Addressing Barriers to Learning

New ways to think . . .
Better ways to link

Mental Health in Schools + Program and Policy Analysis
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[Note: Considerable controversy surrounds discussion of a mayor's role in public education. From a policy perspective, however, it is essential that every mayor help improve schools. And, like everyone else, we have some suggestions about what needs to be done. So here is a letter to our mayor and yours.]

Open letter

To the Mayor

Dear Mayor,

If you really want to help close the achievement gap and reduce dropout rates, you will have to directly zero-in on matters that are keeping too many students from connecting effectively with good instruction.

Good instruction, of course, is essential! It's a truism that schools continuously need to improve the quality of teaching. And, a logical role for you in this is to contribute to efforts to enhance the recruitment, preparation, ongoing capacity building, and retention of good teachers.

But, as you know, better instruction alone cannot ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Indeed, focusing *mainly* on improving instruction is a recipe for maintaining a very unsatisfactory status quo for too many students in urban schools and in poor rural areas. So, focusing on instruction is not where you can make your greatest contribution.

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You are in a unique position to help develop policy and practice to improve how schools *address barriers to learning and teaching.*

This is a concern that has had so little attention that it can only be described as grossly *marginalized* in policy and practice. As a result, there continues to be an amazing disconnect between the rhetoric and the reality of leaving no child behind.

The failure of policy is manifested in the gaps in school improvement planning and in the token and often poorly conceived initiatives for linking community resources to schools. All this is clear from analyses of what schools are currently doing (see attached list of references).

Most school districts offer a range of programs and services oriented to student needs and problems. Some are provided throughout a school district, others are carried out at or linked to targeted schools. Some are owned and operated by schools; some are from community agencies. The interventions may be for all students in a school, for those in specified grades, for those identified as "at risk," and/or for those in need of compensatory or special education. Looked at as a whole, a considerable amount of activity is taking place and substantial resources are being expended. But, it is widely recognized that the whole enterprise is not well conceived, practices are fragmented to the point of dysfunction, and school planners continue to treat the work as nonessential.

Into the mix comes the good offices of the Mayor.

For various reasons, you may be tempted to focus narrowly on specific matters such as parent involvement, school safety, mentoring, and coordination of services. These types of efforts often are referred to as low-hanging fruit by politicians looking to show they are "doing something." Unfortunately, such a piecemeal and

ad hoc approach tends to increase the widespread problems of fragmentation, inappropriate redundancy, and counterproductive competition for resources. In turn, this can exacerbate, rather than reduce the marginalization of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and can make a mockery out of stated commitments to close the achievement gap and reduce dropout rates.

Instead of tinkering around the edges, you should focus on the big picture and the central policy question:

> *How can school and community resources be braided together to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive systemic approach for addressing barriers to learning and development*?

And in this respect, it is important to remember that you are the mayor of the entire community – not just a leader of publicly funded service agencies. So, you need to lead the way in coalescing and focusing *all the resources* in the community that have overlapping missions and concerns about ensuring children and adolescents have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and in adult life.

The Figure on the next page highlights aspects of such an approach in terms of a public health continuum. The illustrated continuum encompasses efforts to enable academic, social, emotional, and physical development and address learning, behavior, and emotional problems at every school. As noted, most schools have some programs and services that fit along the entire continuum. However, the tendency to focus mostly on the most severe problems has skewed things so that too little is done to prevent and intervene early after the onset of a problem. The result has been characterized as a "waiting for failure" approach.

Policy that helps schools and communities move forward in developing the full continuum is the only way to stem the tide of students who are referred for learning, behavior, and emotional problems and who eventually dropout or are pushed out of school.

Such policy must effectively establish a *comprehensive intervention framework* that can be used to map, analyze, and set priorities. It must call for *rethinking infrastructure* so that there is leadership and mechanisms for building a system of learning supports at every school and for connecting school and community resources. And, it must provide guidance for the difficulties inherent in facilitating major *systemic changes*.

