for Improving school safety](#)
- >>[Implementation Science in School Mental Health: A 10-Year Progress Update and Development of a New Research Agenda](#)

A Few Upcoming Webinars

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

- 12/4 Using AI to address school absenteeism
- 12/4 Handling holiday stress
- 12/4 Shaping AI for human centered education
- 12/9 Teaching ethical use of artificial intelligence
- 12/9 Goal setting for prevention
- 12/10 College, career and high school success tools
- 12/10 Coping with loneliness: building social relationships
- 12/10 Foundations of equity
- 12/11 Using data to inspire hope in instructional coaching
- 12/11 Resolutions and goal setting
- 12/12 Welcoming newcomers
- 12/13 School threat assessment
- 12/17 Rethinking the Principalship
- 12/18 Understanding anxiety
- 1/13 Wraparound fidelity
- 1/14 Use cultural humility to shape a prevention coalition
- 1/14 How to have a successful and equitable student program
- 1/15 Adapting evidence based programs
- 1/16 Blending and braiding funding streams
- 1/23 Leveraging evaluation for transformative growth
- 2/11 Prevention core competencies
- 2/12 Safe and inclusive schools
- 2/12 Students as equity leaders
- 4/22 Student led initiatives
- 5/8 Creating conditions for healthy disagreement

[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.

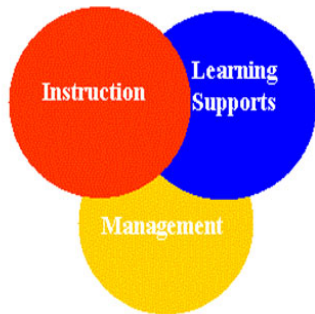
For example, see our recent guides that provide a roadmap for moving in new directions:

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

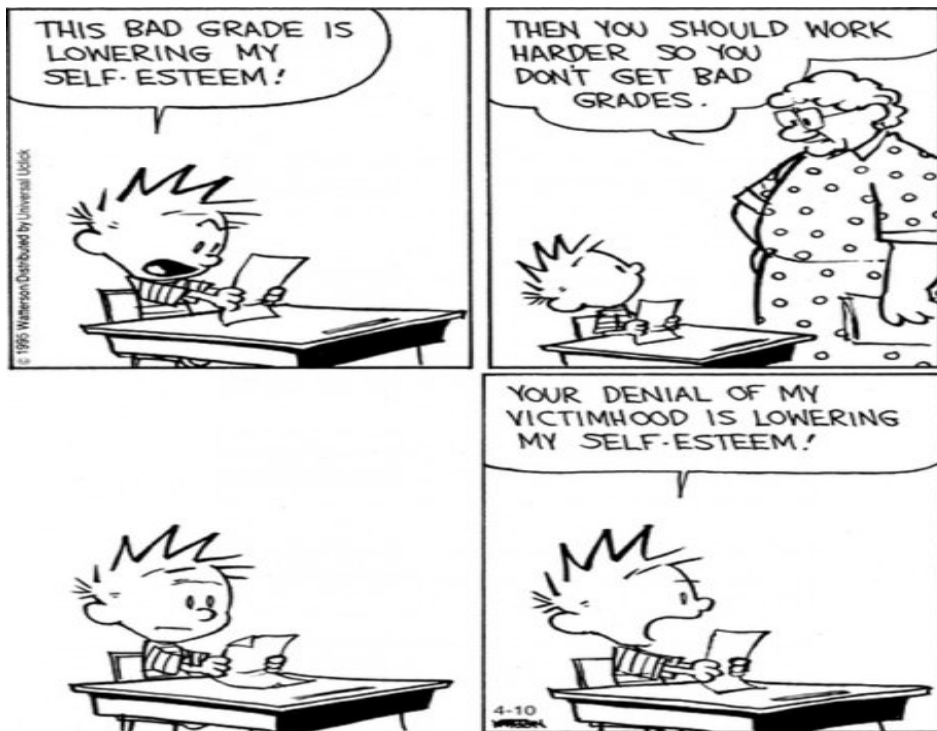
These provide prototypes for new directions and first steps for moving forward on a monthly, schedule. The first steps outlined involve

- (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/>)