Featured

(1) When is it essential to talk with (and not just at) students?

(2) Perspectives on Universal School-based Mental Health Interventions

And, as always, you will find
(3) 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:

> *When is it essential to talk with (and not just at) students?*

Both learning and teaching are transactional processes. Student engagement results when the transactions encompass ways to (1) enhance students feelings of self-determination, competence, and relatedness to significant others and (2) reduce threats to such feelings. School staff are well aware of some general classroom and school-wide strategies that can be used to address such matters.

For some students (e.g., those not very engaged or disengaged), a more personalized approach is required. The aim is to better understand what they are experiencing related to school and classroom instruction that interferes with their engagement. In such instances, we think in terms of *Personalized Student Conferences* as an essential element for (re)engaging such students.

Conferencing is pivotal in enhancing student engagement and reengagement in learning.

Properly conducted conferences convey positive regard, valuing of the student's perspectives, and the school's belief that the student should play a meaningful role in defining options and making decisions. Conferences also are one of the best contexts for providing feedback in a nurturing way and for conveying the staff's sincere desire to ensure needed support.

In general, a conference is a time for both student and teacher to say what they need, want, and are hoping for from each other. The importance of ensuring conferences are a two-way dialogue cannot be over-emphasized. When talking *with* a student, a teacher or team member can convey a sense of positive regard and gain a richer understanding of the status and bases for a student's current levels of motivation and capability. And the process can be a major step in enhancing a collaborative working relationship with a teacher (or student support staff member).

Appropriately designed, personalized conferences can provide an opportunity for students to share thoughts, feelings, problems, needs, desires, interests, attitudes, preferences, expectations, and concerns in ways that offer a basis for improving the situation. The dialogues and shared exploration also provide information about who the student is as an individual (e.g., personal and family background and/or current life events that have relevance to current behavior and learning).

Conferences vary in length, depending on how much time is available and how much time is needed. The process is ongoing and not always done in a formal manner. Indeed, some of the best dialogues are spontaneous (e.g., occur when a teacher or team member takes time to sit down next to a student during class for an informal chat). Such impromptu conferences become feasible when the classroom is designed to maximize use of small group and independent learning activities and cooperative and peer supported learning.

See >Section D. "**Conferencing as a Key Strategy**" in Unit I *Personalizing Learning*
Also see >**Talking with kids**

**Four General Strategies for
Reengaging Students in Classroom Instruction**

Obviously, it is no easy task to decrease well-assimilated negative attitudes and behaviors. The process requires considerable departure from routine classroom processes.

    I.   ***Clarify student perceptions of the problem*** – It is desirable to create a situation where it is feasible to talk openly with students about why they have become disengaged. This provides an invaluable basis for formulating a personalized plan for helping to alter their negative perceptions and for planning ways to prevent others from developing such perceptions.

    II.   ***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.

    III. ***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.

    IV. ***Reestablish and maintain an appropriate working relationship*** – This requires the type of ongoing interactions that creates a sense of trust, open communication, and provides personalized support and direction.

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).

From: Adelman & Taylor (2017).
        >Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide

About Student Engagement in the IEP meeting
From: *Strategies for Running a Truly Student-Centered IEP Meeting*

"There are typically more than 20 pages of information to cover during individualized education program (IEP) meetings. Sifting through lots of academic jargon can unintentionally make these meetings feel overwhelming.... As a result, a student's personality and interests, which are supposed to inform how their educational program is designed, risk becoming an afterthought....

   I try to ensure that the entire IEP team knows the student well enough to determine an individualized plan for them. An IEP meeting should be a collaborative effort where everyone contributes, as opposed to a 20-page to-do list.

   Most important, I put students' input at the forefront of the conversation. I've found there are a number of strategies that highlight student voices, before their IEP meeting as well as during the meeting....

My strategies, broken down into simple steps.

