

(6/19/24) **This continuing education resource is from the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

## Featured

**>Can unnecessary student mental health referrals be reduced?**

Also for discussion:

**>Increasing Concern About the Complexity of Attendance Problems**

**>Absenteeism: Yet Another Reason for Transforming Student/Learning Supports**

And, as always: **Links to a few other resources relevant to continuing education**

**For discussion and interchange:**

**>Can unnecessary student mental health referrals be reduced?**

Our Center recently commented:

“Many students are having problems academically (reading, math), but most of us don’t think the first step at schools should be to refer all of them for special education!

So why is it that when students are having problems with feelings (e.g., feeling sad, lonely), too often the first thought is that they need a referral for mental health services?

Is over diagnosing, labeling, and referring students to mental health treatment really the only option?...”

In response, a colleague emailed the following comment:

“...you all may retire when the referral process for interventions for mental health services are as stringent as the Intervention Assistance process for academics in Houston Independent School District ... From the time they started the Intervention Assistance process for academic referrals, that protocol became refined district-wide in Houston ISD.”

From the **HISD website**:

“An Intervention Assistance Team is a team of professional educators with diverse training and experience who convene to discuss and initiate interventions for students in need of assistance and individualized services. It is a problem-solving group whose purpose is to assist teachers, parents, and others with intervention strategies for dealing with the learning needs and behavior problems of students....

The Intervention Assistance Team is established to systematically identify instructional recommendations for students having learning difficulties and behavioral or other concerns. The IAT should consider all support services available, such as tutorials, acceleration, compensatory and other services. The IAT may assist the teacher with instructional strategies or may make program and/or placement recommendations....

The primary focus of the Intervention Process is the identification and consideration of educational opportunities in the general classroom setting that may resolve a student’s academic, social, emotional, communication, and/or behavioral problem(s). ...”

For more on this concern, see our Center resources

- >[Minimizing Referrals Out of the Classroom](#)
- >[Learning Supports: Enabling Learning in the Classroom](#)
- >[Prereferral Interventions](#)
- >[Promoting Mental Health and Preventing Problems at School](#)
- >[Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change](#)

***What processes do your local schools use to enhance “opportunities in the general classroom setting” before considering referral for mental health interventions?***

Send responses for sharing with the community of practice to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

***For discussion and interchange:***

***>Increasing Concern About the Complexity of Attendance Problems***

Here’s a sample of some recent articles on the topic

From: [Systematic Review of Interventions with Some School Involvement for School Refusal in High School–Age Adolescents](#)

“...One type of school attendance problem is school refusal, defined as a student-motivated refusal to attend school and/or difficulty remaining in class due to emotional distress about attending school.... The role of schools in intervening at the early onset of symptoms related to school refusal is critical given the long-term deleterious impact of psychosocial issues later in adulthood.

School refusal is a complex problem that can stem from individual and contextual factors and that requires a “multitiered systems of support” framework.

>Individual factors related to school refusal range from psychiatric conditions including separation, generalized, and simple or social anxiety to student learning processes and mastery/performance goals to self-esteem

>Contextual factors range from family involvement to environment (e.g., school). ...

With school personnel often the first to identify concerns related to school refusal, understanding the details of their role, best practices to provide services, and how to partner with them is important because early identification of school refusal may prevent negative consequences, such as dropout. School factors, such as peer relationships, teacher–student rapport, and academic failure may be related to school refusal regardless of individual and family risk factors.

Interventions that include schools are generally effective in areas of anxiety and positive youth development among other outcomes.... It is critical to understand effective aspects of school involvement on how to provide services to address school refusal and how to best partner with school personnel....

Strategies delivered using multitiered systems of support (i.e., evidence-based approaches that vary depending on student need) must be considered to address school refusal. Examples include improving school climate to enhance belonging; a schoolwide social and emotional learning approach; in-school personnel training in mental health literacy and providing aligned accommodations; approaches in trauma-informed care; and coordination of care for the child, family, school, and community.... Better connecting sociological systems (e.g., the child–family–school–community system) are key to providing an effective and comprehensive approach....”

From: **Chronically absent... school struggles to get kids to school to learn**

“Making sure students are in the classroom where they can learn is an ongoing battle parents and school officials fight every day.... In Hobbs Municipal Schools (NM), students miss an average of 17 days per year... The greatest rates of absenteeism in Hobbs Schools are at opposite ends of the educational spectrum. Kindergarteners and high school seniors chronically have the worst attendance record across all the grades.

In 2019, a new law called Attendance for Success did away with truancy officers... To replace truancy officers and truancy court, Hobbs School instituted a group that counsels parents and students on the importance of being in school and how to break down barriers to regular attendance... These Parent Attendance Liaisons, “bring about a different discussion and different process on how we deal with kids and their families. “We’re there to assist, suggest, help to determine what’s going on, why children aren’t coming to school. What resources are there for that family. What can we do to help them come back to school.” ” said one liaison....

Today, HMS uses a four-tiered system to address absenteeism.

>It starts with contacting the parent or guardian of students who are absent less than 5 percent of the time, informing them their children weren’t in school.

>For those absent 5 percent to 9.99 percent, the school schedules a phone conference with parents and students.

>At 10 percent and more, there’s an in-person conference where staff discuss interventions and strategies with the family and a school attendance team and the campus principal may be involved.

