

(6/18/25) This continuing education resource is from the national
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA

Featured

(1) School improvement: Moving into the age of Implementation Science

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And, as always, you will find

(4) 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:

>School improvement: Moving into the age of Implementation Science

Request from colleagues:

An increasingly frequent request to our Center asks for guidance related to introducing improvements (e.g., new initiatives and programs, systemic changes). Having spent years working with schools, districts, and state departments of education to move to a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, this is a matter we have experienced and studied extensively (e.g., see *Implementation Science and School Improvement*, 2024).

What follows are a few thoughts and resources.

Whether the focus is on making a significant change at one school or all schools in a district, the process can be conceived in terms of four overlapping phases.

- >First Phase – Introduction and creating readiness, commitment, & engagement
- >Second Phase – Start-up and phase-in: Expanding operational infrastructure and Capacity and pursuing initial implementation
- >Third Phase – Institutionalizing, replicating to scale, sustaining, and evolving to enhance system change outcomes
- >Fourth Phase – Ongoing Evolution and Generating Creative Renewal

Presentation of the strategic tasks associated with each phase can be found in Chapters 16 and 17 of *Improving School Improvement*.

With respect to the first two phases noted above we highlighted seven steps that we apply in improving student and learning supports, see

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

Also, see

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

Note: The steps outlined are adaptable at school, district, or state agency levels. At each level, the process is envisioned as beginning with establishment of a workgroup of interested and concerned stakeholders (hopefully, including key administrators).

For more on this, see the Center's Quick Find:

- >[*Systemic Change & the Diffusion of Innovation in Schools \(the Implementation Problem\)*](#)
- and our
- >[*System Change Toolkit*](#) (section D)

Comments from the Field:

We also asked some colleagues across the country about this. Here is a sample of responses.

1. From a former state department of ed student support staff:

- "... thinking like a principal, I would want to know:
- >What will this program do for my school/students/staff?
 - >Will this program address an existing concern? Or, will this program prevent a problem? (Here is an opportunity for [advocates] to do their homework in advance and use existing data from the school to show specifically how this program has addressed this/these issue(s) in other places and what a difference it will make for this school.)
 - >Explain in basic terms how and why the program will make a positive difference. Why is it better?
 - >Follow up by showing positive trends/changes in data for that specific school.
 - >How does it work:
 - >How much does it cost?
 - >How much time will it take away from existing curricula? (Because something WILL have to go - show how this program is evidence-based and better than what already exists.)
 - >Does the program require staff? How many? Will they need to be trained? How much does that cost?
 - >How long does it take to get the program up and running? To see results?
 - >What will I tell others about this program to "sell it" to staff/students/parents:
 - What is the take away message about this program?
 - What should the principal tell others about why the school should do this?"

2. From a university professor who works closely with schools

"I would say that the first thing to consider is why this program and why this school. This gets to the motivation of the school to participate. It is important to do some homework and know something about the school, its population, and leadership.

Assuming this is a cold ask, how does this program relate to *this* school's needs. For example, will this program compete with an existing program? Will it be involving school personnel and if so will it add to their workload? Alternatively, is it sustainable with existing resources? How much time in training is involved?

Even considering that these issues are addressed, there is still the question of how to get your foot in the door. Is the school part of a large school district and therefore district approval is needed? Or is it a rural school with autonomy to implement programs at the principal's discretion?

Finding the right person to smooth the way in is an important first step. It might be a guidance counselor, assistant principal, teacher or even a parent. Someone who is known to the school can help with introductions. Or perhaps a key person from another setting can help. This would be especially useful if this program is known to the school, such as a neighborhood resource (e.g., after school program or park district) or another school. A testimonial or two can be very helpful.

Last point is not to rush it. It takes time to develop relationships and this is often the first test. How important is our school to this program? Do they care about our students and families enough to take the time to get to know them? Offering to do a workshop or attend a parent meeting can be a way to show both your sincerity and the program's benefits."

3. From a former Superintendents and now a school consultant

"I would suggest research to find out the areas of need for the school and then present the program as a way to address the need. Data sources to use would be the school's accreditation report, articles in their local media, and achievement, behavior, and attendance data to determine the areas of needed improvement."