Before the Meeting
>I complete the following strategies at least two weeks before the scheduled IEP meeting. I do so through casual conversations with the student, where they respond in their language and communication mode of choice...
>I communicate to the students that I will meet with their teachers, parents or guardians, and other team members in order to plan how to best support them in school. Then, I ask them, "What environment helps you learn the best?" and "What can teachers do to help you focus more?" I drill into whether they prefer big groups, small groups, or working one-on-one with a teacher. It's essential for students to describe their optimal learning environment, so we can determine the location of services. The only way to know what's most effective for student learning is to ask them about it.
>Students complete an interest questionnaire. I ask them about their future career goals; their favorite TV shows, movies, and books; what they do on the weekends; and what languages they speak ... I include this information as part of the student strengths and interests section of the IEP...

During the Meeting
>After introductions, I remind the team of the intentions of the meeting: "I would like everyone to remember that all discussions and decisions made at this meeting are in the best interest of [student name]."
>While reviewing progress on IEP goals, I use samples that the student identifies as their proudest works. I also share anecdotes with the team about each IEP goal that the student has accomplished thus far.
>With the rest of the team present, I share the student's response to my question about whether they prefer big groups, small groups, or one-on-ones. I then give the team time to process this information and determine the least restrictive environment that best fits the student's needs.
>I ask the student what they think of the support and goals that we've proposed as a team. In the event that the student is absent from the meeting, I share with the team the additional requested areas of support that the student previously conveyed to me.

After the meeting, I've seen many students express excitement about implementing the IEP. Students have asked me about the progress toward their goals. They've also become more comfortable advocating for themselves and asking teachers about their accommodations. To me, this demonstrates that my students understand they have a team of people advocating for and listening to them—and crucially, that the above steps are working as intended."

What bothering you?

Are you sure you want to hear about it?

3

>Perspectives on Universal School-based Mental Health Interventions

From: *Five perspectives on "Where to next for universal school-based mental health interventions?"*

(1) Alarming increases in youth mental health problems among recent generations of young people highlight the critical role of prevention. One key avenue to deliver large-scale prevention is through universal programs implemented in schools. Universal prevention is delivered to all students regardless of level of risk, conferring many advantages: it is equitable, delivering public health preventive strategies to all young people; efficient; cost-effective; less stigmatizing and relatively easy to implement, when compared to targeted or indicated programs.

While initial evaluations of universal school-based programs to prevent common mental health problems (such as anxiety and depression) showed small promising symptom reductions, recent large school-based universal prevention trials conducted in high-income countries have reported null primary and even negative effects on secondary outcomes among adolescents ...

While we advocate against abandoning universal school-based mental health prevention, it is imperative the field explores opportunities to improve the efficacy of such interventions... We urgently need innovation in universal prevention. Existing approaches employing traditional psychological treatment approaches (namely CBT and mindfulness) have failed to make population impacts in preventing incidence of mental ill health. This signals the need to shift away from teaching general psychological skills used in treatment programs in a universal way. Innovation might include personalized prevention, third-wave CBT (including self-compassion and empathy as targets, rather than cognitive techniques), consideration of school context/climate, removal of pathologizing language and empowering young people to support their peers...

Interventions should be adapted or designed with the involvement of young people themselves and key stakeholders (e.g. teachers and school staff who may be delivering the intervention), to help guide what prevention outcomes are important to them and how the intervention is delivered in partnership with local contexts.... Important lessons can also be drawn from community approaches to prevention that address broader factors associated with mental health, such as living conditions, stigma, and parental attitudes....

(2) The value of student voices in informing the design and implementation of universal school-based mental health interventions

"...Universal school-based mental health interventions, designed to be accessible to all students regardless of their current mental health status, have emerged as a promising strategy in addressing youth mental disorders. By providing early preventive measures, these interventions have the potential to not only help mitigate the onset of mental health issues but also work to reduce stigma associated with school students seeking mental health support through separate sessions. A growing body of research from varied international contexts indicates their effectiveness in alleviating symptoms such as depression and anxiety among youth; however, the extent of this is often modest and short-lived...