The key then is to end the policy marginalization of direct efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching.

In doing so, you will have taken great strides toward ending the fragmentation of current practices and toward establishing a unified and fully integrated system of learning supports.

Clearly, you will want to work closely with the school board and the superintendent to accomplish this. In addition, you will want to consider working with other Mayors in the state on legislation so that there are statewide standards and accountability indicators related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

And the coming year will see the U.S. Congress discussing the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. Your voice along with other Mayors across the country is needed to focus Congress on what amounts to a fundamental gap in the Elementary and Secondary Education law.

In moving forward, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. See, for example, the following comprehensive approaches formulated at the state level in Hawai`i, California, and Iowa:

>Hawai`i Department of Education (2004). *Comprehensive Student Support System.* Overview online at: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/hawaii.pdf

>California's Proposed Legislation (2005). *Comprehensive Pupil Learning Support System.* Online at: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ab171(1-20-05).pdf

>Iowa State Department of Education working with the Iowa Collaborative for Youth Development (2005). *Fulfilling a Promise, Investing in Iowa's Future: Enhancing Iowa's Systems of Supports for Learning & Development*. Brief Summary online at: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/iowabriefsummaryofdesign.pdf Full document online at: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/iowasystemofsupport.pdf

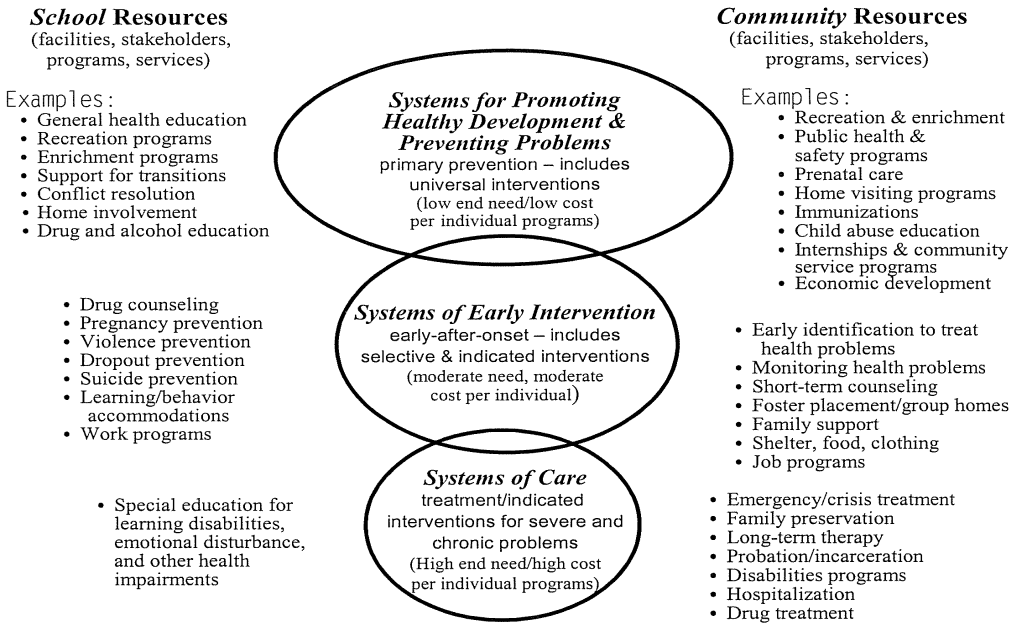
Well, that's it for now. We sincerely thank you for playing a role in the best interests of students and their schools.

And, if you want us to help as you move forward with the agenda for school improvement, we are ready to do our part.

Interconnected Systems for Meeting the Needs of All Students

Providing a *CONTINUUM OF SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PROGRAMS & SERVICES*

Ensuring use of the *LEAST INTERVENTION NEEDED*



Systemic collaboration is essential to establish interprogram connections on a daily basis and over time to ensure seamless intervention within each system and among *systems for promoting healthy development and preventing problems, systems* of *early intervention*, and *systems of care*.

Such collaboration involves horizontal and vertical restructuring of programs and services
(a) within jurisdictions, school districts, and community agencies (e.g., among departments, divisions, units, schools, clusters of schools)
(b) between jurisdictions, school and community agencies, public and private sectors; among schools; among community agencies

If the Mayor's staff wants to review some references, here are a few from our work:

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2002). So you want higher achievement test scores? It's time to rethink learning supports. *The State Education Standard, Autumn*, 52-56. (Journal of the National Association of State Boards of Education)

Adelman, H. S. & Taylor, L (2006). School and community collaboration to promote a safe learning environment. *The State Education Standard*, *7*, 38-43. (Journal of the National Association of State Boards of Education)

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006a). *The school leader's guide to student learning supports: New directions for addressing barriers to learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006b). *The implementation guide to student learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide: New directions for addressing barriers to learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2005). *School improvement planning: What's missing?* Los Angeles: Author at UCLA . http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schoolimprovement/whatsmissing.pdf

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2005). *Addressing what's missing in school improvement planning: Expanding standards and accountability to encompass an enabling or learning supports component.* Los Angeles: Author at UCLA http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enabling/standards.pdf

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2005). *Another initiative? Where does it fit? A unifying framework and an integrated infrastructure for schools to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infrastructure/anotherinitiative-exec.pdf

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2006). *Legislation in Need of Improvement: Reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act to Better Address Barriers to Learning*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/nclbra.pdf report.

Center News

New Report Raises Concerns About the *No Child Left Behind Act's* Congressional Hearings

Anticipating Congressional reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, the Center has analyzed preliminary hearings and related reports and proposals. The specific focus is on whether the reauthorization *process* is likely to include a substantive discussion of what is needed to enable all children to have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

The analysis finds:

> *there has been no major discussion of the need for a systematic focus on learning supports to address barriers to learning, development, and teaching.*

Given this, the report cautions that this matter is unlikely to be on the agenda in upcoming Congressional hearings unless remarkable efforts are made between now and then. See *Legislation in Need of Improvement: Reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act to Better Address Barriers to Learning.* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/nclbra.pdf

Added to Series on Enabling Systemic Change

Systemic Change and Empirically-Supported Practices: The Implementation Problem

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/implementation%20problem.pdf

Note: This is part of an ongoing series of Info Resources on "Diffusion of Innovations and Science-Based Practices to Address Barriers to Learning & Improve Schools." Developed so far and online are:

- Brief Overview of Major Concepts from E.M. Rogers' Work on Diffusion of Innovations
- Brief Overview of Malcolm Gladwell's Concept of the Tipping Point
- Some Key Terms Related to Enabling System Change
- Systemic Change for School Improvement
- Change Agent Mechanisms for School Improvement: Infrastructure not Individuals
- System Change and Empirically-Supported Practices: The Implementation Problem
- Policy Implications for Advancing Systemic Change for School Improvement
- Some Key References Related to Enabling System Change

Want resources? Need technical assistance? We can help!

Contact us at: E-mail: **smhp@ucla.edu** Ph: **(310) 825-3634** Toll Free Ph: **(866) 846-4843**
Write: Center for Mental Health in Schools, Department of Psychology, UCLA
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563

Or use our website: **http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu**

If you're not receiving our monthly electronic newsletter (ENEWS), send an E-mail request to:
smhp@ucla.edu
or subscribe online @ – http://lists.ucla.edu/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/mentalhealth-L

For access to the latest Center developed resources, go to:
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsnew/JustPutOnline.htm http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsnew/otherresources.htm

FOR THOSE WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS, ALL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE BY CONTACTING THE CENTER.

Exchange info on MH practices in school and network with colleagues across the country by joining (1) the **Weekly Listserv for School MH Practitioners** and/or (2) **the Center's Consultation Cadre**. Sign up by email at smhp@ucla.edu or by phone – Toll Free (866) 846-4843**.**

Also, phone, fax, E-mail, or snail mail us if you want to submit feedback, request resources, or send comments and info for us to circulate.

Update on the *National Initiative: New Directions for Student Support*

(1) Center staff have been updating the resource document: *Where's It Happening? Examples of New Directions for Student Support & Lessons Learned* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/wheresithappening.htm

This contains descriptions of trailblazing efforts at school, district, state, and national levels. Includes early versions of major initiatives that continue to evolve and pilots that were not sustained.

> *If you have been involved in developing a comprehensive New Directions for Student Support approach, please send us the information so that we can include it.* Contact: ltaylor@ucla.edu
>
> Also, let us know if you are associated with a district that is ready to move forward and want to explore ways we might be able to help.

(2) Next summits and leadership institutes are currently being planned. Under discussion is a Leadership Institute for Hawaii and Summits in several large urban centers.

Let's us hear where else we should be considering.

(3) And, remember that the Center continues to provide free and ready online access to a range of documents to support moving in new directions and a variety of resources for enhancing learning supports.

For example, see the online tool kit – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm

[Note: As another response to the frequently asked question about costs, the Center has added a brief on: *What will it Cost? - No New Dollars!*]

Interested in learning more about this? Go to http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ndannouncement.htm and/or contact the Center.

Center Staff:
Howard Adelman, Co-Director
Linda Taylor, Co-Director
Perry Nelson, Coordinator
. . . and a host of graduate and undergraduate students

I can please only one person a day. Today is not your day. Tomorrow isn't looking good for you either.

A Look at Some Data

In an article entitled *A New Era of School Reform: Going Where the Research Takes us* (2005), Robert Marzano presents data on factors most associated with student achievement. He reports that:

- school variables account for 6.7% of the variance (e.g., opportunity to learn, time, monitoring, pressure to achieve, parent involvement, school climate, leadership, cooperation)
- teacher variables account for 13.3% (e.g., instruction, curriculum design, classroom management)
- student variables account for 80.0% (e.g., home atmosphere, prior knowledge, aptitude, interest)

(http://www.mcrel.org/topics/SchoolImprovement/products/81/)

As Marzano notes: "... there are many differences among families that can potentially affect the academic achievement of the children in addition to differences in education, occupational level, and income of the parents. ... some low-SES parents ... are very good at creating a home atmosphere that fosters learning ..., [some] are not." He also stresses that the more interest students have in something, the more energy and attention they put into it and the more they learn. Interest, of course, correlates significantly with student feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to others.

From our perspective, all this underscores the importance of ensuring that school improvement efforts fully integrate a focus on addressing barriers to learning in ways that positively enhance student intrinsic motivation and capabilities for learning at school. This means providing the type of learning supports that enable those who are not doing well to (a) get around factors that interfere with learning at school and (b) engage (and re-engage) effectively in classroom instruction.

Policy &Practice
Reducing School Attendance Problems

Student absences jeopardize student and school success. Academic achievement scores are correlated with school attendance. Students who are not at school cannot receive instruction. Excessive school absence is a precursor of school dropout and is related to juvenile delinquency. And, because average daily attendance rates are a common determiner of school funding, absences mean that schools have less resources to do the job.

Given all this, it is not surprising that reducing school absences is a top priority for many schools.

Because the matter is so fundamental, the Center recently compiled a policy and practice analysis brief entitled: *School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies & Practices Going in the Right Direction?* (online at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Briefs/school attendance problems.pdf).

That brief provides a quick overview of issues related to school attendance problems and then frames directions for policy and practice. As with all Center briefs, it is meant to highlight the topic and provide a tool for discussion by school policy makers and practitioners. In particular, it explores matters such as: How important is attendance to school success? Why do students skip school? What do schools do when students have attendance problems? How effective are existing policies and practices? What seems to work?

The following excerpt from the brief is the section discussing practices for reducing school attendance problems.

Toward Better Policies and Practices:
The Key is Helping Students Feel Connected

Schools, districts, and states have developed policies regarding attendance and have delineated interventions.
In general, district policies and practices related to attendance problems focus mostly on truancy.

The tendency is toward increasingly harsh punishments for unexcused absences. And, this works against efforts to take into account the various underlying causes of attendance problems and the range of prevention, early intervention, and ongoing support that might more effectively address the problems.

What are the Numbers?

Data from the Condition of Education 2000-2006 indicate the following data for elementary and middle schools:

> *"In 2005, 19 percent of 4th-graders and 20 percent of 8th-graders reported missing 3 or more days of school in the previous month. . . . In both grades, students were more likely to miss 3 or more days of school if a language other than English was spoken at home, if the student was an English language learner, or if the student was classified as having a disability. Additionally, in both grades, a lower percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students and a higher percentage of American Indian students reported missing 3 or more days of school than their peers in other racial and ethnic groups. Students who were eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch were more likely to be absent from school for 3 or more days than those who were not eligible. This pattern among students eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch has remained stable for both 4th- and 8th-grade students from 1998 and 2005."*

The National Center for Education Statistics indicates the follow data for 10th graders during the first half of the 2002-2003 school year:

14.3% of all students missed no days
35.4% missed 1-2 days
33.0% missed 3-6 days
17.2% missed more than 6 days

Interventions usually are reactive but may include (1) incentives & disincentives, (2) efforts to provide supports to promote attendance, and (3) coordinated efforts involving school and community agencies, including juvenile justice. There is a clear need for greater attention to prevention and intervening as early as feasible after attendance problems are noted. There is a need for a comprehensive, multifaceted and integrated approach that weaves together the resources of school and community.

As the folks at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory have noted in discussing dropouts:

"Children at-risk need to be identified at a young age (as early as preschool) so that early sustained intervention can be applied. Success in the elementary grades diminishes the possibility of later dropping out in high school. The key ... is helping youth to overcome their sense of disconnectedness. It is imperative not to isolate or alienate any students from the school. Not all factors related to dropout [and truancy] reduction are school controllable, and solutions to the complex problem[s] of dropouts [and truancy] cannot be achieved by the schools alone. ... It requires resources that go beyond the school, and solutions require a team approach – the combined efforts of students, parents, teachers, administrators, community-based organizations, and business, as well as the federal, state, and local governments."

What the School Can Do

Addressing lack of connectedness with school and schooling is a growing problem and requires enhancing

- supports for transitions
- interventions to re-engage students in schooling

Supports for Transitions

Periods of transition can increase school attendance problems. Examples of such periods are:

>entry into school at kindergarten
>moving to a new home and into a new school
>beginning a new year in a new class
>articulation from elementary to middle or middle to high school
>re-entry from suspensions, expulsions, juvenile detention
>inclusion from special to regular education

Every school needs transition supports as part of efforts to address attendance problems. And, student support staff can play a major role in planning and developing such programs.

During transitions, potent interventions are needed to ensure students are welcomed and connected with ongoing social supports. Beyond that, individual assistance must be provided quickly to students having transition problems. Practices can be grouped into three categories:

- *Broad-band practices* (often designated universal approaches) to ensure support is in place for each identified transition where intervention is indicated.
- *Enhanced personalization* to accommodate minor differences (watching for individuals having minor adjustment problems and providing just a bit more personalized assistance, e.g., aid in overcoming minor barriers to successful adjustment, a few more options to enable effective functioning and make participation more attractive).
- *Special assistance* (identifying as early as feasible those who have not made an effective adjustment or who remain uninvolved, those displaying an intense lack of interest or negative attitudes, and/or lack of capability). This facet of the work requires continued use of personalized approaches, as well as intensive outreach and special assistance.

A key facet of all this involves careful monitoring that (a) identifies students who are having difficulty making a transition and (b) ensures the problem is corrected.

Connecting with Students Who Are Becoming Disengaged

A second major arena in need of attention is that of designing classroom and school-wide programs to re-engage students who have become actively disengaged from schooling. This is one of the most neglected aspects in school improvement planning.

For motivated students, facilitating learning is a fairly straightforward matter and fits well with school improvements that primarily emphasize enhancing instructional practices. The focus is on helping establish ways for students who are motivationally ready and able to achieve and, in the process, maintains and hopefully enhances their motivation. The process involves knowing when, how, and what to teach and also knowing when and how to structure the situation so students can learn on their own.

Unfortunately, students who manifest learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems often have developed extremely negative perceptions of teachers, programs, and school in general. This can lead to active disengagement from classroom instruction and school. Where the problem is widespread, it needs to be acknowledged and established as a high priority for school improvement. School support staff and teachers can then collaborate in developing a major initiative for re-engaging those who have become disengaged and for reversing conditions that led to the problem. (See Exhibit on next page for general strategies.)

Exhibit – General Strategies for Working with Disengaged Students

Given appropriate commitment in policy and practice, there are four general strategies we recommend for those who are working with disengaged students. These are highlighted below; reference to resources for pursuing these matters are listed at the end of this article.

- ***Clarifying 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 the negative perceptions of disengaged students and prevent others from developing such perceptions.

- ***Reframing school learning*** – In the case of those who have become disengaged, it is unlikely that they will be open to schooling that looks like "the same old thing." Major changes in approach are required if they are even to perceive that anything has changed. Minimally, exceptional efforts must be made to have 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 procedures can be effective – especially those designed to help correct specific problems.

- ***Renegotiating 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.

  In all this, it is essential to remember that effective decision making is a basic skill (as fundamental as the three Rs). Thus, if a student does not do well initially, this is not a reason to move away from student involvement in decision making. Rather, it is an assessment of a need and a reason to use the process not only for motivational purposes but also to improve this basic skill.

- ***Reestablishing and maintaining an appropriate working relationship*** (e.g., through creating a sense of trust, open communication, providing support and direction as needed) – In applying the above strategies, maintaining reengagement and preventing disengagement requires a continuous focus on:

  > ensuring that the processes and content minimize threats to feelings of competence, selfdetermination, and relatedness to valued others, maximize such feelings, and highlight accomplishments (included here is an emphasis on a school enhancing public perception that it is a welcoming, caring, safe, and just institution)

  > guiding motivated practice (e.g., providing opportunities for meaningful applications and clarifying ways to organize practice)

  > providing continuous information on learning and performance

  > providing 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)

Conclusions

It is often said that school attendance is both a right and a responsibility. Certainly, those of us who value education can readily agree with this. And, for students who are absent from school because of circumstances over which they have no control, society has to play a greater role in addressing barriers that are abridging their rights.

However, there are some students who experience school as not a good fit and, therefore, see compulsory education not as a right or a responsibility but as an infringement on their self-determination. From a psychological perspective, the problem becomes motivational (e.g., avoidance motivation, reactance). So, addressing the problem requires strategies that are more psychologically sophisticated than those used by most schools and the society in general. Focusing only on "What's wrong with that kid!" often is tantamount to blaming the victim and leads to ineffective policies and practices.

Given the variety of factors that play a role in school attendance problems, it is essential to avoid lumping all youngsters together. This is particularly important when the problem is truancy. Some truancy is *reactive* and some is *proactive*, which means the underlying motivation differs considerably and so should the interventions.

It seems evident that school attendance problems provide another indication of the need and opportunity for moving forward in new directions for student support. The complexity of such problems demands comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approaches. Policy and practice must now evolve so schools, families, and communities are working together to develop what is needed.

Resources

Transitions: Turning Risks into Opportunities for Student Support –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transitions/transitions.pdf

Easing the Impact of Student Mobility: Welcoming & Social Support –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/specres.htm#newsletterarticles

What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/WELMEET/welmeetcomplete.pdf

Re-engaging Students in Learning at School –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Newsletter/winter02.pdf

Classroom Changes to Enhance and Re-engage Students in Learning –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/classchange_tt/classroomfull.pdf

Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom-Focused Enabling – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/contedu/cfe.pdf

Also see the Center Online Clearinghouse Quick Find on:
>*Support for Transitions* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm
>*Motivation* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm

All the above and more are synthesized in two books prepared by the Center co-directors (Adelman & Taylor) and published in 2006 by Corwin Press:
>*The school leader's guide to student learning supports: New directions for addressing barriers to learning.*
>*The implementation guide to student learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide: New directions for addressing barriers to learning*.

Ideas into Practice

We Used to Call it a Resource Coordinating Team!

Most schools have teams that focus on individual students identified as having problems. Among the many terms used for these teams are Student Support Team and Student Assistance Team. Such teams focus on such functions as referral, triage, and care monitoring or management.

In the late 1980s, we began pilot testing a new school infrastructure mechanism designed to ensure that schools paid more systematic attention to how they used resources for addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development. The need for such a *school-based mechanism* was to ensure there was a formal group at the school with responsibility for guiding how resources were deployed and redeployed in developing a comprehensive approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

Early in our work, we called the mechanism a Resource Coordinating Team. This was because one of its first tasks was to coordinate resources. But, the term doesn't fully capture the mechanism's aims and functions. (Nevertheless, our general use of the term resulted in it being used in various places as they initially established such a team.)

It is clear, however, that "coordination" is too limited a descriptor for a mechanism that has a much broader role to play. So, as others across the country have adopted the term *Learning Supports Resource Team* we have made the change as well.

Whatever it is called, it is the role and functions that are important. The team focuses specifically on ensuring appropriate use of existing resources and enhancing efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching. Such a team works with a school's administrators to expand on-site leadership for comprehensively addressing these matters. And, in doing so, it ensures all such activity is coordinated and increasingly integrated into an enabling or learning supports component.

Properly constituted and operated, the mechanism can reduce marginalization and fragmentation and enhance cost-efficacy of learner support activity. For this to happen, it must be fully integrated as a primary component of school improvement planning.

More specifically, the team's work provides ways to (a) make prioritized decisions about resource allocation, (b) maximize systematic and integrated planning, maintenance, and evaluation of learning supports (enabling) activity, (c) outreach to create formal working relationships with community resources to bring some to a school and establish special linkages with others, and (d) upgrade and modernize the enabling or learning supports component to reflect the best intervention thinking and use of technology.

Examples of the team's major functions are:

>aggregating data across students and from teachers to analyze school needs
>mapping resources in school and community
>analyzing resources
>identifying the most pressing program development needs at the school
>coordinating and integrating school resources and connecting with community resources
>establishing priorities for strengthening programs and developing new ones
>planning and facilitating ways to strengthen and develop new programs and systems
>recommending how resources should be deployed and redeployed
>developing strategies for enhancing resources
>social "marketing"

Connecting school resource-oriented mechanisms across a cluster of schools (e.g., a feeder pattern) and at the district level provide oversight, leadership, resource development, ongoing support, and economies of scale. At each system level, the tasks require that staff adopt some new roles and functions and that parents, students, and other representatives from the community enhance their involvement. They also call for redeployment of existing resources, as well as finding new ones.

For more on this, see the Center report entitled:
Resource-Oriented Teams: Key Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Learning Supports
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf

##########

Until I worked with kids, I didn't realize:

>how much I didn't know
>how many were smarter than me
>how fast the world is changing
>how many are being left behind

Commentary

Science-based Practices: Yes, But ...

[Note: The following is excerpted from the Center Info Resource entitled: *Systemic Change and Empirically-Supported Practices: The Implementation Problem* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/implementation%20problem.pdf]

The ways in which "science-based" practices are reshaping public policy have raised a range of concerns and controversies. Few argue against the value of integrating the best available research with professional expertise – with due appreciation for consumer differences stemming from individual characteristics, culture, preferences, and so forth.

Concerns arise when decision makers use criteria that those with appropriate experience and expertise see as inadequate and inappropriate. A major concern is that the science-base for many practices has been developed under laboratory conditions, and this is no guarantee that it will produce the same outcomes when applied widely.

In effect, until researchers demonstrate that a prototype is effective under "real world" conditions, it is a promising not a proven practice. And, even then it must be determined whether it is a best practice.

Findings from laboratory studies are referred to as data on *efficacy*; findings from studies conducted under common conditions of daily practice are designated as data on *effectiveness***.** In both instances, concern about generalizability arises when studies have not included samples representing major subgroups with whom the practice is to be used. Another major concern is that certain interventions increasingly are officially prescribed and others are proscribed by policy makers and funders, and only those practitioners who adhere to official lists are sanctioned and rewarded. This is a particular concern in sectors where individual needs come into conflict with powerful social, political, and economic forces.

In response to the various concerns and controversies, some researchers have suggested that the heated reactions they encounter from some practitioners represent mindless resistance. They often interpret the difficulty of achieving prototype fidelity in clinics and schools as the result of practitioner's undermining the advance of science. It's a truism that not everyone is ready for major changes in their lives. At the same time, not all concerns raised about proposed changes are simply resistance.

For example, the following matters are often heard when efforts are made to introduce some evidence-based practices:

> "I don't believe their 'evidence-based' intervention is better than what I do; they need to do the research on what I do before they claim theirs is better."
>
> "That intervention is too narrow and specific to fit the problems I have to deal with."
>
> "We wanted to use the grant money to enhance the work we already are doing, but we've been told we have to use it to buy evidence-based programs that we think don't really fit our needs."
>
> "How do we know that if we adopt this evidence-based program we will get the results they got in their research."
>
> "We have so many things we have to do now, when are we going to have time to learn these new practices?"
>
> "They make it sound like I am doing bad things. Soon, they will be suggesting that we are incompetent and need to be fired."
>
> "I've heard that some of the highly touted science-based programs have been found not to work well when they are tried throughout a school district.?
>
> "I'm not taking the risk of giving up what I believe works until they prove their laboratory model does better than me out here in the real world."

The same statement may be motivated by a desire not to change or by a deep commitment to the best interests of agencies, schools, and the consumers they serve.

Controversies and concerns about what practices are appropriate and viable almost always are major contextual variables. Their impact must be addressed in efforts to diffuse empirically-supported practices, especially in settings that have well-established institutional cultures and organizational and operational infrastructures. We all must avoid the blame-game and appreciate the complexities of diffusing innovations and making major systemic changes. From such a vantage point, the focus shifts from "I'm right and they're wrong" to "Is this practice the right one for use here at this time?" and if there is resistance, the question is "What haven't I done to promote readiness for change?"

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Instead of being presented with stereotypes by age, sex, color, class, or religion, children must have the opportunity to learn that within each range, some people are loathsome and some are delightful.

Margaret Mead

No Child Left Behind – The football version

1. All teams must make the state playoffs and all MUST win the championship. If a team does not win the championship, they will be on probation until they are the champions, and coaches will be held accountable. If after two years they have not won the championship their footballs and equipment will be taken away until they do win the championship.
2. All players will be expected to have the same football skills at the same time even if they do not have the same conditions or opportunities to practice on their own. NO exceptions will be made for lack of interest in football, a desire to perform athletically, or genetic abilities or disabilities of themselves or their parents. All players will play football at a proficient level!
3. Talented players will be asked to workout on their own, without instruction. This is because the coaches will be using all their instructional time with the athletes who aren't interest in football, have limited athletic ability or whose parents don't like football.
4. Games will be played year round but statistics will only be kept in the 4th 8th and 11th game. It will create a New Age of Sports where every school is expected to have the same level of talent and all teams will reach the same minimum goals. If no team gets ahead, then no team gets left behind. If fans do not like this new law, they are encouraged to vote for vouchers and support private teams that can screen out the non-athletes and prevent their players from having to play with bad football players.

Sent to us by a colleague who indicated that "This is making the rounds in our school district."

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