4. From a former state department of education leader and current school consultant

“ You’re not the first person to forward this type of question to me. Schools are often overwhelmed with programs, so capturing their attention requires a tailored, strategic approach that focuses on what the school or school district needs. Sometimes when I was a superintendent someone had a great program, but it did not align with any of our school district’s strategic goals or expected outcomes. So, based on my experience, these are the key elements to consider:

- > Frame the program in terms that reflect current school or school district priorities—such as improving student attendance, reducing behavioral incidents, enhancing school safety, or supporting compliance with mandates (e.g., legislation that requires schools to address the behavioral health needs of students). If the program addresses one of these hot-button issues, lead with that.
- > Use clinical trial and/or community data – show whatever outcome data that is available but translate it into school-focused outcomes, such as fewer discipline referrals, improved classroom behavior, higher engagement, increased teacher retention, etc. Case studies or examples of how the program has been used can be useful but they need to be short, visual case studies or one-pagers that quickly convey the impact of the program.
- > If possible, connect through someone the district already trusts—this could be a behavioral health coordinator, school psychologist, or community partner. A warm intro from someone within the education system or who has worked with someone in the school or school district carries more weight than a cold pitch and can be a very effective way to “get in the door.” ...
- > Schools are more likely to engage with a new program if the first step is low-risk. For example, offer a free webinar, a 15-minute consultation, or a brief pilot with one school. Make it easy for them to say “yes.” ...
- > If it’s relevant, reference legislation (e.g., School Safety Plans, mandatory student attendance protocols, etc.), Title funds, or potential mental health grants. Show how the program helps schools meet requirements or makes schools or school districts eligible for funding.
- > As with any profession, educators have their own language with lots of anachronisms, so it’s important to learn those, such as “MTSS,” “tiered supports,” “SEL,” “school safety plans,” “chronic absenteeism,” “IEP,” “504,” “PBIS,” etc., because they will talk that language and won’t have time to explain each one; plus, it’s much easier to explain a new program using those terms as often as possible, which also lets them know that you took the time to learn their language. And I need to add this - avoid clinical jargon—reframe benefits in terms of desired and relevant outcomes. ...

Below is the one-page structure my team uses when we want to engage schools and school districts in a new program....

- >What Is It? – A brief, non-jargony description of the program; Emphasize it’s evidence-based, feasible, and adaptable for schools; Mention alignment with MTSS, SEL, or School Safety Plans
- >Key Outcomes – 30% improvement in student engagement (community settings); Reduced behavioral incidents in pilot sites; Positive feedback from parents and educators
- >How It Works – Delivered virtually or in person; Integrates easily with school schedules; Requires minimal lift from school staff; Can start with a small pilot
- >Why It Matters Now – Supports compliance with [existing policy/legislation]; Addresses growing behavioral health needs post-COVID; Aligns with goals for attendance, safety, and SEL
- >Next Steps – Schedule a 15-minute consultation; Explore a free demo session or pilot; Invite them to a location where the program is being implemented

I’ll add one more suggestion: Don’t give up. Analyze what didn’t resonate and reframe the message about the program, but only if the program is relevant to the needs of the school or school district.”

5. From a university professor working with schools

“... The key [is] knowing the existing needs and resources and being able to position one’s program to address the needs in a uniquely successful way that builds on existing resources. This scenario also is influenced by state and local educational issues. It’s a personalized and contextualized process, which is why it does not happen easily and often....”

About the Difficulty in Disseminating New Approaches

The term *dissemination* encompasses the many challenges involved in dispersal of information, ideas, and recommendations to individuals, groups, and organizations.

Questions arise about how best to design and package products (e.g., brochures, fact sheets, frequently asked questions, presentations, courses, workshops, manuals, articles, books).

When it comes to wide-spread distribution, questions arise about how best to use the variety of available delivery systems (e.g., email, webinars, websites, social media, mailers and public relations ads, networks of professionals, news outlets, clearinghouses) to create awareness, interest, and acceptance.

Distribution alone, however, does not guarantee communication and understanding. That is, while distribution is a necessary precursor, it is insufficient with respect to assuring understanding, never mind mobilizing acceptance and action. So, a fundamental concern is how to pursue dissemination efforts in ways that can increase the likelihood that proposed changes will be accepted and acted upon.