This underscores the need for more in-depth and purposive qualitative research which promotes student voice,... Student voice in its most genuine form involves enabling youth to recognize and analyze issues related to their development which they regard as meaningful and having their voices inform action. It can be enacted in various ways, such as via students participating in decision-making processes, giving feedback and being involved in program design. It can also occur via a number of qualitative research methods including interviews, focus group discussions, written reflections and open-ended surveys.

Student voice has the potential to open-up opportunities for youth from marginalized and minority groups to play key roles in changes impacting their development and well-being. In the context of mental health programs, integrating student voice means actively listening to their experiences, understanding their needs and tailoring interventions accordingly. When students have a say in shaping the programs that directly affect them, they are more likely to feel valued and engaged, leading to better outcomes ...

The journey towards effective universal school-based mental health interventions requires a shift in perspective. Instead of viewing students merely as recipients of support, we must recognize them as active participants in the development, implementation and evaluation of programs that affect their

lives. By fostering environments and processes where their voices are heard and valued, we can create more impactful interventions that not only address immediate mental health concerns but also empower students to take charge of their well-being. This shift is crucial for ensuring that universal approaches to mental health in schools are not only effective but responsive to the needs of all students."

(3) Universal versus targeted school-based mental health interventions: a health economic perspective
"Mental health problems in schools are a concern and various initiatives have been developed to address these. Interventions can be universal (covering a whole school) or targeted (addressing those with specific needs). Any new intervention should be evaluated, and this should include an assessment of cost-effectiveness. Evidence to date suggests that while gains from universal schemes may be modest, they can still be cost-effective given the extent of their reach. However, targeted interventions can address key health inequalities which should also be an objective of an economic evaluation. Studies that have examined the longer term impact of both universal and targeted approaches have demonstrated that both can represent good values for money, and it is likely that a blended or tiered approach is appropriate....

When we consider the cost per pupil, universal interventions are likely to be relatively inexpensive. As such, even modest improvements in well-being, mental health and quality of life ..."

(4) Time to move towards more effective alternatives
"...In the broader literature, 'prevention' can mean a number of different things: interventions that prevent the onset of a disorder before any symptoms appear (primary prevention), those that slow or reduce the progression of a disorder when symptoms have already begun (secondary prevention) or those that manage or lessen the impact of a fully developed disorder (tertiary prevention). Each of these approaches is valid, but they should not be confused with each other, and their effects should not be analyzed together. In the school-based mental health intervention literature, universal preventive interventions are often described as, and intended to act as, primary prevention....

Iatrogenic effects among universal school prevention have been documented, with some individuals faring worse following the intervention, relative to the control group. In a recent scoping review of school-based group mental health interventions, we found that among high-quality studies (i.e. those with low risk of bias), a third (33.33%) reported at least one negative outcome. This included an increase in internalizing symptoms, a decrease in prosocial behavior and a decrease in parental relationship quality. Around half of these negative outcomes were found within subgroup analyses: for example, being younger, experiencing deprivation or having mental health problems at baseline were all associated with worse outcomes...

We argue that the field should move towards alternative school-based approaches with a stronger evidence base, including
> targeted interventions that focus on smaller groups of individuals at risk of specific problems,
> opt-in interventions which are more in line with adolescents' desire for autonomy,
> indirect interventions which focus on adjacent risk factors such bullying and
> approaches which increase access to treatment outside of school.

In summary, and in the context of rising rates of mental health problems among young people, we argue that the field should focus more on improving and disseminating effective targeted interventions that have a higher likelihood of improving the mental health of young people."

