Featured:

>*Some indicators of youth risk behavior show encouraging trends*

>*About mental health in schools as a platform for transforming student/learning supports*

>*Can mentoring expand support for adolescents who are depressed?*

>*Links to a few other relevant shared resources*

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For discussion and interchange:

>*Some indicators of youth risk behavior show encouraging trends*

The media focus on youth mental health ignores some of the encouraging findings collected in fall 2021 by the **Youth Risk Behavior Survey**. (This is the first Youth Risk Behavior Survey done since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.)

> "Several areas of adolescent health and well-being are continuing to improve overall, including risky sexual behavior (i.e., ever and current sexual activity and having four or more lifetime sexual partners) and substance use (i.e., ever used select illicit drugs, ever misused prescription opioids, current alcohol use, and current marijuana use) We also saw a decrease in the proportion of youth who were bullied at school....
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>   Children and adolescents in the U S spend much of their daily lives in school, providing a considerable opportunity to foster the knowledge and skills to shape behaviors and experiences, but also the responsibility to ensure that all learning is done in a safe and supportive school environment....
>
>   Protective factors are the characteristics, conditions, and behaviors that improve health outcomes or reduce the effects of stressful life events and other risk factors School connectedness, which is the feeling among adolescents that people at their school care about them, their well-being, and success, has long-lasting protective effects for adolescents. Youth who feel connected at school are less likely to experience risks related to substance use, mental health, violence, and sexual behavior School connectedness also protects against the co-occurrence of these risks. School connectedness was assessed by asking whether students felt close to people at their school... In 2021, 61% of high school students felt a sense of school connectedness, measured by agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt close to people at school...."

From a **PBS interview** with Kathleen Ethier, Director of the Division of Adolescent and School Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

> "...the research shows the importance of young people feeling connected to others at their school - so what that means is that there are others at their school who care about them, who are interested in their well-being, who are interested in their success. Young people who feel that way anywhere in seventh to 12th grades 20 years later have better outcomes in terms of their mental health, in terms of substance use, in terms of experience in perpetration of violence and in terms of sexual health. It's this really broad-ranging impact.
>
>   And so that's why we started to focus there because we knew that there were things that schools could do to increase connectedness. Some of them are intuitive.... Get rid of bullying. Make sure that young people feel safe and feel supported. But then there are some things that you might not think about, like classroom management. And so really teaching teachers how to find that line where students feel valued, they feel heard, they feel like they are participating. But there's also structure. ...
>
>   The other thing that increases school connectedness are a set of programs called youth development programs, where students go out into their community, connect with important folks in their community and really learn kind of that service orientation...."

Our Center offers many resources about enhancing school connectedness and children and adolescent development. For example, see

>*Schools as Caring, Learning Communities*.

>*Service Learning in Schools*

>*Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH*

>*Cross-Age Peer Mentorship Programs in Schools*

>*Peer Tutoring: Part of Learning Supports*

For more, see the Center's *Quick Find Menu*.

For discussion and interchange:

>**About mental health in schools as a platform for transforming student/learning supports**

We have received many requests such as the following. As you will see in our response, we have encouraged using efforts to enhance mental health in schools not just by adding a few "mental health providers" but as a catalyst for transforming student/learning supports.

Request to the Center:

"I know you are aware of the challenges: high prevalence of underserved populations who are homeless; the correlation of mental health linked to disparities (recently worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic); high rates of anxiety, depression, suicide among youths and the toxic stress among families. We are disturbed by the worsening disparities; and the awareness that a solution is no easy task.

We have formed a network of community partners including high risk underserved, challenging Unified School District(s), Workforce Development Board, Institutions of Higher Learning (training Mental Health providers), Community Based Organizations, Unified School Districts -Teachers' Association...

Aim: We are seeking to apply for the Dept. of Education funding: to increase the number of Mental Health Providers working in Unified School Districts.

Purpose: We would like to utilize the funding opportunity: to revise and refine Mental Health in Schools training to better meet the needs of underserved communities, provide a continuum of services, optimize use of resources and close widening gaps for worsening disparities among underserved populations. We hope to effect the necessary and required changes (organizational shifts, staff and provider training) to better meet mental health needs of schools, optimize use of resources, to close gaps in disproportionate disparities and improve outcomes. ... "

Center Response:

We are pleased to see your focus on optimizing use of resources as you focus on enhancing mental health in schools. From a school's perspective, the need is to move from clinical models to embedding and fully integrating mental health and psychosocial concerns into the broad need for addressing barriers to learning and teaching, reengaging students in formal learning, and promoting social and emotional development. Accomplishing such a broad focus certainly will require rethinking the roles, functions, and development of personnel and of policy and practice related to school improvement.

The next decade must mark a turning point for how schools and communities address the many barriers to learning experienced by children and youth. Needed in particular are initiatives to transform how schools work to prevent and ameliorate external and internal barriers which lead to so many students being designated as learning, behavior, and

emotional problems. Such a transformation is essential to enhancing achievement for all, closing the achievement and opportunity gaps, reducing dropouts, and increasing the valuing of schools as treasures in their neighborhood. Efforts to enhance mental health in schools can be platforms for moving a broader agenda forward.

Our efforts to enhance mental health in schools have led us to understand the importance of embedding the work into a transformed system of student/learning supports. For us, this involves helping districts move away from what typically is a narrow, fragmented, piecemeal (and marginalized) approach to student and learning supports. The transformation begins with unifying student/learning supports and redeploying what already is budgeted for such activity as move toward developing the supports into a comprehensive and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

> **More About Broadening the Focus of Mental Health In Schools**
>
> >*Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*
>
> >*Schools and Mental Health: A Position Statement*
>
> >*Time for Straight Talk about Mental Health Services and MH in Schools*
>
> >*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*
>
> >*An Example of a Formal Proposal*

I've had to send you to the principal every day this week. What do you have to say for yourself?
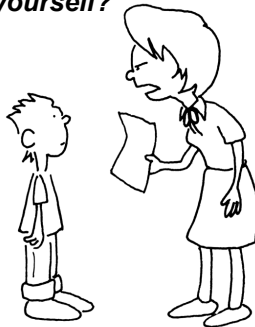
I'm glad it's Friday!

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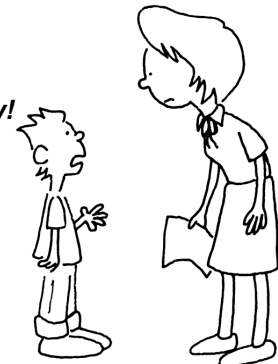
Can mentoring expand support for adolescents who are depressed?

The growing national emphasis on mentoring students has led to discussion of the use of mentors in addressing mental health concerns. In such instances, the trend is for an individual with more experience, knowledge, and connections establishes a relationship with a student aimed at primary, secondary, or tertiary prevention related to mental health problems.

From: *Mentoring and depressive symptoms of youth: Examining prospective and interactive associations with mentoring relationship quality*

"...Over the past decade, researchers have argued that standard psychotherapy needs to be restructured to better meet current demands and become more accessible, expanding both the settings and providers offering treatment. Recent research has demonstrated that caregivers may turn to mentoring programs for support when their children express clinically elevated mental health concerns. Considering growing rates of adolescent depression, low service utilization rates overall, as well as disparities based on race and ethnicity, understanding the role of mentoring as it relates to the well-being and mental health of racially and ethnically diverse groups of youth can inform the development of outreach programs and interventions to promote adolescent mental health.... Mentoring processes associated with socioemotional development include engagement in mutually enjoyed activities, companionship, modeling effective communication, prosocial experiences, and emotion regulation skills. These processes may be especially important for youth struggling with depressive symptoms, who tend to have difficulty forming and maintaining relationships.... Mentors can open doors to resources, activities, and educational or occupational opportunities to which youth may not otherwise have access, influencing identity development...."

From: *Sage and Seekers to Foster Intergenerational Connections at Palisades High*

"Local nonprofit Sage and Seekers builds relationships between older adults and teenagers. The group encourages senior citizens (60+) to form meaningful bonds with high school students (15-24), and aims to "build empathy, diminish ageism and social isolation". The program seeks to bolster and improve the mental health of both youth and older adults, alongside promoting communication skills for students."

Mentors also are seen as a promising resource to address learning loss.

From: *Educators try to turn around pandemic-era learning loss*

"What we're trying to do with the National Partnership for Student Success is to find ways to get at least 250,000 more adults in schools as mentors, as tutors, as success coaches. And we're looking at places where we get large numbers of students, like college work study students, folks that are already volunteering for 4-H or Big Brothers or Big Sisters of the YMCA. And even corporate volunteers to create this small army of adults that can help teachers and students." Robert Balfanz

Of course, mentoring and other volunteer programs, especially peer mentoring and tutoring, are used to provide support not only for at-risk youth, but a wide range of students. Mentoring can be provided in-person (usually one-on-one) and online. Group mentoring also is used.

From the perspective of our Center's work on addressing barriers to learning and teaching, mentoring (and the myriad of other special interventions that are proposed for schools) should be embedded into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports.

For more, see our Center's **Quick Find on *Mentoring***.

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>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

Framework for successful school reintegration after psychiatric hospitalization: A systematic synthesis of expert recommendations

Practice-focused collaboration.

Parenting in America today

Children's experiences of a good environment and its future—Developing theoretical framework for children's wellbeing

Fostering emotional and mental health in residential youth care facilities: A systematic review of programs targeted to care workers

Building Better Professional Learning: How to Strengthen Teacher Learning

Overview of the Impacts of Long COVID on Behavioral Health

Most Black Children Live in Neighborhoods That Lack Amenities Associated with Child Well-being

Innovating High School Math through K–12 and Higher Education Partnerships

Getting Better at Getting More Equitable: Addressing Racial Inequities in Education Using Equity-Driven Continuous Improvement

A Few Upcoming Webinars

For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's Links to
Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts – https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm

3/8 The School Counselor's Role in Addressing Student Behavio**r**
3/9 Cultivating Caring Communities in Schools: Tools for Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline
3/9 Steps to Lead Inclusive School Transformation
3/14 Equity drive strategies for addressing chronic absences
3/15 Prevention: from vision to action
3/16 Resiliency unmasked: the impact of grief and trauma
3/22 Transforming kindergarten
3/22 Exploring the staff shortage impact on education
3/22 Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Students Experiencing Homelessness
3/23 Supporting Vulnerable and At-Risk Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care
3/28 Classroom Strategies for Building Equity and Student Confidence
3/28 McKinney-Vento School Selection Rights
3/29 Disrupting PD Day in Schools with Continuous Professional Learning Experiences
3/29 Elevating Culturally Affirming and Sustaining Services and Practices in Youth Service Agencies
3/30 Belonging and Engagement: The Keys to Showing Up

Teacher: ***Looks like you've been missing a lot of work lately.***

Student: ***I wouldn't say I've been missing it,***

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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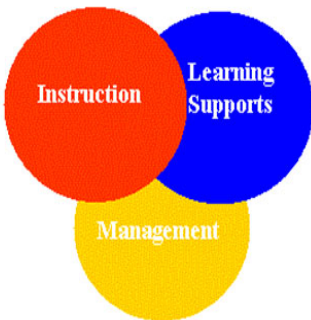
For information about the
National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
go to http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html

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 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/)