Clues from various lines of work (e.g., Rogers, 2003; Greenlaugh & colleagues, 2004) suggest that dissemination should be designed to enhance perceptions of:

- > **Benefits.** This includes delineating what is to be gained from use and action (e.g., how ideas and recommendations meet an organization's needs). With respect to new information or innovations, Rogers emphasizes the concept of relative advantage. The degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supercedes. The greater the degree of perceived relative advantage, the more rapid its rate of adoption.
- > **Compatibility (fit, match).** This refers to the degree to which an idea or recommendation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters. Rogers states that the more compatible it is, the more rapidly it will be adopted.
- > **Usability.** Language and design should maximize the likelihood that what is sent can be readily understood by the intended audience. The content should highlight use, including how ideas and recommendations might be integrated into existing activity and leverage available resources. Rogers emphasizes the concept of trialability. This is the degree to which a prototype may be experimented with on a limited basis. An approach that is triable represents less uncertainty as it is possible to learn by doing.
- > **Evidence of sufficient resources.** Specific information should be communicated about the resources allocated for moving the research into regular practice and sustaining it.
- > **Evidence that others are on board.** Messages should clarify who is ready to and who has already adopted the work and that high-ranking decision makers have made it a priority.
- > **Evidence of impact.** This requires references to data, opportunities to observe demonstrations, compelling anecdotes, or any other ways to convey the potential credibility and impact of acting on recommendations.

In terms of strategic approaches, it is usually emphasized that processes should initially target specific stakeholders and do so in a personalized manner. Furthermore, the communication should provide a succinct overview and stress the credibility of both the content and its advocates....

For more, see:

Bringing New Prototypes into Practice: Dissemination, Implementation, and Facilitating Transformation

Systemic Change and Empirically-Supported Practices: The Implementation Problem

New Initiatives: Considerations Related to Planning, Implementing, Sustaining, and Going-to-Scale

For all who work with others to enhance the well being of the young

>Appreciations for what has been accomplished

Did you receive (or send) a letter of appreciation as the school year ended? If not, here are samples from school leaders who emphasized the positive as the school year ended. If you haven't received a thank you for your hard work, consider that these are for you as well.

From: *the superintendent of Elk Grove Unified*

Dear Families, Students and Staff,

.... As the year winds down, I want to take a moment to reflect on all that we have accomplished together — and to express my deepest gratitude to each and every one of you who made it possible. As I reflect on this past school year, there is so much to be proud of — from academic to athletic to award-winning performances, our students and staff continue to amaze me with their talent, dedication, and perseverance to pursue the best.

First and foremost, I would like to thank our amazing staff. Your hard work, creativity, and dedication have shaped a year filled with growth, learning, and achievement. Upon visiting our schools over this past year, I continuously saw the way you engaged and connected with our students to make our schools places where students could become critical thinkers, upstanding citizens and kind human beings....

To our families, thank you for being such vital partners in this journey. Your support, encouragement, and engagement have created a strong foundation for our students to thrive. I have personally witnessed and heard about your dedication to our students from the many wonderful events over this past year....

Finally, to our students, we are so proud of all you have accomplished. I want to especially congratulate our seniors — the Class of 2025 — congratulations! You have demonstrated resilience, leadership and compassion, and you leave behind a legacy that will inspire future generations....

Thank you for your continued partnership and support.,,.. This can be a very busy time of year, so remember to pause, take a breath, and soak it all in. I wish you all a relaxing and rejuvenating summer break and look forward to being together again in the fall."

From: *the superintendent of Pittsfield School District SAU#51*

"The last day of school has many emotions to it. It is something we as educators look forward to because it is the culmination of our efforts in preparing our students. It is something we have been waiting for because to be an educator is a vocation that takes all of our efforts and we need to have some down time. It is a time to say goodbye to the students we have come to care for and maybe worry about. All these things and more are going through our minds today.

I wanted to take a moment to say thank you for all that you do. No matter what your position, you are all a part of the amazing world of children and you will always hold an important place in their lives. Your efforts have been strong and dedicated, it is obvious when you walk into the school buildings and see the progress that these students are making. You do this with little gratitude at times but the smile in a student's eyes is a powerful thing.

For those of you who are leaving us, I wish you all the best of luck as you move on to the next stage of your life. For those of you who are returning, I am excited about the possibilities and what new things we will accomplish with our students together as a District.

Please take the time to recharge and refresh with family and friends.

These words are not enough to express my gratitude, thank you."

From: *the superintendent of Orchard View Schools*

"...I wanted to take a moment to express my heartfelt appreciation for all your support and dedication throughout the academic year. It has been a year filled with remarkable achievements, growth, and countless memorable moments.

Now that we have reached the end of another successful year, I would like to extend my warmest wishes to each and every one of you for a truly wonderful summer. This is a time to relax, rejuvenate, and create lasting memories with your loved ones.

To our exceptional students, I want to applaud your hard work, determination, and resilience throughout the year. You have shown remarkable progress and have consistently risen to new

challenges. Your thirst for knowledge and passion for learning have been truly inspiring. As you embark on this well-deserved break, I encourage you to explore new horizons, pursue your passions, and embrace opportunities for personal growth.

To the families who have been unwavering pillars of support, thank you for your continuous involvement in your child's education. Your commitment to their success and well-being has played an invaluable role in our shared achievements. As the summer unfolds, I hope you have the opportunity to bond, create cherished memories, and relish the joys of family time.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated educators, administrators, and support staff who have worked tirelessly to provide an enriching and safe learning environment. Your unwavering dedication to our students and commitment to excellence have made our district a shining beacon of educational success. Your well-deserved break is a chance to recharge, reflect, and prepare for the exciting challenges that lie ahead.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to our wonderful community for its continuous support and collaboration. Your partnership has been instrumental in fostering an environment where our students can thrive, and your involvement has strengthened the bonds between our schools and the community. Together, we have created a nurturing educational ecosystem that sets the foundation for lifelong success.

As we bid farewell to this academic year, let us embrace the summer with open hearts and open minds. May the sunshine and warmth fill our days with joy, laughter, and endless possibilities. Take this opportunity to explore new interests, embark on exciting adventures, and make memories that will last a lifetime.

Remember, education is not confined to the walls of a classroom. Learning happens everywhere, and the world is your classroom. Whether you're traveling, volunteering, reading, or engaging in creative endeavors, seize the opportunity to grow, learn, and make a positive impact.

Stay safe, stay curious, and stay connected. We eagerly await your return in the coming school year, filled with new adventures, fresh ideas, and endless possibilities."

And from our Center at UCLA we want to add our appreciation for sharing with us your successes, frustrations, and so much more. And thanks for all you do for schools, students, families, and your communities.

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

- >>The protective role of community cohesion across rural and urban contexts: implications for youth mental health**
- >>Special edition of *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, 35, #2 (2025)**
 - **The Critical Nature of Collaboration in Special Education**
 - **Conjoint Behavioral Consultation Research and Practice**
 - **Teacher-Paraeducator Teams: Strategies and Systems to Improve Student Outcomes**
- >>Roadblocks to Effective District, Family, and Community Collaboration**
- >>Call to Action on Assessing and Mitigating Bias in Artificial Intelligence Applications for Mental Health**
- >>Artificial intelligence in mental health research: New WHO study**
- >>How AI could expand and improve access to mental health treatment**
- >>Enhancing mental health with Artificial Intelligence: Current trends-future prospects**
- >>The Mental Illness Self-Labeling**

A Few Upcoming Webinars

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

6/18 Catalyzing community networks
6/18 Recognizing emotional stress in youth
6/18 Engaging and retaining coalition partners /
6/18 From managing problems to promoting resilience
6/24 Nurturing the whole child
6/25 Sustaining progress
6/25 Rethinking attendance: belonging and connections
6/26 Weaving prevention into community life
7/9 Building social connections
7/16 Leveraging CDC's Mental Health Action Guide
7/17 Advocacy, ethics, and sustainability in prevention
7/29 Adolescent substance abuse prevention /
7/30 Conflict management and problem solving
8/5 Harnessing the power of anxiety
8/6 Student Connectedness Fosters Attendance and Engagement
8/20 Classroom participation and engagement
8/21 Making the case for prevention
9/18 The power of emotion regulation to drive k12 wellbeing
9/24 Family Engagement is the Foundation for Attendance and Learning

How Learning Happens (Edutopia's updated series of videos explores how educators can guide all students to become productive and engaged learners.

Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth

***The school year has ended,
why aren't you happy?***



***I left before I had a chance
to tell my teacher how much
I liked her.***

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

The work of the **National Initiative for Transforming Student/Learning Supports** emphasizes that:

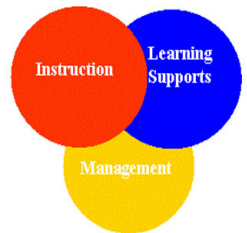
Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to promoting whole child development, advancing social justice, and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.

Our research indicates that transforming student/learning supports involves

- >moving school improvement policy from a 2 to a 3 component framework and
- >unifying and developing student/learning supports into a comprehensive and equitable intervention system

See:

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



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/>)