(5) Addressing the mental health crisis among young people in low- and middle-income countries
"...a key strength of universal school-based interventions is that they can be flexibly delivered, when tailored appropriately, by non-specialist facilitators. This task-shifting approach is essential... and has shown to help overcome various barriers to accessing healthcare, especially among underserved and hard to reach groups like those living in rural settings. Moreover, universal programs mitigate the stigma often associated with targeted and indicated mental health interventions. By providing mental health interventions to all young people, these programs reduce the risk of singling out individuals based on perceived vulnerability...."

Universal interventions that are youth-informed, co-developed and led, or adapted in close consultation with key stakeholders in the local community, have the potential to offer wider benefits such as promoting mental health awareness and help-seeking among caregivers. Youth engagement is a critical component of effective school-based mental health programs and young people... themselves

have reported that they are eager to participate in mental health initiatives. Young people,,, have reported that integrating mental health education into school curricula empowers them with knowledge and skills to support themselves and their peers."

Center Comments on Universal School-based Mental Health Interventions

While advocacy grows for schools to play a greater role in addressing mental health problems, mental health in schools remains a quite limited enterprise. Moreover, programs in place are so fragmented that they often produce inappropriate redundancy, counterproductive competition, and work against the type of systemic collaboration that is essential for establishing connections among school interventions and between school and community resources. This state of affairs increases costs, reduces effectiveness, and is perpetuating widespread marginalization of efforts to transform student/learning supports. There also is a continuing tendency to focus interventions mainly on students, thereby deemphasizing the role of environmental factors in causing student problems and as the appropriate focus for ameliorating many problems. What exists is a vicious cycle of unsatisfactory policy, research, practice, and training. And, the cycle is likely to continue as long as mental health is viewed narrowly and as a separate enterprise. There is an alternative: see

>*Embedding MH into Student/Learning Supports* for several brief related discussions.

Transforming Student/Learning Supports

Are you 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.

Instruction · Learning Supports · Management
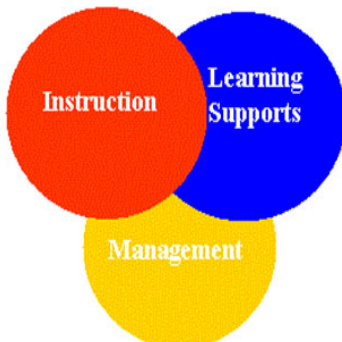
Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to promoting whole child development, advancing social justice, and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.
National Initiative for Transforming Student/Learning Supports

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

> **Building on MTSS to Enhance How Schools Address Barriers to Learning**

> **Exploring Systems-Level Family Engagement Practices Across Elementary and PK-8 Schools**

> **Stress, social support, and internalizing problems: Domains of stress and support**

> **Youth-centered Recommendations to Address Social Stigma and Discrimination Against Unhoused Youth**

> **Mental Health Interventions in Middle Schools**

> **Eating disorders, school professionals, and understanding family theory**

> **Helping Young Children Who Are Socially Anxious**

> **Inseparable: School Mental Health Report Card 2025**

A Few Upcoming Webinars

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

3/12 Relations, family, and mental health
3/12 AI in education
3/12 Navigating immigration: how schools can help
3/12 Planning for special education over the summer
3/13 Learning interventions that work
3/13 Characteristics of young adolescents
3/18 Understanding stress responses
3/19 Strengthening school and community connections
3/19 Questions to ask during the special education process
3/19 Promoting Young Children's Achievement
3/20 Leading a middle school
3/20 Student centered actions
3/24 How to recognize children's goals
3/26 Environmental change for prevention
3/26 Emerging technology in education
4/1 Preparing students to thrive
4/2 Creating a culture of consistency
4/2 Understanding loneliness
4/3 Sustainability planning
4/3 Confidence and self-esteem
4/9 Addressing bullying
4/16 A crisis plan for mental health problems
4/22 Telling stories with data
4/22 Student led initiatives
5/7 Racial Justice in Discipline
5/8 Creating conditions for healthy disagreement

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

>*Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth* (Webinar recording)

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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!   Contact: ltaylor@ucla.edu

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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 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/)**