>Only with the worse offenders, students missing 20 percent of school or more, can officials refer the student and family to Juvenile Probation and to a specialist from the state Children, Youth and Family Department....

And some schools host special days for parents to come into the classroom for arts and crafts events or to watch movies with their kids to entice parents to become more involved in addressing the attendance issues.

But barriers still remain, particularly at the elementary level, where transportation seems to be the biggest issue. With the youngest students who can’t walk to school alone, if a parent’s car has a flat and they don’t have the money to get it fixed, that makes it difficult for them to get to school. “Another one is clean clothes. We have parents call and say they don’t have the money to buy new clothes. We also have parents who are off work one day a week and have to keep the kids home with them,” said a liaison.

To address those concerns, the Parent Attendance Liaisons are working with the local United Way of Lea County to put parents in touch with local non-profits who can help with car repairs, clothing and more to break down those barriers and encourage parents to get their kids to school...

And there are still parents out there who got used to their children learning from home during the school shutdown implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and still insist that’s a viable option when their students aren’t in school for whatever reason. Breaking down that belief is a big part of the mindset change school officials say is necessary to even start to curb the absenteeism issue....”

From: **Why Chronic Absenteeism is a Budget Problem, Too**

Chronic absenteeism skyrocketed during the pandemic, creating headaches for teachers and school administrators eager to bring students back to regular classroom routines. But for many schools, chronic absenteeism is a source of financial strain as well.

For schools in six states, which collectively enroll more than 13 million of the nation’s 50 million public school students, lower attendance translates to less funding from the state....

Beyond the immediate fiscal impacts, students who are chronically absent are likely to struggle academically, which means schools need more resources to serve them. And schools with a large number of chronically absent students may have lower test scores that dent the district’s reputation and discourage families from enrolling in the future.

All these issues are arising at the same time as many districts across the country are already experiencing a downward trend in enrollment, brought on largely by lower birthrates as well as growing interest in private and homeschool options, and a phenomenon of thousands of missing children that is still puzzling researchers....”

**Absenteeism:  
Yet Another Reason for Transforming Student/Learning Supports**

Given the variety of factors that play a role in school attendance problems, it is essential to avoid lumping all youngsters together. For example, some truancy is reactive and some is proactive, and the underlying motivation for not coming to school can vary considerably in both cases.

Ideas for developing more sophisticated approaches to improving attendance can be adapted from current efforts. But, given the complexity of the problem, policy and practice must evolve so schools, families, and communities are working together to develop more comprehensive, multi-faceted, and integrated solutions. Focusing only on “What’s wrong with those kids!” often is tantamount to blaming the victim and contributes to policies and practices that are not making significant inroads

From the broad perspective of addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students and families, the nature and scope of school attendance problems provide another indication that moving in new directions for providing student and learning supports is essential. Expanded school improvement policy is necessary to broaden efforts for prevention and for intervening as early as feasible after problems are noted. And as the National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports stresses, efforts to reduce school absences need to be embedded into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports that weaves together school and community resources.

For more on this, see the following resources from our Center:

- >**School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies & Practices Going in the Right Direction?**
- >**About Policy and Practice Trends for Reducing Truancy**
  - >**School Attendance: Focusing on Engagement and Re-engagement**
  - >**Absenteeism: Beyond Reporting and Beyond Another Special Initiative**
  - >**Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions**

From other Sources:

- >**Reengaging Students to Support Everyday Attendance**
- >**How to Improve Your School’s Response to Chronic Absenteeism**
- >**Finding Support & Significance at School- Program Evaluation of a Chronic Absenteeism Reduction Initiative**

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**Juneteenth: Teaching outside the textbooks**  
<https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/juneteenth/>  
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**>Links to a few other relevant shared resources**

**Perceptions of the Teacher-Student Relationship Climate and the Development of Academic Motivation in High School**

**Social support and end-of-semester depression, burnout, and adjustment in students making the transition to university**

**Resources on how to support LGBTQ+ children and teens from Child Mind Institute**

**Schools fear job cuts as emergency pandemic funding runs out**

**Districts Struggle to Find the Least Harmful Cuts as Budgets Shrink**

**Fiscal Cliff Threatens Student/Learning Supports:It's Time to Braid and Rethink Resource Use**

**A Few Upcoming Webinars**

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

6/20 AI in schools: promises and pitfalls

6/20 Innovative special education

6/26 Accelerating English Learner Success

7/11 Managing conflict on interdisciplinary teams

7/11 Enhancing School Safety Using Behavioral Threat Assessment (part three)

7/18 Culturally informed crisis support

7/23 Stress management and resiliency training

7/25 Organizational commitment to a culture of care

8/13 Administrator Basics for Supporting English Learners with Disabilities /

8/20 Welcoming students through transitions /

8/22 Compassionate leadership

***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**

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

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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](mailto: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](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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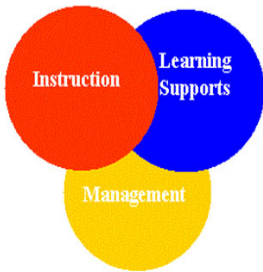
Through the **National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports**, our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

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 guide:

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

Send all info and requests to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)



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**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](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.**

**THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER**

Who Are We? Recently renamed the Center for MH in Schools and Student/Learning Supports, our national Center was established in 1995 under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project (which was established in 1986). We are part of the Department of Psychology at UCLA. The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor.