How to address student mental health needs proactively

By Nathaniel von der Embse, The Conversation

One out of every 4 or 5. That’s how many students will display a significant mental health problem over the course of their lifetime.

Such students can be identified early with considerable accuracy if educators are given the right training and tools. Unfortunately, most schools rely on reactive methods, like office discipline referrals, to figure out which students need behavioral and mental health services.

Research shows this approach of waiting until students act out in school is inefficient and leads to as many as 80 percent of those with mental health needs to fall through the cracks.

Such concerns have heightened in the wake of the Parkland high school massacre. News reports indicate the alleged shooter exhibited a number of troubling behaviors, raising questions about his mental health status and whether more could have been done to help him sooner.

To address the issue of students falling through the cracks, more schools should adopt proactive, universal screening tools.

Universal screening typically occurs three times throughout the school year: fall, winter and spring. Screeners are brief assessments that take no more than a few minutes to complete. They include approximately 20 questions and are given to each student in the elementary classroom. These tools ask students to indicate things such as “I lose my temper” or whether they are “adaptable to change.” The questions are purposefully broad and are meant to identify students who may be at risk for either internal problem behaviors, such as anxiety or depression, or external problem behaviors, such as aggression toward others. The screenings are scored and used to prioritize which students need intervention.

Screeners are typically administered without parental consent if they are embedded into the general school curriculum.

Research shows that screening tools can help educators identify students with mental health needs with far greater accuracy and speed, rather than waiting for a severe problem behavior, such as a school fight.

I developed one such tool – the Social, Academic and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener, or SAEBRS – with the help of several grants, including $1.4 million from the Institute for Educational Sciences in the U.S. Department of Education.

If society is serious about preventing severe mental and behavioral health problems, it must take a critical look at the current state of mental health supports in the nation's schools. Doing so will bring the value of screening tools into sharper focus.

School mental health stretched thin

First, let's consider the service provider side of the equation. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500-700 students. However, the reality is that states on average have ratios of nearly twice that amount. Simply put, schools rarely have the staff necessary for comprehensive mental health services.

Second, only a small number of students who need mental health services will receive intervention in a timely manner. Due to the amount of time that teachers spend with students, teachers are the critical link to identify which students need help and to refer students to school psychologists, counselors and social workers. The question is: Do teachers know what to look for?

Silent issues overlooked

Consider a typical elementary classroom with 30 students. Approximately six students, on average, will have a critical mental and behavioral health problem such as anxiety or aggression, yet less than half will receive timely intervention. Who are those students? Typically those that exhibit more outward types of problems, such as aggression, problems paying attention and disruptive behavior.

Students with harder-to-see issues, such as withdrawal, anxiety and social isolation often get overlooked and rarely receive essential services. Teachers often lack the training or tools necessary to know which students may need help, beyond those that are disruptive to instruction.

These screenings are not part of the process for comprehensive special education evaluations, so the concerns about schools having to offer special education services as a result of the screening do not come into play.

While screening tools can help identify troubled students sooner, it is important not to oversell the usefulness of these tools. To be clear, there are no research-validated tools that can reliably identify which students may commit violent acts.

Toward universal screening

Currently, less than 15 percent of schools engage in some form of behavioral or mental health screening. However, more schools are adopting universal screening.

As the developer of a screening tool, I have seen rapid adoption of the tool over the last four years from two elementary schools in rural North Carolina to hundreds of schools across 28 states. As schools consider how best to meet the behavioral and mental health needs of their students, screening can provide crucial information to guide the way.

Nathaniel von der Embse is an assistant professor of psychology at the University of South Florida.

CTC chief receives 10 percent pay raise

By Kathryn Reed

After more than an hour of deliberations, the California Tahoe Conservancy board on Wednesday voted unanimously to give Executive Director Patrick Wright a 10 percent raise.

This comes after getting two less than stellar reviews in the last year.

Patrick Wright

Even so, Wright received a 4 percent bump in pay on July 1, 2017.

The latest raise brings his annual salary to $137,874.

Staff had recommended a 32 percent raise.

Part of the issue is the deputy director and the CTC attorney make more than Wright – and still do even with the current adjustment. The deputy makes $151,488 and the lawyer $149,508.

These compaction issues occur because the state gives raises, not the local board, to employees. Wright is the only CTC employee the board has any say over.

The staff report had multiple charts comparing other state executives who work in the Tahoe area, as well as local government chiefs' salaries.

So, the issue of who gets paid what is not being based on merit, but instead with keeping up appearances, which the powers that be say is the only way to then be able to recruit for that job in the future.

Had the staff recommendation been approved, Wright's salary would have had him be the highest paid employee at the CTC – which is normal for the top person to be paid the most.

The increase is still subject to review by three other state agencies.

Wright's next review is scheduled for June.

CHP to have zero tolerance for DUIs on St. Paddy's Day

While the public makes plans to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, the California Highway Patrol is preparing to keep the roadways free of impaired drivers.

