



A Resource Aid for

Improving Teaching and Learning Supports by Addressing the Rhythm of a Year



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Preface

In developing a series of thematic resource aids reflecting the yearly rhythm of schools, our intent is to encourage school staff, especially student and learning supports personnel, to be proactive and timely in promoting a focus on some basic concerns that arise throughout the year.

The material is meant to be used as a basis for planning and implementing interventions. To circulate the material, we designed a website format for easy sharing among school staff. Through our Center outreach activities, we encourage such sharing to enhance awareness about cyclical school concerns and the need to address them.

For ease of access, a special section of our Center's website was created for these resources. They can be downloaded from the homepage (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>) by clicking on the icon labeled: *Ideas for Enhancing Support at your School: This Month*.

This packet is a hardcopy compilation of the examples of monthly themes. In looking them over, it will be evident that they can be "rearranged" to fit the rhythm of a particular school.

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Three overlapping concerns for work over the summer

- >Summer Learning
- >System Development
- >Staff Development

Introduction

Schools have a yearly rhythm – changing with the cycle and demands of the school calendar. Special concerns regularly arise throughout the year. With this in mind, school improvement plans need to ensure that such concerns are well-addressed.

Examples of Concerns Arising Over the Year

- Welcoming and integrating and ensuring good school adjustment
- Enhancing student engagement
- Addressing ongoing learning/behavior problems
- Minimizing stress reactions & preventing student and staff “burnout”
- Re-engaging disengaged students (as well as families and staff)
- Preparing students for transitions to the next grade and new school
- Preventing problems related to parties, proms, and graduation.

Clearly, every month, there are important opportunities for anticipating predictable problems and planning prevention and early intervention to minimize them. By pursuing such opportunities, schools enhance teachers’ ability to do their job well.

Therefore, as such basic concerns arise throughout the year, school staff need to be proactive and timely in promoting a schoolwide focus to address the concerns and minimize their impact on students, their families, and the staff at a school. Student support personnel, in particular, can play a major role in formulating and providing supports for implementing a *theme of the month* at schools throughout the district.

Given the limited time a school has for personnel development, focusing on a different theme each month engages all stakeholders as a community of learners. Emphasizing a theme encourages doing some reading, discussions with colleagues, learning about additional resources from our Center and elsewhere. All this helps build capacity and can help in developing learning supports into a comprehensive system.

By fully integrating a theme of the month into school improvement planning, schools increase the likelihood of enhancing equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school and for making schools better places for all who spend so much of their lives there.

To guide and support this facet of school improvement, the Center has developed monthly themes and compiled a set of aids and resource references related to each. These can be readily accessed at no cost by going to our Center’s website (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>) and clicking on the icon labeled: *Ideas for Enhancing Support at Your School: This Month*.

And the Center’s Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds provide a gateway to even more free resources related to topics about which school staff are concerned.

Month 1 Theme

Getting Off to a Good Start



A special focus for interventions this month is on:

- (1) Welcoming & Orienting**
- (2) Connecting Students and Families with Social Supports**
- (3) Enabling School Adjustment**

Activity to help focus staff discussion on this theme:

Encourage staff to explore:

How do we welcome and bring students and their families into our school and ensure they make a good adjustment over their first weeks?

Why Welcoming is So Important

Changing schools, changing grades – are among the many transition demands with which students regularly cope. Every transition can exacerbate problems or be used as a natural opportunity to promote positive learning and attitudes and reduce alienation.

Schools need to build their capacity to address transitions proactively and in the process to be guided by their goals for enhancing personal and social functioning. This requires school-wide and classroom-based intervention systems designed to enhance successful transitions and prevent transition problems. Examples of programs include school-wide and classroom specific activities for welcoming new arrivals (students, their families, staff) and rendering ongoing social support; counseling and articulation strategies to support grade-to-grade and school-to-school transitions and moves to and from special education, college, and post school living and work; and before and after-school and inter-session activities to enrich learning and provide recreation in a safe environment.

Anticipated overall outcomes are reduced alienation and enhanced motivation and increased involvement in school and learning activities. Over time, effective articulation programs help reduce school avoidance and dropouts, as well as enhancing the number who make successful transitions to higher education and post school living and work.

(1) Welcoming Strategies for All Students & Their Families

Starting a new school year can be scary. And it is not uncommon for students and parents to feel unwelcome at school. The problem may begin with their first contacts. Efforts to enhance welcoming and facilitate involvement must counter factors that make the setting uninviting and develop ways to make it attractive. Those concerned with school improvement and school climate must ensure a school has an effective welcoming program and ways to provide ongoing social support.

Some families are not sure how to interact with the school. Three ways to help them feel welcome and a part of things are to:

- ensure the Office Staff are provided with training and resources so they can create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere to everyone who enters the school*
- establish processes whereby teachers *invite a student and family to a Welcoming Conference* that helps clarify student and family interests and answers their questions
- provide workshops and follow-up assistance for teachers to help them establish welcoming procedures and materials.

And, because the emphasis is on *Welcoming*, any written material given out at this time specifically states WELCOME and is limited to simple orientation information. To the degree feasible, such material is made available in the various languages of those likely to enroll at the school.

All this is meant as a chance to get to know teachers and school and for teachers to facilitate positive connections between family and school such as helping the student and parents connect with a school activity in which they seem interested.

Like any other interventions, efforts to welcome and involve new students and families require institutional commitment, organization, and ongoing involvement. That is, the process must be school-owned, and there must be a mechanism dedicated to effective program planning, implementation, and long-term evolution.

*When a family comes to register, it is essential that there be a designated staff/volunteer to welcome and provide information (in primary languages). This includes information about needed documents (e.g., residence, immunizations) and how to access missing documentation. In registering a new student and family, someone needs to welcome and begin an orientation and tour, with initial introductions to teacher(s), principal, support staff, and others. This includes providing information about matters such as: (a) how the school runs each day, (b) special activities for parents and students, (c) community services they may find helpful, (d) parents who are ready to help them join in, (e) students ready to meet with new students to help them join in, and (f) how the family can help the child learn and do well at school.

The following are additional examples of prevention-oriented welcoming and orienting strategies for minimizing negative experiences and ensuring positive outreach.

Schoolwide

>FRONT DOOR: Set up a Welcoming Table (identified with a welcoming sign) at the front entrance to the school and recruit and train volunteers to meet and greet everyone who comes through the door.

>FRONT OFFICE: Work with the Office Staff to create ways to meet and greet strangers with a smile and an inviting atmosphere. Provide them with welcoming materials and information sheets regarding registration steps (with appropriate translations). Encourage the use of volunteers in the office so that there are sufficient resources to take the necessary time to greet and assist new students and families. It helps to have a designated registrar and even designated registration times.

>WELCOMING MATERIALS: Prepare a booklet that clearly says WELCOME and provides some helpful info about who's who at the school, what types of assistance are available to new students and families, and offers tips about how the school runs. (Avoid using this as a place to lay down the rules; that can be rather an uninviting first contact.) Prepare other materials to assist students and families in making the transition and connecting with ongoing activities.

>STUDENT GREETERS: Establish a Student Welcoming Club (perhaps the student council or leadership class can make this a project). These students can provide tours and some orientation (including initial introduction to key staff).

>FAMILY/VOLUNTEER GREETERS: Establish a General Welcoming Club of parents and/or volunteers who provide regular tours and orientations (including initial introduction to key staff). Develop a Welcoming Video available in the front office.

>WELCOMING BULLETIN BOARD: Dedicate a bulletin board (somewhere near the entrance to the school) that says WELCOME and includes such things as pictures of school staff, a diagram of the school and its facilities, pictures of students, information on tours and orientations, special meetings for new students, and so forth.

Classroom

>CLASSROOM GREETERS: Each teacher should have several students who are willing and able to greet newcomers who come to the classroom. Recent arrivals often are interested in welcoming the next set of new enrollees.

>CLASSROOM INTRODUCTION: Each teacher should have a plan to assist new students and families in making a smooth transition into the class. This includes ways to introduce the student to classmates as soon as the student arrives. (Some teachers may want to arrange with the office specified times for bringing a new student to the class.) An introductory Welcoming Conference should be conducted with the student and family as soon as feasible. A useful Welcoming aid is to present both the student and the family member with Welcoming Folders (or some other welcoming gift such as coupons from local businesses that have adopted the school).

(cont.)

>PEER BUDDIES: In addition to the classroom greeter, a teacher can have several students who are trained to be a special buddy to a new student for a couple of weeks (and hopefully thereafter). This can provide the type of social support that allows a new student to learn about the school culture and how to become involved in activities.

>FOLLOW-UP OUTREACH FROM ORGANIZED GROUPS: Establish a way for representatives of organized student and parent groups (including the PTSA) to make direct contact with new students and families to invite them to learn about activities and to assist them in joining in when they find activities that appeal to them.

>SUPPORT GROUPS: Offer groups designed to help new students and families learn about the community and the school and to allow them to express concerns and have them addressed. Such groups also allow them to connect with each other as another form of social support.

>ONGOING POSITIVE CONTACTS: Develop a variety of ways students and their families can feel an ongoing connection with the school and classroom (e.g., opportunities to volunteer help, positive feedback regarding participation, letters home that tell "all about what's happening").

Communications to Enhance Welcoming

A prime focus in addressing welcoming is on ensuring that most communications and interactions between the school and students and families convey a welcoming tone. This is conveyed through formal communications to students and families, procedures for reaching out to individuals, and informal interactions. Communications and invitations to students and their families can be done in two forms:

- general communications (e.g., oral and written communications when a new student registers, classroom announcements, mass distribution of flyers, newsletters)
- special, personalized contacts (e.g., personal conferences and notes from the teacher).

For those who are not responsive to general invitations, the next logical step is to extend special invitations and increase personalized contact. Special invitations are directed at designated individuals and are intended to overcome personal attitudinal barriers and can be used to elicit information about other persisting barriers.

(2) Connecting Students and Families with Social Supports

After welcoming, it is essential to connect students and their families with others who can provide ongoing social supports related to engagement at the school and in the community. (Attention should be paid to anyone who seems disconnected.)

Social supports are necessary to:

- (a) endorse and facilitate participation
- (b) account for cultural and individual diversity
- (c) provide social, emotional, and academic supports to improve participation skills
- (d) address barriers to learning and teaching and enable those with minimal skills to participate.

Examples of Interventions

Student Transition-in Phase

- Teacher introduces students to classmates and program
- Peer "buddy" is identified (to work with in class, go to nutrition and lunch with – at least for first 5 days)
- Designated students introduce and invite new students to out of class school activities

Parent Transition-in Phase

- Designated staff or volunteer (e.g., a parent) either meets with parents on registration day or contacts parent during next few days to discuss activities in which they might be interested
- Designated parent invites and introduces new parent to an activity in which the new parent has expressed interest or may find useful
- At first meeting attended, new parent is given a welcoming "gift" (e.g., calendar with school name; coupons donated by neighborhood merchants)

Student Becomes Involved in School Activities

Over first 3 weeks staff monitors student's involvement and acceptance. If necessary, designated students are asked to make additional efforts to help the student enter in and feel accepted by peers.

Parent Becomes Involved in School Activities

Over the first month, staff monitors involvement and acceptance. (If necessary, designated parents are asked to make additional efforts to help the parents enter in and feel accepted.)

In all these facilitative efforts, established peers (students, parents, staff colleagues) can play a major role as welcomers and mentors.

For some, connection is straightforward because they are motivationally ready and able to engage. Some individuals, however, need just a bit more personalized assistance.

(3) Enabling School Adjustment

INVEST NOW ...

OR PAY LATER!

Some students experience difficulties adjusting to new classes (content and standards), new schools, new teachers, new classmates, etc. It is particularly poignant to see a student who is trying hard, but is disorganized and can't keep up.

Over the first few weeks, teachers realize quickly who has and hasn't made a good adjustment to their classroom and to the school. This is the time to address any problems before they get worse. If adjustment problems are not addressed, student motivation for school dwindles, and behavior problems increase. Misbehavior often arises in reaction to learning difficulties. What appears as a school problem may be the result of problems at home.

The first month is the time to be proactive. This is the time for staff development to focus on the type of strategies described below. This is the time for student support staff to work with teachers in their classrooms to intervene before problems become severe and pervasive and require referrals for out-of-class interventions.

Below, we have compiled ideas for *enhancing engagement in learning*.

Also, included are links to in-depth prevention and early intervention strategies.

Some Guidelines

- Through enhanced personal contacts, build a positive working relationship with the youngster and family.
- Focus first on assets (e.g. positive attributes, outside interests, hobbies, what the youngster likes at school and in class).
- Ask about what the youngster doesn't like at school.
- Explore the reasons for "dislikes" (e.g., Are assignments seen as too hard? as uninteresting? Is the youngster embarrassed because others will think s/he does not have the ability to do assignments? Is the youngster picked on? rejected? alienated?)
- Explore other possible causal factors.
- Explore what the youngster and those in the home think can be done to make things better (including extra support from a volunteer, a peer, friend, etc.).

Some Basic Strategies for Strengthening the Environment to Support Student Success

Try new strategies in the classroom – based on the best information about what is causing the problem. Enhance student engagement through (a) an emphasis on learning and enrichment options that are of current greatest interest and which the student indicates (s)he wants to and can pursue and (b) a temporary deemphasis on areas that are not of high interest.

If a student seems easily distracted, the following might be used:

- identify any specific environmental factors that distract the student and make appropriate environmental changes
- have the student work with a group with others who are task-focused
- designate a volunteer to help the student whenever s/he becomes distracted and/or starts to misbehave, and if necessary, to help the student make transitions
- allow for frequent "breaks"
- interact with the student in ways that will minimize confusion and distractions (e.g., keep conversations relatively short; talk quietly and slowly; use concrete terms; express warmth and nurturance)

If a student needs more direction, the following might be used:

- develop and provide sets of specific prompts, multisensory cues, steps, etc. using oral, written, and other guides as organizational aids related to specific learning activities, materials, and daily schedules
- ensure someone checks with the student frequently throughout an activity to provide additional support and guidance in concrete ways (e.g., model, demonstrate, coach)
- support student's efforts related to self-monitoring and self-evaluation and provide nurturing feedback keyed to the student's progress and next steps

If the student has difficulty finishing tasks as scheduled, the following might be used:

- modify the length and time demands of assignments and tests
- modify the nature of the process and products (e.g., allow use of technological tools and allow for oral, audio-visual, arts and crafts, graphic, and computer generated products)

To accomplish the above: Enhance use of aides, volunteers, peer tutors/coaches, mentors, those in the home, etc. not only to help support student efforts to learn and perform, but to enhance the student's social support network. Encourage structured staff discussions and staff development about what teachers can do and what other staff (mentors, student support staff, resource teachers, etc.) can do to team with teachers in their classrooms to enable school adjustment.

What If the above Strategies Don't Work?

- If the new strategies don't work, talk to others at school to learn about approaches they find helpful (e.g., reach out for support/mentoring/coaching, participate with others in clusters and teams, observe how others teach in ways that effectively address differences in motivation and capability, request additional staff development on working with such youngsters).
- After trying all the above, add some tutoring designed to enhance student engagement in learning and to facilitate learning of specific academic and social skills that are seen as barriers to effective classroom performance and learning.
- Only after all this is done and has not worked is it time to use the school's referral processes to ask for additional support services. As such services are added, it, of course, becomes essential to coordinate them with what is going on in the classroom, school-wide, and at home.

Additional Center Materials on Starting a New School Year

The following Center resources can help as aids for interventions and for structured personnel development:

- *Easing the Impact of Student Mobility: Welcoming and Social Support* Newsletter Article – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/easimp.htm>
- *What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families* (Guidebook) – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/WELMEET/welmeetcomplete.pdf>
- *Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families* (Technical Aid Packet) – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/welcome/welcome.pdf>
- *Support for Transitions to Address Barriers to Learning* (Training Tutorial) – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/transition_tt/transitionsfull.pdf
- *Enabling Learning in the Classroom* (Newsletter article) – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/enabling.htm>
- *Engaging and Re-engaging Students* -- <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagingandre-engagingstudents.pdf>
- *Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning* (Cont. Educ. modules)

For more, use the Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds. For example, see:

- >*Transition Programs/Grade Articulation/Welcoming* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm
- >*Classroom Focused Enabling* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/classenable.htm>
- >*Motivation* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>
- >*Response to Intervention* –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/responsetointervention.htm>

Month 2 Theme

Enhancing Student Engagement



A special focus for interventions this month is on:

- (1) increasing staff understanding of the motivational bases for enhancing school engagement**
- (2) implementing new ways to enhance school engagement and minimize problems arising from low or negative motivation**

Activity to help focus staff discussion on this theme:

Encourage staff to explore:

Most days, how many of your students come to class motivationally ready and able to learn what you have planned to teach them?

You will find the responses of too many surprising and disturbing.

In urban and rural schools serving economically disadvantaged families, teachers tell us they are lucky if 10 to 15% of their students fall into this group. In suburbia, teachers usually say 75% fit that profile.

What's the situation in your school?

Some Points About Enhancing Student Engagement

Engagement is associated with positive academic outcomes, including achievement and persistence in school; and it is higher in classrooms with supportive teachers and peers, challenging and authentic tasks, opportunities for choice, and sufficient structure.

Even for those who have made a reasonably good adjustment to a new school and a new classroom, a month or two into a school year may see positive motivation subside. Many behavior, learning, and emotional problems arise at this time.

The key to minimizing such problems is to aggressively focus on enhancing and maintaining student engagement. This calls for maximizing classroom and schoolwide experiences that (1) promote *feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness to significant others* and (2) minimize threats to such feelings. To these ends, this month provides a critical time to focus on increasing ways for the school to

- avoid overreliance on extrinsics
- emphasize intrinsic motivation
- minimize practices that produce negative psychological reactions and unwanted behavior.

Engagement and Response to Intervention

The increasing focus on *response to intervention* provides a great opportunity to stress enhancing student engagement. Many instructional approaches are effective when a student is motivated to learn what is being taught. And, for students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems, motivation for classroom learning often is the primary concern.

The seeds of significant problems are planted when instruction is not a good fit. For example, learning problems generate an emotional overlay and usually behavior problems. Thus, while motivation is a fundamental concern for all students, for those with problems a nuanced classroom focus on motivation is essential.

Fundamental implications for classrooms include ensuring there are a broad range of *options* with respect to:

- content
- outcomes
- processes (including a personalized structure to facilitate learning)

With real options comes real opportunities for *involving learners in decision making*. A motivational focus also stresses development of nonthreatening ways to provide information about learning and performance.

In transforming classrooms, the following points about motivation warrant particular attention:

- ***Motivational Readiness.*** Optimal performance and learning require motivational readiness. Motivation is a key antecedent condition in any learning situation. Readiness is understood in terms of offering stimulating and supportive environments where learning can be perceived as vivid, valued, and attainable. It is a prerequisite to student attention, involvement, and performance. Poor motivational readiness may be a cause of poor learning and a factor maintaining learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Thus, the need for strategies that can produce a high level of motivational readiness (and reduce avoidance motivation and reactance) so students are mobilized to participate.
- ***Motivation as both a process and an outcome concern.*** Individuals may value learning something, but may not be motivated to pursue the processes used. Many students are motivated to learn when they first encounter a topic but do not maintain that motivation. Processes must elicit, enhance, and maintain motivation so that students stay mobilized. Programs must be designed to maintain, enhance, and expand intrinsic motivation so that what is learned is not limited to immediate lessons and is applied in the world beyond the schoolhouse door.
- ***Countering negative motivation.*** Negative motivation and avoidance reactions and any conditions likely to generate them must be circumvented or at least minimized. Of particular concern are activities students perceive as unchallenging, uninteresting, overdemanding, or overwhelming. Most people react against structures that seriously limit their range of options or that are overcontrolling and coercive. Examples of conditions that can have a negative impact on a person's motivation are sparse resources, excessive rules, and a restrictive day-in, day-out emphasis on drill and remediation.

Students experiencing problems at school usually have extremely negative perceptions of and avoidance tendencies toward teachers and activities that look like "the same old thing." Major changes in approach must be made if such students are to change these perceptions. Ultimately, success may depend on the degree to which the students view the adults at school and in the classroom as supportive, rather than indifferent or controlling and the program as personally valuable and obtainable.

- School staff not only need to try to increase motivation – especially intrinsic motivation – but also to avoid practices that decrease it. Although students may learn a specific lesson at school (e.g., some basic skills), they may have little or no interest in using the new knowledge and skills outside of the classroom. Increasing such interest requires procedures that can reduce negative and increase positive feelings, thoughts, and coping strategies.

With behavior, learning, and emotional problems, it is especially important to identify and minimize experiences that maintain or may increase avoidance motivation. Of particular concern is the need to avoid overreliance on extrinsics to entice and reward since such strategies can decrease intrinsic motivation.

The point is to enhance stable, positive, intrinsic attitudes that mobilize ongoing pursuit of desired ends, throughout the school, and away from school. Developing intrinsic attitudes is basic to increasing the type of motivated practice (reading for pleasure for example) that is essential for mastering and assimilating what has just been learned.

Resources for Staff Development Related to Enhancing Student Engagement

For staff development to improve understanding of the motivational bases for many behavior, learning, and emotional problems and what to do about them, the Center has several resources. For a quick introduction to discussions of the above topics, see any of the following:

>*Intrinsic Motivation: Engaging and Re-engaging Students, Families, & Staff*
(powerpoint) online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/rfl/sessiv.ppt>

>*About Motivation (Practice Notes)*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/motivation.pdf>

>*Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School*
<http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagingandre-engagingstudents.pdf>

>*School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schooleng.pdf>

Month 3 Theme

Enhancing Learning Supports



A special focus for this month is on moving forward in developing a comprehensive system at the school for addressing barriers to learning and teaching

Activity to help focus staff discussion on this theme:

Encourage staff to explore:

How well does our school address barriers to learning and teaching – schoolwide and in the classroom? (e.g., What are we doing currently and how well are we using our sparse resources?)

To structure the activity, you can use the Center's tool outlining a process for charting all current activities and resource use at the school. Access at:

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf>

Schools that do such mapping are able to use it as a basis for evaluating the current state of development, doing a gap analysis, and setting priorities for moving forward.

An alternative activity

Ask the staff: Who provides student and learning supports schoolwide and in the classroom?

To structure this activity, use the tool on the next page.

Learning Supports Staff at the School

In a sense, each staff member is a special resource for each other. A few individuals are highlighted here to underscore some special functions.

Administrative Leader for Learning Supports

School Psychologist _____
times at the school _____

- Provides assessment and testing of students for special services. Counseling for students and parents. Support services for teachers. Prevention, crisis, conflict resolution, program modification for special learning and/or behavioral needs.

School Nurse _____
times at the school _____

- Provides immunizations, follow-up, communicable disease control, vision and hearing screening and follow-up, health assessments and referrals, health counseling and information for students and families.

Pupil Services & Attendance Counselor

times at the school _____

- Provides a liaison between school and home to maximize school attendance, transition counseling for returnees, enhancing attendance improvement activities.

Social Worker _____
times at the school _____

- Assists in identifying at-risk students and provides follow-up counseling for students and parents. Refers families for additional services if needed.

Counselors _____ times at the school _____

- General and special counseling/guidance services. Consultation with parents and school staff.

Dropout Prevention Program Coordination

times at the school _____

- Coordinates activity designed to promote dropout prevention.

Title I and Bilingual Coordinators

- Coordinates categorical programs, provides services to identified Title I students, implements Bilingual Master Plan (supervising the curriculum, testing, and so forth)

Resource and Special Education Teachers

times at the school _____

- Provides information on program modifications for students in regular classrooms as well as providing services for special education.

Other important resources:

School-based Crisis Team (list by name/title)

_____	/	_____
_____	/	_____
_____	/	_____
_____	/	_____

School Improvement Program Planners

_____	/	_____
_____	/	_____
_____	/	_____

Community Resources

- Providing school-linked or school-based interventions and resources

Who	What they do	When
-----	--------------	------

_____	/	/
_____	/	/
_____	/	/
_____	/	/
_____	/	/

**So You Want Higher Achievement Scores?
It's Time to Enhance Learning Supports**

School systems are not responsible for
meeting every need of their students.
But when the need directly affects learning,
the school must meet the challenge.

– Carnegie Task Force on Education

Every school has some resources devoted to addressing barriers to learning and teaching. Some devote as much as 25% of their budget to such concerns. But in most schools, the efforts are fragmented and marginalized and focused on a relatively few students with major behavior, learning, and emotional problems.

This month is the time to improve the situation by moving forward in efforts to develop a comprehensive system of learning supports.

A comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching is essential for enabling all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school. Such a system encompasses resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and cognitive supports in the classroom and schoolwide. A comprehensive, cohesive, and coherent system of learning supports is essential to reducing dropout rates, narrowing the achievement gap, and strengthening school improvement.

Framing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

Thinking about a continuum of interventions is a good starting point for framing the nature and scope of a comprehensive system. The levels of such a continuum involve an interrelated and overlapping intervention subsystems focused on

- (1) promoting development and preventing problems
- (2) responding to problems as early-after-onset as feasible
- (3) treating severe, pervasive, and chronic problems.

Moreover, each subsystem is seen as needing to link school and community interventions in ways that integrate, coordinate, and weave resources together.

A comprehensive system of student and learning supports, however, involves more than a continuum of interventions. There is the pressing matter of coalescing the laundry list of fragmented programs and services. This requires a formulation to guide organizing programs and services into a circumscribed set of arenas reflecting the content purpose of the activity.

Pioneering work across the country emphasizes six arenas encompassing interventions to:

- >Enhance regular classroom strategies to enable learning (e.g., improving instruction for students who with mild-moderate learning and behavior problems and those have become disengaged from learning at school; includes a focus on prevention, early intervening, and use of strategies such as response to intervention)
- >Support transitions (i.e., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes and many other transitions)
- >Increase home and school connections and engagement
- >Respond to, and where feasible, prevent crises
- >Increase community involvement and support (outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
- >Facilitate student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed.

***Resources Introducing a Comprehensive System for
Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching***

>A Brief Introductory Document – ***Toward Next Steps in School Improvement:
Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching***

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/towardnextstep.pdf>

If this document doesn't fit your situation, there are others to choose from in
Section A of the Center's Rebuilding Toolkit

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

>Information about other places that are moving forward.

>>***Brochures from Districts and State Departments***

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkit1a.htm>

>>***Examples of state and District Design Documents***

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkitb1a.htm>

>For answers to typical questions raised in the process, see and share as needed
material from the

>>***Q & A Talking Points*** (in Section A of the Center's Rebuilding Toolkit)

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkit2a.htm>

Month 4 Theme



Minimizing Stress Reactions & Preventing Student and Staff “Burnout”

A special focus for this month is on broadening understanding of how schools exacerbate stress and what to do about it.

Activity to help focus staff discussion on this theme:

Encourage staff to explore:

*What does our school do on a regular basis to
reduce stress on students and staff?*

*i don't suffer from stress.
i'm a carrier.
dilbert*

When school staff don't feel good about themselves, it is unlikely they will be effective in making students feel good about themselves.

At this time of the year, the pressure mounts.

Echoing through the school may be phrases such as:

It's too Hard! It's Not Fair! You Can't Win! No one seems to care!

Clearly, it's time to reduce stress and enhance hope.

Everyone needs to play a role in this; support staff can play a special role.

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The impact of accountability standards and assessment has increased pressure on everyone. Teachers are experiencing tremendous pressure to prepare students for high stakes testing. In turn, students are under enhanced pressure to perform.

A negative impact of the mounting pressure on students, staff, and parents is to be expected, and steps need to be taken to minimize the impact.

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Understanding Burnout

Because the psychological needs of staff often are overlooked, the following highlights staff burnout. It should be evident that much of what is presented is relevant to stress in general and can be applied to students and their families.

What Causes Burnout?

Burnout is used to describe a syndrome that goes beyond physical fatigue from overwork. Stress and emotional exhaustion are part of it, but the hallmark of burnout is the distancing that goes on in response to the overload.

Christina Maslach

Some Primary Causal Factors:

- >Lack of Control Over One's Destiny
- >Lack of Occupational Feedback and Communication
- >Work Overload or Underload
- >Contact overload resulting from the necessity for frequent encounters with other people in order to carry out job functions.
- >Role Conflict/Ambiguity (Uncertainty about what one is expected to do at work).
- >Individual Factors, including financial stability, marital satisfaction, neuroticism, excessive shyness, inflexibility, and poor stress management skills
- >Training Deficits

Some Secondary Factors:

- >Poor working conditions
- >Lack of job security
- >Lifestyle changes
- >Rapidly changing society that force individuals to make unexpected adjustments in their way of life and work.

(From: A. J. Cedoline (1982) *Job Burnout in Public Education: Symptoms, Causes, and Survival Skills*, Teachers College, Columbia University.)

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An Intrinsic Motivational Perspective of Burnout

The behavior referred to as burnout is a psychological phenomenon. One way to understand the problem is in terms of three psychological needs that theorists posit as major intrinsic motivational determinants of behavior. these are the need to feel competent, the need to feel self-determining, and the need to feel interpersonally connected. From this perspective, burnout can be viewed as among the negative outcomes that result when these needs are threatened and thwarted. and, such needs are regularly threatened and thwarted by the prevailing culture of schools.

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Dealing with Burnout

As with so many problems, it is easiest to view burnout as a personal condition. and, as in many other instances, this would be the least effective way to understand what must be done over the long-run to address the matter. The problem is multifaceted and complex. while stress-reduction activities often are prescribed, they are unlikely to be a sufficient remedy for the widespread draining of motivation. reducing environmental stressors and enhancing job supports are more to the point, but again, alone these are insufficient strategies.

The solution requires reculturing schools in ways that minimize the undermining and maximize the enhancement of intrinsic motivation. this involves policies and practices that ensure a daily focus on (1) promoting staff and student well-being and (2) addressing barriers to teaching and learning.

- Individuals are capable of learning new coping skills.
 - >Research demonstrates that educational sessions are effective in helping individuals to learn to cope with the demands of their jobs.
- Changing the job environment, as well as the person in it, is essential for interventions to deal with burnout.
 - >The most effective interventions combine changes in managerial practice with individual-level educational interventions.
- A combined managerial and educational approach to intervention tends to emphasize building engagement with work.
 - >Focusing on engagement creates an increased alliance with the organizational mission.
 - >Work settings which support positive development of energy, vigor, involvement, dedication, absorption, and effectiveness among employees should be successful in promoting their well-being and productivity.

(From: Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W.B., & Leiter, M.P. (2001). Job Burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 397-422)

Promoting Well-Being and Preventing Burnout

School-based programs should include the following key elements:

- Inducting newcomers into the school culture in a welcoming and socially supportive way.
- Opening classroom doors and creating appropriate teams of staff and students who support, nurture, and learn from each other every day.
- Personalized staff development and support, including:
 - >In-service programs that account for interests strengths, weaknesses and limitations;
 - >Approaches that overcome avoidance motivation;
 - >Structure that provides personalized support and guidance;
 - >Instruction designed to enhance and expand intrinsic motivation for learning and problem solving.
- Restructuring school governance to enable shared decision-making.

(From: *Addressing Barriers to Learning*, Spring 2002, Center for MH in Schools.)

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Providing strategies and skills so everyone at a school can take care of each other and enhance the nurturing environment necessary for learning to occur and all students to succeed is an opportunity for support staff to demonstrate the critical role they play in addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

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For Resources Related to Minimizing Stress Reactions & Preventing Student and Staff "Burnout"

See the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Find on *Burnout*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/burnout.htm>

The Quick Find provides easy access to a variety of online resources from our center and elsewhere. See, for example:

- >>*Understanding and Minimizing Staff Burnout* (Introductory Packet)
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Burnout/burn1.pdf>
- >>*School Staff Burnout* (Quick Training Aid)
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Burnout/burn1.pdf>

Also see the Quick Find: *Environments that Support Learning*

Month 5 Theme



Re-engaging Disconnected Students

A special focus for this month is on those for who have become disengaged from schooling.

Activity to help focus staff discussion on this theme:

Encourage staff to explore:

What changes could be made in classrooms (with the help of student and learning supports staff) that would keep most/all students engaged in learning and re-engage disconnected students in classroom learning?

As a basis for answering this question, have the staff review:

>Engaging and Re-engaging Students --

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagingandre-engagingstudents.pdf>

Re-engaging Students

By this point in the year, school staff and students know that for some students *"it isn't working."*

Common laments:

- *They could do it if they only wanted to!!!*
- *These are smart kids, but they just won't do the work!*
- *If he survives childhood and adolescence, he'll probably be a very successful adult!*

Some of these students are passively disengaged and seemed bored or burned out; others are actively disconnected – often to the point of acting out at school or not attending.

Disengaged students reflect low and negative intrinsic motivation and tend to have a negative effect on staff intrinsic motivation. That is, staff feel discouraged when experiencing a lack of success with students. The failure threatens feelings of competence and self determination and too often disconnects staff from kids who need help.

Since giving up on these students is no option, we need to focus on ***re-engagement***.

Now is a time for mid-course corrections to turn this all around. A time to think how to do some things differently to get results.

As Winnie the Pooh says (while Christopher Robin is dragging him by his heel downstairs and his head is bumping on each stair), *"I think there is a better way to do this if only I could stop bumping long enough to think of it."*

This is the time to stop bumping and try to re-engage students who seem to have become rather disengaged from classroom learning (and are finding other, often disruptive and inappropriate, ways to spend their time.)

For support staff and teachers, the following are some ideas for starting to turn things around.

The first step is for support staff and teachers to establish the kind of working relationship that is motivated by the desire to (a) understand the causes for students' lack of engagement and difficult behavior and (b) try some different strategies.

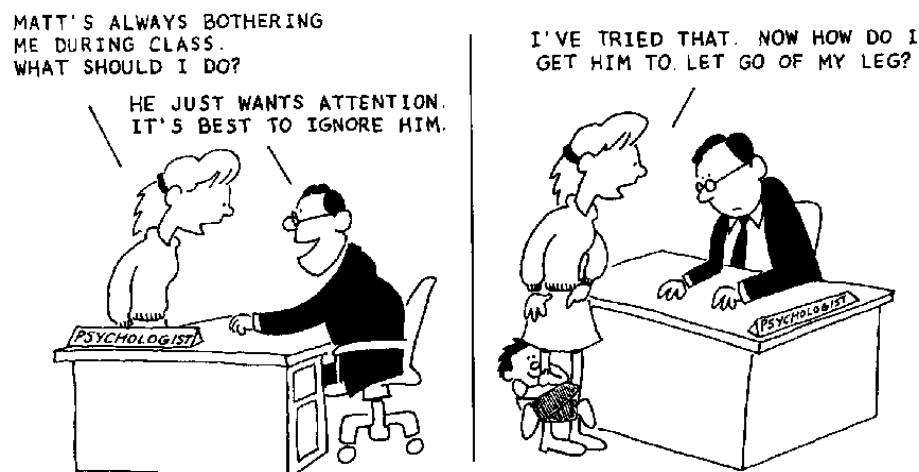
While the initial focus may be on a particular student, move toward thinking more generally about that student as one of a type who experiences learning or relationship problems and how changes in strategy would benefit as many as we can. That makes the potential pay off much greater.

Ask *WHY*? Why are some students not engaged in classroom learning? Why are they misbehaving? Real pathology as the cause is relatively rare. Factors away from school can be barriers, but at this time, we should focus on some of the common school-related reasons. These include:

- not experiencing sufficient success in learning, so they give up;
- not having a good relationship with the teacher, so they react/resist;
- not having connected with a supportive group of friends, so they feel isolated/alienated.

Worse yet, a few students may be experiencing a lack of success related to all three matters.

Any of the above can set a negative cycle into motion. And, once students have a negative image and reputation, we are all in trouble.



Some Things to do

1. ***Individual Conferences:*** Schools need to assist teachers at this time of year by facilitating time for them to conference individually with each student who has been having problems. In some cases, the student's parents need to be included. The focus is on how to use the time before and through the winter break as a period for renewing positive relationships and re-engaging the student in classroom learning. Student support staff can play a role in arranging such conferences and then covering the teacher's class while the teacher holds the conferences. The discussions should cover (a) why there has been a problem (without getting into a "blame-game"), (b) exploring some new ways that the student thinks could make things better for all concerned, and (c) arriving at some mutual agreements (not one-way "contracts").

2. ***Immediate Opportunities For Change of Image:*** For students who have acquired a negative reputation, it is critical to develop some immediate opportunities for them to take on some attractive, positive roles (e.g., team captain, special monitor, photographer for the school newspaper, part of the design group for the school's website).

3. ***Add Some Extra Caring Support:*** Use volunteers, aids, and/or other students to provide additional support to these specific students. Make certain the tone is one of caring not censure and that the support provides real opportunities to discover the value of learning and not another monitoring device.

4. ***Do more to account for individual differences:*** Focus on differences in both motivation as well as capability in designing learning opportunities and then implementing them in ways that enhance intrinsic motivation for ongoing learning at school. Accommodations may be needed with respect to the physical arrangement of the classroom, presentation of material, workload and nature of feedback, and more

5. ***Positive Activities When Not in School:*** Focus on connecting the student with intrinsically motivating activities and projects. These should be ways to build on the new classroom activities that have been designed to re-engage the student. Such activities can consolidate something that has been learned recently or lay a foundation for future learning (e.g., school reading and writing projects). Examples include involving students in (a) carrying out special roles related to holiday events, (b) taking pictures while on trips to special places and later bringing them to school to include in learning activities (e.g., writing stories), (c) choosing videotapes that teach as well as entertain, and so forth.

5. ***Keep Making Them Feel Cared About and Positively Special:*** Teachers and support staff need to keep taking special steps to bond with these students and help them re-engage in positive activities and learning. Again, use volunteers, aids, and/or other students to provide extra support.

6. ***KEEP IT UP UNTIL IT PAYS OFF.***

>>***Some points about:***

Students who haven't made a good relationship with teachers and are reacting/resisting.

Making a positive, caring connection with such students is essential.

Researchers such as David Hawkins and Richard Catalano have found that a core factor in preventing problems is "strong, attached relationships with adults who hold healthy beliefs and clear standards for young people, and an investment in positive lines of action such as school, service and work."

It is ironic that this is often translated into "mentor" programs where a few students spend a few hours in such attached relationships. The real opportunity every day, all day in school (and at home) is for a teacher (and parent) to be the adult with whom a student has a strong relationship.

In their description of Communities that Care, Hawkins and Catalano describe how such bonds between students and adults are established:

"Research shows that a child living in a high-risk environment can be protected from problem behaviors by a strong, affectionate relationship with an adult who cares about, and is committed to, his or her healthy development. This can be any caring adult – a parent, a teacher, an extended family member, a coach, and employer or an adult from the child's faith community. The most important part of this relationship is that the youth has a long-term investment in it, or she believes the relationship is worth protecting, and so is motivated to follow the healthy beliefs and clear standards held by the person."

So what creates these protective bonds?

- There must be opportunities for young people to be involved in their families, school and communities in meaningful, developmentally appropriate ways – to make a real contribution and feel valued for their efforts and accomplishments.
- For young people to take advantage of those opportunities, they need the social, cognitive, emotional and behavioral skills to be successful. Finally, young people need recognition for their involvement"

Building a strong, positive relationship with difficult students is a challenge. Looking for the strengths, building on the competence, and re-establishing relationships of mutual respect is best achieved when support staff and teachers work as a team. Support staff often have the opportunity to get to know these students and can take the lead in helping others see what is "special" in a student who hasn't yet made good connections with teachers and school staff.

>>Some points about:

Students who haven't found a supportive group of friends and feel isolated/alienated.

For many students there is nothing as important in school as the social dynamics:

Who's in and who's out?

Who is my friend?

Who likes me and who do I like?

While schools focus on cognitive skills, they too seldom address the development of social and emotional skills. There are programs and curriculum designed for this important area of development, but every day there are natural opportunities for schools to enhance students' positive relations with each other.

In class, during breaks, before and after school, during lunch, at student activities, in the community.

This is the time of year to consider how the school is promoting social and emotional development and to plan ways to enhance the focus on such matters as:

- cooperative learning and team play
- students as leaders at school
- groups of students engaged in project learning
- students involved in service learning in the community
- same-age and cross-age peer contact

Some students need just a bit more help in connecting with other students in a positive way. Teachers working with student and learning supports staff can create a range of opportunities both inside the classroom, schoolwide, and in the neighborhood to address these problems.

For Resources Related to Re-engaging Students

See the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

> *Motivation* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

> *Classroom Focused Enabling* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/classenable.htm>

> *Response to Intervention* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/responsetointervention.htm>

> *Re-engaging Students in Learning* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/reengage_qt/

Month 6 Theme



Increasing Graduation Rates by Working at All Levels

A special focus for this month is on what the school can do to minimize student dropouts and maximize graduation rates. (*Time is running out for catching up; decisions are being made about who passes and who fails.*)

“Most late high school dropouts (83%) listed a school-related (versus a family or employment related) reason for leaving. These reasons included missing too many school days, thinking it would be easier to get a GED, getting poor grades, and not liking school.”

National Center for Education Statistics, Late High Schools Dropouts (2009)

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009307>

Activity to help focus staff discussion on this theme:

Encourage staff to explore:

What should the school do differently to be more effective in preparing students so they do not dropout?

The Dropout Crisis

There is a high school dropout crisis far beyond the imagination of most Americans, concentrated in urban schools and relegating many thousands of minority children to a life of failure. ... Only half of our nation's minority students graduate from high school along with their peers. For many groups – Latino, black, or Native American males-graduation rates are even lower. ... this [is an] educational and civil rights crisis.

Gary Orfield, director of the Civil Rights project

As the true dropout figures emerge across the nation, the crisis nature of the problem is apparent. Recent reports indicate that more than half a million young people dropout of high school each year, and the rate at which they drop out has remained about the same for the last 30 years.

As with so many problems in our society, increasing high school and postsecondary graduate rates could be tremendously aided by reducing generational poverty. As a societal institution, schools play an indirect role in this. Their direct role is to ensure they do the best they can to promote positive development and address barriers to learning and teaching – especially school-related experiences that push students out.

Springtime Focus on Student and Learning Supports

Schools and teachers need to become a bit more flexible and encouraging towards students who seem as if they are losing gusto and falling behind. Sometimes its towards the end of the year that the pressure that has been building up ... becomes too much. Schools need to outreach to kids who seem to be having trouble, talk to them, make them feel important and connected and provide them with a plan to get back on their feet. Things like make-up assignments, make-up tests, tutoring opportunities, etc., should all be made available. If this has been implemented, and it doesn't help, get parents involved.

-a recent high school graduate

At this critical juncture, the teacher needs to work with student and learning support staff with an emphasis on (a) helping students who need special assistance to “catch-up” (e.g., homework help, tutoring, peer to peer support) and (b) turning things around for students who are falling further and further behind.

The need in both instances is for personalized and shared problem solving. This usually requires an indepth conference and a series of follow-ups with the student and family. In essence, the content focus is on clarifying specifics related to the problem and formulating flexible steps to solve it; the process focus is on establishing and continuously enhancing a positive working relationship and monitoring the intervention steps closely to make immediate changes as necessary. Special attention needs to be paid to addressing any underlying factors interfering with school learning and performance.

For more related to this topic, see the Center’s Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

>*Dropout Prevention* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/dropout.html>

>*Barriers to Learning* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/barriers.htm>

>*Accommodations* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/idea.htm>

Reducing Dropouts/Increasing Graduation Rates: What should schools do?

School factors can account for approximately two-thirds of the differences in mean school dropout rates. Available research suggests that being held back is the single strongest predictor of dropping out for both early and late dropouts. Data indicate that being held back one grade increases the risk of dropping out later by 40 to 50 percent, two grades by 90 percent.

There is general agreement that schools must become more proactive in preventing problems. The trend has been to wait and then react. Here are some points for school staff to consider:

- ***Rethink classroom and schoolwide approaches to (a) enhance engaged, personalized learning and (b) provide students the learning supports they need to succeed.*** For prevention to be effective, schools must *engage* all students in learning. Doing this involves practices based on understanding *intrinsic* motivation and that use classroom assessments that inform personalized intervention (e.g., response to intervention).
Children at-risk need to be identified at a young age (as early as preschool). At every age interventions are needed to ensure students feel competent to succeed at school. Some need one-on-one support for awhile. Special attention must be given to re-engaging those who have disengaged from classroom learning.
- ***Enhance the professional development of teachers and support staff.*** Ensure teachers have the knowledge and skills to ensure a wider range of students meet standards. Ensure that support staff know how to team with teachers in the classroom to rethink engagement, personalized intervention, and special assistance.
- ***Provide out-of-school opportunities.*** Efforts using out-of-school opportunities to retain middle and high school students begin early. They include tutoring, mentoring, service learning, career advising, and more. When older students (including potential dropouts) work with younger ones, both can improve their literacy skills.
Service learning, for example, integrates community service into the academic curriculum. Investigators have found that when rigorous study in academic disciplines is linked to serious work on real needs, students' motivation to learn increases. When teachers are rigorous about partnering with young people to design and carry out service-learning projects that are tied to curricular objectives and standards, there are academic, intellectual, civic, ethical, social, and personal benefits.
- ***Offer multiple pathways.*** Students need alternative career and vocational pathways that reflect high standards. The concept of multiple pathways focuses on ensuring choice among a variety of high school programs that prepare all students for both college and careers. The emphasis is on providing both academic and career foundations for advanced learning, training, and effective and responsible participation in society. Available choices reflect student interests and community strengths and opportunities. They include programs that provide real world training in areas where graduates can apply for living-wage jobs.
- ***Introduce non-traditional approaches.*** Educational alternative programs provide a non-traditional approach to curriculum by utilizing alternative teaching strategies. Programs focus upon the needs and interests of students by offering positive school experiences, which are geared for achievement, enhancement of positive self-concept, motivation, reduction of truancy, and reduction of disruptive behavior.

For Resources Related to Increasing Graduation Rates

Note: In September 2008, the U.S. Department of Education released a practice guide on *Dropout Prevention*. This is one of a set of practice guides designed to provide practical recommendations to help address the everyday challenges faced in classrooms and schools. Developed by a panel of nationally recognized experts, practice guides consist of actionable recommendations, strategies for overcoming potential roadblocks, and an indication of the strength of evidence supporting each recommendation. The Department states that each practice guide is subjected to rigorous external peer review.

The *Dropout Prevention* guide provides recommendations that focus on reducing high school dropout rates. Strategies presented include identifying and advocating for at-risk students, implementing programs to improve behavior and social skills, and keeping students engaged in the school environment. Online at http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/dp_pg_090308.pdf

Need More?

For links to key references, empirically supported programs, and centers specializing in the topic and related topics, go to the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Find on *Dropout Prevention*. Online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/dropout.html>

Other Center Quick Finds that may be helpful include:

- >Barriers to Learning >Classroom Climate >Classroom-focused Enabling
- >Environments that Support Learning >Learning Supports: Students to Succeed >Mentoring
- >Motivation >Parent/Home Involvement >Parenting Skills and Parenting Education
- >Prevention for Students "At Risk" >Resilience/Protective Factors >Social Promotion

A Few Websites Dealing Directly with Dropout Prevention

- <http://www.dropoutprevention.org/> - National Dropout Prevention Centers
- <http://www.focusas.com/Dropouts.html> - Focus Adolescent Services: Youth Who Drop Out
- <http://www.ed.gov/programs/dropout/index.html> — School Dropout Prevention Program
- <http://www.schoolengagement.org/> — National Center for School Engagement
- <http://www.youthbuild.org/> — Youth Build USA

Month 7 Theme

Spring Can be a High Risk Time



A special focus for this month is on

working against drops in motivation and engagement

Activity to help focus staff discussion on this theme:

Encourage staff to explore:

What is planned with respect to

- (1) helping students stay motivated through the second semester slump,*
- (2) minimizing stress related to spring achievement testing,*
- (3) addressing the cumulative effects of frustration on emotional problems.*

It's time to prevent; it's time to help;
there's still time for students to turn it all around.

Spring Can Be a High Risk Time for Students

(1) Helping students stay motivated through the second semester slump

Excerpt from "Spring Slump" – by Amanda Gray – <http://www.ndsmcobserver.com>

"I noticed a trend lately a sleepy, tired and sad trend. We're growing, slowly but surely, more impatient and grumpy as the year progresses. I'm calling this phenomenon the 'Spring Semester Slump.' It's common sense, really. We start out the school year relatively excited to be back on campus, with friends, possibly even excited to be in class. Fall break comes, and while it's well-appreciated, we can come back to school without much coaxing. School has yet to get truly difficult ...This goes out the proverbial window, however, after Fall Break.... Winter Break cannot come fast enough. Those three beautiful weeks are the shortest three weeks of my life.... After that brief respite, spring semester begins."

While a second semester slump may have a small effect on motivated and successful students, there is a sense of mounting frustration for students who aren't doing well (socially, emotionally, academically) that can lead to problems in attendance and effort. For some, it is just that the school year seems so long and their motivation lags. For others, it is clear that they aren't doing well and are unlikely to catch up. For those in their last year at a school, a version of "senioritis" hits, and they hope to coast through and survive the last few months.

How do you understand the drop in effort/energy/motivation and what do you think might counter the "slump" and maybe enhance motivation for school and for learning during spring semester?

Thoughts from a colleague:

"I see this very often happening with middle school students, those who have struggled through the grades prior but done well enough to pass or aren't "failing enough" to identify. These students hit 8th, 9th grade and any compensating skills they have aren't enough to get them through the increased difficulty in curriculum and additional demands. The first and second quarters of struggling are often met with 'let's wait and see before we evaluate or implement comprehensive RTI strategies'. By the time they hit the 3rd quarter they are often so buried/behind in skills that they fall into the "giving up" mode and the year is lost. ... This is magnified with students who have underlying mental health issues, bringing to the surface anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, depression and the like. Too often it is these students who succumb to typical peer pressures and a negative domino effect comes into play.

In elementary students, they are often seen as 'late developers' and as it becomes apparent in looking to the next grade level they will have challenges meeting with success, how do you catch up when a half the year is gone.

In high school students, with the demands of passing every required exam to be able to obtain a diploma, it can be one exam that keeps them from their goals. How do you motivate a student that has been able to pass up until this point, but can't graduate due to inability to pass a one required exam.

Fundamentally, something has to change to keep the spark of wanting to learn be meaningful and rewarding to students. A meaningful diploma needs to be in place for those whose 'success' is currently measured by being able to pass all regents. There is something to be said for keeping a student engaged learning, knowing and believing there is benefit to learning despite what grade they are able to obtain on an exam.

Keeping parents involved at every grade level is important and sometimes that means creative ways of keeping them involved other than once a year parent conferences. In addition, more earnest efforts in Child Find and RTI need to occur. ... Catching these students earlier in their educational careers can help prevent issues commonly seen with older students second semester lack of motivation. As well, identifying struggling students and providing supports early in the year in order to be able to provide more intensive services if needed, versus waiting until half the year is over will give a greater opportunity for success.

Keeping kids connected, a hook, so to speak, be it a adult mentor at school, sports, club, etc can help struggling students stay motivated. Kids have to have something to feel positive about going to school, staying the entire day in an environment where you consistently struggle or meet with failure isn't conducive to motivation or a desire to learn.

I am not sure that teachers are given the skills to teach struggling students, especially struggling students with mental health issues. And with budget cuts, many of our teachers are faced doing this without the supports of AIS teachers, Title I support staff, etc. A truly serious look at unfunded mandates needs to occur and alternatives to what almost always seems to occur in times of budget crisis; cuts that most directly affect our students at risk."

For more see Quick Find online clearinghouse resources on motivation:
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

(2) *Minimizing stress related to high stake achievement testing so all students do their best*

Excerpt from "You Teach for Me; I've Had it!" A First-year Teacher's Cry for Help"
by Dixie Massey, *Action in Teacher Education*, 28, 73-86.

http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ762012&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ762012

"...It was March, and school wide test preparation had begun in every third through fifth grade classroom. The teacher was a first year teacher participating in a study of the impact of high stakes testing on instruction. As I walked through her door, I could tell her attitude was different from that of my previous observation...The stress of being required to use practice tests as the bulk of her reading instruction for seven full weeks before the actual test was given was proving to be frustrating for her..."

There is great debate about the wisdom of using high stakes testing to measure student progress, teacher value added, and school success. Since they continue to be the cornerstone of assessment and accountability, how can we create conditions that increase our confidence that the students are trying their best so the tests are valid and reliable. As the above description implies, the stress throughout a school as the date of the test approaches is high on students and staff. This is not about "test anxiety" in the usual sense, it is about creating a climate for learning and demonstrating that learning.

Excerpt from "Take Out Your No.2 Pencils: Taking the Stress Out of Standardized Tests"
by Donna Clovis *Scholastic* – <http://teacher.scholastic.com>

American students may be the most tested kids in the world, taking more than 100 million standardized tests every year, according to Teachers College at Columbia University in New York City. The results of these tests are taken very seriously by educators, parents, administrators, and even local government officials, for they are viewed as a measure of teacher and school competence and, in some cases, can affect a child's future placement in a school. ... All this pressure is not lost on children. Even good students who are well prepared can be derailed by the general air of anxiety surrounding the tests. ... Now what can you do for yourself? The kids' anxiety can be contagious, but it will be easier to get them to relax if you're relaxed. "When your job and performance are on the line, it's awfully difficult not to be stressed out from these tests," says Ann Brown. ..."

Rather than "tips for taking tests" and "hints for stress reduction", preparing students to do their best on achievement tests is based on a motivational foundation:

Motivation, and especially intrinsic motivation, must be considered in all facets of an intervention. What's required is

- > developing a high level of motivational readiness (including reducing avoidance motivation) so participants are mobilized
- > establishing processes that elicit, enhance, and maintain motivation so that participants stay mobilized
- > enhancing motivation as an outcome so that the desire to improve oneself and address problems increasingly becomes a positive intrinsic attitude that mobilizes activity outside the intervention situation

(3) Addressing the likelihood of emotional problems

It is essential to keep emotional problems in perspective and not overpathologize.

In any school, there are young people who are not very happy. This is quite understandable among those living in economically impoverished neighborhoods where daily living and school conditions frequently are horrendous. But even youngsters with economic advantages too often report feeling alienated and lacking a sense of purpose.

Youngsters who are unhappy usually act on such feelings. Some "internalize;" some "act out;" and some respond in both ways at different times. The variations can make matters a bit confusing. Is the youngster just sad? Is s/he depressed? Is this a case of ADHD? Individuals may display the same behavior and yet the causes may be different and vice versa. And, matters are further muddled by the reality that the causes vary.

The causes of negative feelings, thoughts, and behaviors range from environmental/system deficits to relatively minor group and individual vulnerabilities on to major biological disabilities (that affect only a relatively few individuals). It is the full range of causes that account for the large number of children and adolescents reported as having psychosocial, MH, or developmental problems.

Recent highly publicized events and related policy initiatives have focused renewed attention on youth suicide, depression, and violence. Unfortunately, such events and the initiatives that follow often narrow discussion of causes and how best to deal with problems.

The Classification of Child and Adolescent Mental Diagnoses in Primary Care (DSM-PC) developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics is a useful resource to help counter this tendency to overpathologize.

Some Center Resources to Guide Prevention and Early Intervention

Packets:

- > *Affect and Mood Problems Related to School Aged Youth*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Affect/affect.pdf>.
- > *Screening/Assessing Students: Indicators and Tools*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/assessment/assessment.pdf>
- > *School Interventions to Prevent Youth Suicide*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Sampler/Suicide/suicide.pdf>
- > *School-Based Client Consultation, Referral, and Management of Care*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/consultation/consultation2003.pdf>

Quick Training Aids:

- > *Suicide Prevention* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/suicide_qt/
- > *Assessment & Screening* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/assess&screen_qt/index.htm
- > *Case Management in the School Context*– http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/case_mgmt_qt/
- > *School Interventions to Prevent and Respond to Affect and Mood Problems* –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/mood_qt/

Also see > *Toolbox* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/toolbox.htm>

> *Quick Finds* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/> (e.g., *Suicide Prevention, Depression*)

Month 8 Theme



Helping Students and Families Plan Transitions to a New Grade/New School

A special focus for this month is on using the end of the year to help ensure successful transitions.

Activity to help focus staff discussion on this theme:

Encourage staff to explore:

What is planned and how do we work with other schools to help students and families make a successful transition?

#####

As students end a school year, new interventions needs arise. Minimally, there is a need to anticipate transitions and assist students and their families in the move to the next teacher(s) and setting. Ideally, efforts should be made to facilitate positive expectations and the beginnings of a strong working relationship.

#####

Time to Help Students and Families Plan Successful Transitions to a New Grade or a New School

The traditional school year draws to a close:

Teachers, students, and families appreciate their work together . . .
and anticipate the changes ahead.

>>>>new teachers

>>>>new schools

>>>>new peer groups

>>>>new opportunities, challenges, and stressors

Transitions are truly risky opportunities

Transitions arise related to each new step in formal education and in moving to and from special programs and to post school living and work. For those making such transitions, well-designed support during the period of transition can make a great difference in their lives. From the first grade-to-grade transition to the move to middle school and high school and every other move to a new school, all call for well-conceived programs designed to support transitions.

This means programs that prepare students and their families for the transitions *and* follow-up to ensure the transition has been a good one. Programs are needed that

- provide closure related to what the student is leaving behind
- enhance articulation between the old and the new
- welcome newcomers and ensure they have the type of social support that facilitates positive acceptance and adjustment in the new setting
- assess transition success
- implement timely corrective interventions when transitions are not successful

An Example of a Plan from a City School District IN GA
(response from the director of learning supports)

Pre-K to Kindergarten Transition – At the start of the second semester, the class curriculum and structure changes to mirror what it will be like in kindergarten (e.g. shorter naps). Teachers also begin to talk to the children about going to kindergarten. Also, each school holds a parent night for parents of upcoming kinder students.

Fifth to sixth grade Transition – We have 5 elementary schools and 1 feeder middle school. Our elementary and middle school counselor communicate regularly to facilitate transition activities between the schools in the feeder pattern. These are support for transitions currently being utilized:

- Academic Fair Night – In February, an Academic Fair Night is held where fifth and sixth graders and their parents have the opportunity to come to the middle school and meet with teachers and counselors in their upcoming grade. It is also a good opportunity for fifth graders to interact with students who were former fifth graders when they were in fourth grade. Teachers also have examples of exemplary work on display so parents and students can get an idea of the level of expectations where work is concerned at the middle school.
- Fifth Grade Orientation Day – Before the end of the school year, fifth graders from our 5 elementary schools visit our middle school to get oriented on the particulars of middle school life. They have a chance to ask questions and get any concerns addressed that they may have.
- Teacher Transition Forms – We use a transition form that was created as a means for fifth grade teachers to communicate pertinent information about students to their sixth grade teachers. The form alerts sixth grade teachers and counselors as to concerns, interventions and learning supports in place for a student. Our goal in creating the form was to quickly communicate to the middle school so that supports/interventions could be put in place at the beginning of the school year. We believe it will expedite the services and aid in the transition process. The future plan is for the form to be utilized during all grade transitions.
- Teacher Transition Info Meeting – Each year, the sixth grade academy principal meets with all fifth grade teachers to orient them to the expectations, procedures, and the registration process at the middle school. It provides an opportunity for teachers to ask questions or get any concerns addressed. The middle school administrator can also bring any concerns from his sixth grade teachers that need to be discussed.

Eighth grade to Ninth grade Transition – The eighth to ninth grade transition is a year long process. In October 2010 the eighth grade counselor and one of the High school counselors attended a workshop on the New BRIDGE Legislation. The BRIDGE legislation involves the 6-12 grade transitions from grade to grade. It is now required for each eighth grade student, along with the counselor to compose a high school plan for ninth to twelfth grade. The high school plan is an outline of courses that students must take in order to graduate in four years. All eighth grade students compose their High school Plan using the <http://GAcollge411.org> website.

(cont.)

Calendar

January:

- The eighth grade counselor meets with all students to set up GAcollge411.org accounts
- Eighth grade teachers meet with High school counselors and Registrar to fill out class recommendations sheets
- The Transition team comprised of eighth grade and ninth grade department heads meet to discuss strategies to help incoming ninth graders be productive in ninth grade.

February:

- The eighth grade Counselor meets with all 8th grade students to make high school plans using GAcollge411.org
- Eighth grade parent night at the high school. Department heads and the ninth grade
- Principal meet with eighth grade parents to discuss the upcoming ninth grade year for their students. Parents are able to learn about the different programs and classes that are offered at the high school. Parents also have the opportunity to sit down with their children to map out elective choices for high school.
- Eighth grade teachers make class recommendations for each student.

March:

- Eighth grade counselor meets with any individual student who has not completed their high school plan.
- High school students from the Drug free coalition at GHS came to talk to students about different social temptations that may appear once in high school. They discussed with the students the importance of staying involved and making the right choices.

April:

- Ninth grade shadowing: Several outstanding students from each eighth grade team are selected to spend a day over at the High school shadowing a ninth grade student.

May:

- All eighth graders take a trip over to the high school to take a tour of the campus and to learn about all the great things they can do once they get to the high school.

The Transition team meets monthly to discuss plans for the eighth grade students. The ninth grade teachers tell the eighth grade teachers what they feel the students will need to be successful.

For more examples, see:

>**Transitions to and from Elementary, Middle, and High School**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transitionstoandfrom.pdf>

>**Transition Programs/Grade Articulation/Welcome** – Quick Find

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm

>**Transition to College** – Quick Find –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/Transitiontocollege.htm>

Where transition supports to and from elementary, middle, and high school fit with respect to the full range of supports for transitions*

Students are regularly confronted with a variety of transitions – changing schools, changing grades, and encountering a range of other minor and major transitory demands. Such transitions are ever present and usually are not a customary focus of institutionalized efforts to support students. Every transition can exacerbate problems or be used as a natural opportunity to promote positive learning and attitudes and reduce alienation.

Schools need to build their capacity to address transitions proactively and in the process to be guided by their goals for enhancing personal and social functioning. A comprehensive focus on transitions requires school-wide and classroom-based systems and programs designed to (a) enhance successful transitions, (b) prevent transition problems, and (c) use transition periods to reduce alienation and increase positive attitudes toward school and learning. Examples of programs include school-wide and classroom specific activities for welcoming new arrivals (students, their families, staff) and rendering ongoing social support; counseling and articulation strategies to support grade-to-grade and school-to-school transitions and moves to and from special education, college, and post school living and work; and before and after-school and inter-session activities to enrich learning and provide recreation in a safe environment.

Anticipated overall outcomes are reduced alienation and enhanced motivation and increased involvement in school and learning activities. Over time, articulation programs can play a major role in reducing school avoidance and dropouts, as well as enhancing the number who make successful transitions to higher education and post school living and work. It is also likely that a caring school climate can play a significant role in reducing student transiency.

Support for Transitions encompasses:

- Welcoming & social support programs for newcomers (e.g., welcoming signs, materials, and initial receptions; peer buddy programs for students, families, staff, volunteers)
- Daily transition programs for (e.g., before school, breaks, lunch, afterschool)
- Articulation programs (e.g., grade to grade, new classrooms, new teachers; elementary to middle school; middle to high school; in and out of special education programs)
- Summer or intersession programs (e.g., catch-up, recreation, and enrichment programs)
- School-to-career/higher education (e.g., counseling, pathway, and mentor programs; broad involvement of stakeholders in planning for transitions; students, staff, home, police, faith groups, recreation, business, higher education)
- Broad involvement of stakeholders in planning for transitions (e.g., students, staff, home, police, faith groups, recreation, business, higher education)
- Capacity building to enhance transition programs and activities

*See the *Support for Transitions Self-study Survey* online at:

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/transitionssurvey.pdf>

Month 9 Theme



End-of-the-Year Celebrations at All Levels: Hope, Congratulations, Safe Exuberance

A special focus for this month is on fostering hope, promoting social emotional learning, supporting positive celebrations, and preventing related tragedies.

Activity to help focus staff discussion on this theme:

Encourage staff to explore:

What does the school do to help students celebrate at the end of the year and does it and does it promote hope and help to minimize predictable tragedies?

A Favored Time

The end of the school year is a favored time for everyone. For most students, it is a time to be congratulated and to celebrate. For some, it is a temporary reprieve from problems experienced at school. This is the time to help everyone find hope for the future and experience a sense that they have accomplished something worthwhile. And it is a time to help them celebrate in ways that minimize tragedy.

The key to focusing on hope and accomplishment is to identify whatever a student has done positively, clarify how the student can build on this in coming years, and convey all this personally to the student and family. Drawing on what we know about personal motivation, the focus needs to be on specifics that can enhance *feelings* of competence, self-determination, and connectedness to significant others; minimize messages that threaten such feelings.

With respect to end of the year celebrations, each is something to cherish, and the anticipation of each represents a natural opportunity to promote social and emotional learning (e.g., enhanced understanding of self and others, increased sense of responsibility for self and others, expanded social problem solving skills).

Of special concern are teen parties and proms. The need is to provide guidance and support and to do much more to minimize negative side effects.

“More than one-third of youth under the age of 21 killed in alcohol related fatalities died during the months prior to graduation season, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. ..1,012 died during the months of April, May and June.”

Dangerous Season for Teens: Prom and Graduation Time Increase Alcohol Fatalities

<http://alcoholism.about.com/cs/teens/a/blcc030514.htm>

For a motivational perspective on

School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schooleng.pdf>

For more on natural opportunities to promote social and emotional learning, see

Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/naturalopportunities.pdf>

For a range of ideas about safe end of year celebrations, see such websites as

Student Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) at <http://www.sadd.org>

Safe End of the Year Student Celebrations

Most schools try to address this concern. If a workgroup has not developed a set of ideas for countering problems, it is time to do so. And it can help to ask some recent graduates to participate with planning work groups. Here's what some recent grads have told us:

1) "... what my high school did toward the end of the year that was different than many other schools was the type of 'grad night' we had. Whereas many schools rent out [a local entertainment center] and have dances there and go on rides and many students get intoxicated before attending, at my school grad night was held on campus. The parents worked it and there were different activities like fake gambling, craps tables, dancing, a smoothie bar, food, and "crash room" to sleep since it went until 5am, rock climbing, a palm reader, inflatable jumper obstacle course, face painting, karaoke and much more. When I tell friends from other high schools/friends I made at college, the majority give me positive feedback saying that it sounds like a lot more fun than what they did. I think this is because instead of having the whole [entertainment center] where groups can get separated and remain in cliques ..., it was in our gym and outside in what was called "senior park;" So it remained tight knit, so to speak, making it easier to spend time with a lot of different students and not get lost in a large area. Also, because parents worked the booths, students did not show up intoxicated. There was no re-entry allowed and because it was on campus, even if a few students did decide to drink before the event, it lessened the danger of driving on a freeway to get there because it is possible that they could simply walk over to the school. ... It was a night that I will never forget and one of my greatest memories and it was in a positive setting and a good way to have safe fun."

2) "In my own experience, I remember one of my teachers speaking in class about two weeks before prom and trying to give us some perspective on the event. She wanted us to have a good time, but also acknowledged the enormous stress that it caused for some people. My teacher encouraged us to view it as just another dance and to focus on graduating instead. She had chaperoned so many proms over the years and shared with us some of the very negative things she saw happen when students weren't using their best judgment. While trying to downplay the event may seem like being a killjoy to some, many of my friends and I found it reassuring to hear from an adult that life indeed does go on past these high school celebrations because most students were very much caught up in a prom and end-of-the-year craze.

I think teachers and/or counselors should engage students in conversations like these months before prom to temper the frenzy that can accompany the event and possibly prevent the unwise decisions students make at prom and post-prom parties. It is of course perfectly acceptable to be happy and excited about prom, but I think there is much potential for danger when students blow it into epic proportions. Another thing that my high school did, which looking back I now view as a wise decision, was to not have a prom queen or king. The end of the year was just too filled with other anxiety-inducing events to have so much stress and energy expended on that. We simply had a homecoming king and queen in the fall, and I think that greatly reduced the tension around prom time."

Summer Months Theme



Moving Forward in Providing Learning Supports

A special focus for the summer months is on the following overlapping concerns:

- (1) Using the Summer to Help Students Avoid Falling Behind**
- (2) Furthering Development of a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports**
- (3) Incorporating a Focus on Learning Supports into Staff Development**

Activity to help focus staff discussion on moving forward:

Encourage staff to explore:

What can we do this summer to help students now and plan ways to help us respond more resiliently in the coming school year?

The summer allows dedicated stakeholders not only to help students continue to learn and develop, it provides an opportunity to pursue ways to improve in anticipation of the predictable demands of the coming school year.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”
Margaret Mead

(1) Using Summer to Help Students Avoid Falling Behind

Low-income children and youth experience greater summer learning losses than their higher income peers. On average, middle-income students experience slight gains in reading performance over the summer months. Low-income students experience an average summer learning loss in reading achievement of over two months.

(Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S. (1996). The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: A narrative and meta-analytic review. *Review of Educational Research*, 66, 227-268)

Studies show that out-of-school time is a dangerous time for unsupervised children and teens. They are more likely to use alcohol, drugs, and tobacco; engage in criminal and other high-risk behaviors; receive poor grades; and drop out of school than those who have the opportunity to benefit from constructive activities supervised by responsible adults.

(Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1994). *A matter of time: risk and opportunity in the out-of-school hours: recommendations for strengthening community programs for youth*. NY: Carnegie Corp.)

Learning loss and increases in risky behavior are major worries related to students who aren't in school during the summer. Schools (especially student and learning supports staff), working with the community, need to help develop summer month programs that help address barriers to learning, promote healthy development, and enhance equity of opportunity.

As Johns Hopkins University's Center for Summer Learning stresses in *Primer on Summer Learning Loss*:

“If policymakers are serious about improving excellence and equity in public education, social science research suggests that high-quality summer programs must become a significant and central component in school reform efforts.”

Using the Summer Productively

Below are a few excerpts from the Johns Hopkins University's Center for Summer Learning ***Primer on Summer Learning Loss***:

- All young people should have consistent access to high-quality summer enrichment programs throughout their educational careers. Programs should be proactive and offered for multiple summers.
- Elementary schools and youth development organizations should form partnerships to prevent summer loss in reading among low-income students. ... Teachers and youth development professionals should use the summers to collaborate and bridge gaps between schools and youth programs. Summer programs should incorporate research-based practices for improving cognitive development from high-quality after-school enrichment programs. . . . Summer learning should be a community-wide, inter-agency priority. There are a wide variety of roles that public agencies, community-based organizations, cultural institutions, and colleges and universities can play in improving the quality and quantity of summer learning opportunities for all young people. Improved collaboration and leveraging of funds from multiple sources will help ensure greater levels of access to programs.
- Program models should maintain a strong academic focus, but also acknowledge the unique role that summers play within American culture. Summer programs can demonstrate the power of informal learning experiences such as reading and discussing books for pleasure and gaining exposure to new cultures and ideas.
- Summer programs should be used to support the recruitment, professional development, and retention of teachers and youth program staff. ... Summers should be used to encourage teachers to try new techniques, teach different subjects or grades, acquire new skills and mentor new colleagues. Simultaneously, summers could be used to attract current college students or recent graduates to internship experiences in public school classrooms and with non-profit youth development organizations.

Making Teaching More Effective

“...It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of innovation and creativity in meeting the needs of struggling student. Summer school involves intensive reteaching of materials that students did not master during the school year, but those students need help that goes beyond simply reteaching the same materials in the same way...

What is the ‘something different’ that summer schools need to do? Doing ‘something different’ often means connecting subject matter to real-life situations that are relevant to students. It might mean finding books about baseball to read and using baseball statistics in math instruction for a student who lives and breathes the sport. It could involve using musical themes to engage a student who constantly drums on his desk or incorporating a lot of physical movement to reach the aspiring dancer. It might mean using technology that presents materials in a game-like format. It might mean simply giving a student the opportunity to discuss the material with teachers and peers to an extent not possible in the regular classroom...”

From: The Southern Regional Education Board report *Summer School: Unfulfilled Promise*, 2002, <http://www.sreb.org>,

Of course, summer provides an opportunity to introduce many ideas for making both the content and the process of teaching and learning more relevant to students. Active learning is especially important. There are many ways to promote active learning at all grade levels. It can take the form of class discussions, problem based and discovery learning, a project approach, involvement in learning centers, experiences outside the classroom, and independent learning in or out of school. Students may become involved in classroom, school-wide, or community service or action projects. Older students may be involved in “internships” or service learning. Service learning involves students in identifying a real community need, ties the community work with academic goals, encourages the students to reflect on and evaluate their learning, and strengthens the relationship between community and school. In general, research suggests that the quality of such interactions between teachers and students distinguishes which teachers are most effective.

***For Resources Related to Using Summer to
Help Students Avoid Falling Behind***

For more on summer learning, see:

G.D. Borman (2001). Summers are for learning. *Principal*, 80(3), 26-29

For more information on service learning see “Building Community Through Service Learning” at <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/44/03/4403.pdf>)

For more on active learning, see our Center resources entitled:

- > ***Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom Focused Enabling*** (a set of Continuing Education Modules)
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/contedu/cfe.pdf>
- > ***Re-engaging Students in Learning*** (a Quick Training Aid)
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/quicktraining/reengagingstudents.pdf>

Also see the Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

- *After School Programs
- *Classroom Focused Enabling
- *Environments that support learning
- *Mentoring
- *Motivation
- *Youth Development

(2) Furthering Development of a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

Over a school year, it is hard to find enough time to stop, think, and plan new ways of doing things.

It is a bit like Winnie the Pooh's experience going downstairs. As Milne describes it:

"Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he know, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it."

The summer months provide an opportunity to think long enough to plan better ways of doing things. In particular, it allows staff who work year round to further develop student and learning supports into a more effective system. Such periods also allow for special personnel development.

Turning Learning Supports into a Major Systemic Component

As is described in this series of monthly ideas for enhancing support at a school, there is a rhythm to the course of a school year. Varying demands arise every month. Knowing these cyclical demands helps to anticipate and plan what to do to support students and enable learning. At most schools, support staff have had to keep "bumping their heads" as they struggle each day to meet the demands on them. This usually means reacting with a limited set of piecemeal and fragmented strategies. Now is the time to think about how to become proactive and more effective.

The aim should be to set a process into motion that can lead to development of a comprehensive and cohesive component to address barriers to student learning and promote healthy development. Such a component has been called an enabling or learning supports component. Planning and developing such a component not only can end fragmented approaches, it can move toward eliminating the counterproductive competition for resources and end the marginalization of student support staff.

Building an enabling or learning supports component requires enhancing the capacity of a school's support staff so that they can be more effective in addressing the many factors that interfere with students succeeding at school. One way to enhance the capacity of support staff is to develop a mechanism that enables them to work together on a regular basis.

Time to Think About Establishing a Resource-Oriented Mechanism

WHAT IS A LEARNING SUPPORTS RESOURCE TEAM?

Every school that wants to improve its systems for providing student support needs a mechanism that focuses specifically on improving resource use and enhancement. A *Learning Support Resource Team* (previously called a Resource Coordinating Team) is a vital form of such a mechanism.

Most schools have teams that focus on individual student/family problems (e.g., a student support team, an IEP team). These teams focus on such functions as referral, triage, and care monitoring or management. In contrast to this case-by-case focus, a school's *Learning Support Resource Team* can take responsibility for enhancing use of all resources available to the school for addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development. This includes analyzing how existing resources are deployed and clarifying how they can be used to build a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach. It also integrally involves the community with a view to integrating human and financial resources from public and private sectors to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

What are its functions?

A *Learning Supports Resource Team* performs essential functions related to the implementation and ongoing development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach for addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development.

Examples of key tasks are:

- ◆ Aggregating data across students and from teachers to analyze school needs
- ◆ Mapping resources at school and in the community
- ◆ Analyzing resources
- ◆ Identifying the most pressing program development needs at the school
- ◆ Coordinating and integrating school resources & 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"

Related to the concept of an Enabling or Learning Supports Component, these functions are pursued within frameworks that outline six curriculum content areas and the comprehensive continuum of interventions needed to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to student support that is integrated fully into the fabric of the school.

Who's on Such a Team?

A Learning Support Resource Team might begin with only two people. Where feasible, it should expand into an inclusive group of informed stakeholders who are able and willing. This would include the following:

- Principal or assistant principal
- School Psychologist
- Counselor
- School Nurse
- School Social Worker
- Behavioral Specialist
- Special education teacher
- Representatives of community agencies involved regularly with the school
- Student representation (when appropriate and feasible)
- Others who have a particular interest and ability to help with the functions

It is important to integrate this team with the infrastructure mechanisms at the school focused on instruction and management/governance. For example, the school administrator on the team must represent the team at administrative meetings; there also should be a representative at governance meetings; and another should represent the team at a Learning Support Resource *Council* formed for a family of schools (e.g., the feeder pattern).

References:

- Adelman, H.S. (1993). School-linked mental health interventions: Toward mechanisms for service coordination and integration. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 21, 309-319.
- Center for Mental Health in Schools (2001). *Resource-Oriented Teams: Key Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Education Supports*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA.
- Center for Mental Health in Schools (2002). *Creating the Infrastructure for an Enabling (Learning Support) Component to Address Barriers to Student Learning*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA.
- Rosenblum, L., DiCecco, M.B., Taylor, L., & Adelman, H.S. (1995). Upgrading school support programs through collaboration: Resource Coordinating Teams. *Social Work in Education*, 17, 117-124.

Examples of Areas Schools Might Want to Designate as First Priorities in Developing a Learning Supports Component

(1) Classroom-Focused Enabling

Clearly the primary focus in addressing barriers to student learning is on ongoing inservice for teachers – as reflected in this set of continuing education modules.

With respect to the other five programmatic areas, the efforts of a classroom teacher can be greatly enhanced by setting as priorities development of the following:

(2) Support for Transitions

Many schools need to enhance their positive "climate" for everyone - students, staff, families, others in the community. In particular, they can significantly reduce learning, behavior, and emotional problems by ensuring the development of three types of transition programs:

> Welcoming and Social Support Programs for Everyone

The greater the rate of student and staff mobility, the greater the priority for pursuing strategies to enhance welcoming and social support. A positive welcome is desirable at the various initial encounters school staff have with a new student and family, a new staff member, and all visitors. Each point of contact represents an opportunity and a challenge to positively assimilate newcomers into the school – welcoming them, linking them with appropriate social supports, assisting them to make successful transitions, and identifying and providing additional assistance for those who are having difficulty adjusting. It is risky business for a school not to have programs that fully orient newcomers (students, family, staff), connect them with specific peers (e.g., peer buddies), orchestrate their entrance into ongoing groups and activities, and so forth (see the Center's introductory packet entitled: *What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families*).

>Articulation Programs

Many students have difficulty making the transition from grade-to-grade and many more have difficulty going from elementary to middle school or from middle to high school. Indeed, many "dropouts" occur during transitions to high school. Programs are needed that (a) provide all students with opportunities to prepare themselves psychologically for such changes and (b) identify and intervene on behalf of any student who is having difficulty during the actual period of transition. Comparable programs are useful for family members and new staff.

>Before, During, and After School Recreation, Academic Support, & Enrichment, Programs

Many schools have significant problems with tardies, bullying, substance abuse, and other forms of behavior that contribute to poor student performance. Well-designed and structured recreation and enrichment are basic to encouraging proactive behavior. Offered before school they lure students to school early and thus reduce tardies. Offered at lunch, they can reduce the incidence of harassment and other negative

interactions. After school, they provide alternatives to antisocial interactions in the community, and paired with positive opportunities for enriched and personalized academic support, they offer renewed hope for those who have learning problems.

(3) Home Involvement in Schooling

Besides what the school already is doing to enhance home involvement, there should be an intensive, proactive, positive outreach program aimed at families housing students who are experiencing learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Such activity should be accompanied by a commitment to minimizing negative contacts with family members (blaming and fingerwaving).

>Programs to strengthen the family

It is rarely a mystery as to what family members need and would value from the school. In outreaching to attract family members to the school, the first priority should be development of programs and services related to the area of Student and Family Assistance (see below).

(4) Emergency/Crisis Response and Prevention

>Response Plan & Crisis Team

Every school probably has a written crisis response plan. For such a plan to be viable and in order to pursue an enhanced focus on preventing crises, a strong priority should be to establish and build the capability of a Crisis Team.

(5) Student and Family Assistance

While a wide range of assistance programs and services can be developed over the years, the first priorities in this area are:

>Establishing access to emergency assistance for basic life needs (e.g., food, clothes, shelter, safety, emergency health care and dentistry, legal aid)
This usually involves identifying appropriate referral agencies and establishing direct links to them to facilitate family access.

>Literary and extra academic support program (e.g., family literacy, tutors, GED preparation, ESL classes, related software for computers)

>Social and emotional counseling (support groups, individual and group counseling)

(6) Community Outreach

>Volunteer recruitment program (e.g., parents, college students, senior citizens, mentors from the business community)

Center Tools and Aids for Developing and Guiding the Work of a Learning Supports Resource Team

> ***Resource-Oriented Teams: Key Infrastructure Mechanisms for
Enhancing Education Supports***

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf

> ***Addressing Barriers to Learning: A Set of Surveys to Map What a
School Has and What it Needs***

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Surveys/Set1.pdf>

> ***Resource Mapping and Management to Address Barriers to Learning:
An Intervention for Systemic Change***

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resourcemapping/resourcemappingandmanagement.pdf>

> ***Steps and Tools to Guide Planning and Implementation of a Comprehensive
System to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching***

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/stepsandtoolstoguideplanning.pdf>

> ***Guidelines for a Student Support Component***

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/guidelinessupportdoc.pdf>

> ***Toolkit*** – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

(3) Incorporating a Focus on Learning Supports into Staff Development

At some time or another, most students bring problems with them to school that affect their learning and perhaps interfere with the teacher's efforts to teach. In some geographic areas, many youngsters bring a wide range of problems stemming from restricted opportunities associated with poverty and low income, difficult and diverse family circumstances, high rates of mobility, lack of English language skills, violent neighborhoods, problems related to substance abuse, inadequate health care, and lack of enrichment opportunities. Such problems are exacerbated as youngsters internalize the frustrations of confronting barriers and the debilitating effects of performing poorly at school. In some locales, the reality often is that over 50% of students are not succeeding. And, in most schools in these locales, teachers are ill-prepared to address the problems in a potent manner. Thus, when a student is not doing well, the trend increasingly is to refer them directly for counseling or for assessment in hopes of referral for special help – perhaps even special education.

From this perspective, it is evident that there is a major disconnect between what teachers and student and learning supports personnel need to learn and what they are taught about addressing the difficulties related to so many students.

As the move toward using response to intervention strategies stresses, when a teacher encounters difficulty in working with a youngster, the first step should be to see whether there are ways to address the problem within the classroom and perhaps with added home involvement. To this end, it is essential to equip teachers and student and learning supports staff with a range of ways to enable the learning of such students.

Think in terms of planning staff development for teachers and student and learning supports personnel with a view to promoting a caring and effective context for student learning. Examples of what needs to be learned include how to

- work collaboratively in the classroom with support staff and volunteers
- establish a classroom infrastructure that transforms a big classroom into a set of smaller units and personalizes interventions and bases specialized assistance on a student's responses to the personalized interventions
- move away from overreliance on extrinsics to an emphasis on intrinsic motivation
- prevent and address problems as soon as they arise
- establish a comprehensive system of learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide

About Personnel Development and Enhancing Resilience

One of the most important research findings related to good outcomes for children and youth is understanding that by enhancing protective factors or buffers, risks can be reduced and barriers overcome. We must remember that this applies to adults as well.

In describing the characteristics of resilient person, researchers suggest they reflect

- an intrinsic motivational orientation (tend to feel competent, self-determining, and connected to significant others)
- have the capacity to develop and use a range of strategies and skills for successfully coping with challenges/problems – taking an active, flexible, and persistent stance and viewing a challenge as something that can be worked on, overcome, changed, endured, or resolved in some way (but also when “enough is enough”)

In their work, David Hawkins and his colleagues have emphasized the particular importance of developing strong bonds. He stresses these arise from (a) opportunities for meaningful involvement (ways to make a real contribution and feel valued for effort and accomplishment); (b) developing skill (social, cognitive, emotional, behavioral) that enable success, and (c) recognition for involvement (including corrective feedback) to motivate continued contributions.

It is unlikely that a school that does not promote resilience for staff can promote it for students

“...Resilience applies to everyone at school. Identify at least one protective factor that exists for school staff. How can faculty and administration maximize the benefit of that protective factor to enhance your own resilience? ... Are mistakes, bad decisions, discipline problems, difficulties with academic performance or crises always signs of failure? Or, could they also be ‘teachable moments?’ ... If you believe that nothing you do will make much of a difference, then coming to work at school each day becomes something you have to do, rather than something you want to do.” (National Education Association created the Health Information Network. “Resiliency 101.” – [Http://www.neahin.org](http://www.neahin.org))

Center Resources to Aid in Staff Development

To aid staff development, the Center has a wide range of resources that are online for free access. Some of it has been developed as Quick Training Aids; others for workshop adaptation; and most of it can be used for independent study or by a volunteer *community of learners*.

See, for example, the section of website resources devoted to:

Guides to Policy And Program Development/practice
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/guidestopolicy.htm>

Because the idea of developing a *Comprehensive System of Learning Supports* at a school is relatively new, we have developed a brief guide to beginning personnel development for school staff (teachers, support staff, administrators) using free online resources. These resources are intended to provide an introduction to the concepts and practices that form a comprehensive system of learning supports and how to get such system development going at a school. See:

***Beginning Steps in Personnel Development Related to Establishing
a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports***
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/personneldevelopment.pdf>

Remember: Staff Development Focusing on Learning Supports is for All Personnel

- teachers need to learn more about how to address interfering factors and to work with others in doing so
 - support staff need to learn more about how to work with teachers and other staff (and to do so in classrooms as much as is feasible), as well as learning how to work more productively with district and community resources to enhance practices for prevention and for responding quickly when common problems arise
 - administrators need to learn more about leading the way by expanding policy, enhancing operational infrastructure, and redeploying resources to ensure development of a comprehensive system of learning supports for addressing barriers to learning, development, and teaching
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