Last year on St. Patrick's Day, the CHP made 148 driving under the influence arrests. Three people were killed and 66 people were injured as a result of DUI collisions.

The CHP recommends these steps to avoid impaired driving:

- Plan ahead. Designate a sober driver or have an alternate transportation plan before you go out to drink.
- If you are hosting a party, serve plenty of food and non-alcoholic beverages. Stop serving alcohol a few hours before the end of the party.
- If you see a friend who is too drunk to drive, take their keys and call them a cab or ride-share, or give them a ride home.
- If you see a suspected impaired driver, call 911. Your phone call may save someone's life.

Calif., Trump clash over raising Shasta Dam

By Evan Halper and Sarah D. Wire, Los Angeles Times

The Trump administration is pushing forward with a colossal public works project in Northern California — heightening the towering Shasta Dam the equivalent of nearly two stories.

The problem is that California is dead-set against the plan, and state law prohibits the 602-foot New Deal-era structure from getting any taller.

But in these times of unprecedented tension between Washington and California, the state's objection to this $1.3-billion project near the Sacramento River is hardly proving a deterrent. The Trump administration is pursuing the project with gusto, even as it seeks to make deep cuts in popular conservation programs aimed at California's water shortages.

Read the whole story

'Saving Snow' to be shown at Squaw Valley

"Saving Snow," a documentary focusing on the impacts of disappearing snow seasons in mountain communities that depend on winter tourism and recreation, will be shown April 21 at Squaw Valley.

The film highlights individuals and organizations working to reduce their communities' impacts on the environment and raise awareness of the need for action.

Citizens' Climate Lobby is a nonprofit, non-partisan grassroots advocacy organization focused on national solutions to address climate change, particularly putting a price on carbon through a carbon fee and dividend policy. To generate the political will necessary for passage of a national price on carbon, CCL trains and supports volunteers in over 400 chapters to build relationships with elected officials, the media and their local community.

The event to be held at the Base Camp in the Village at Squaw Valley. Admission is free for Squaw Valley Institute members, $15 for other adults, $5 for children/students.

Doors open at 5pm, opening presentation starts at 5:30pm. Film screening begins at 6pm, followed by public Q&A with the panel.

Scam artists ripoff older Douglas County residents

Two Douglas County residents lost money in a gift card scam.

According to Douglas County sheriff's investigators, a resident received a phone call from someone claiming to be from Apple who said the victim's computer had been compromised. The caller ID also said Apple Inc. so the resident didn't question the call. The caller claimed to have fixed the computer remotely. The suspect then asked the victim to purchase a protection plan by buying $400 in iTunes gift cards.

In the second case, a Douglas County resident received a phone call from a caller claiming to be a grandson, and then later a call from a man who claimed to be the attorney for the grandson who was handling his arrest for driving under the influence. The caller wanted and received $2,500 in WalMart gift cards for handling the incident.

Both victims were older, which is normal in these sorts of cases, according to the FBI. Seniors are perceived to have more money, are more trusting and have memory problems.

DCSO tells people to never answer personal questions, never tell a stranger bank information, Social Security information, or Medicare numbers.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Counterfeit currency material confiscated in Truckee

A Vallejo man was arrested in Truckee on Wednesday after officers found counterfeit currency manufacturing devices in his vehicle.

Officers conducted a routine traffic stop on March 14 on eastbound Interstate 80 near Overland Trail.

The driver, David Honsinger, 33, had several outstanding felony warrants for assault with a deadly weapon, felon in possession of a firearm, hit and run resulting in injury, and felony evading, according to officers.

A subsequent search of his vehicle resulted in items being located that are commonly used in the manufacturing of counterfeit currency and government documents, police said. They added that Honsinger was also found to be in possession of an imitation firearm and a high capacity handgun magazine.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report

Lawmaker: Calif. needs laws to boost earthquake safety

By Rong-Gong Lin II, Los Angeles Times

A Los Angeles lawmaker says California needs new statewide laws that boost earthquake safety, and wants to toughen rules on how strong new buildings should be and require cities to identify buildings at risk of collapse.

Assemblyman Adrin Nazarian, D-North Hollywood, said the bills are important for keeping California functioning after a major earthquake.

California’s construction requirements are so minimal that even a new building can be legally built to a weakness that would leave it severely damaged in an earthquake — so much that it would have to be torn down, Nazarian said.

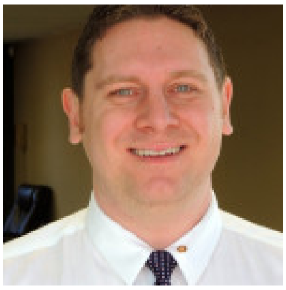
Read the whole story

Money Matters: Education planning options

By Nic Abelow

This article provides an overview of the different tax-advantaged accounts available to help fund an education.

The cost of a college education continues to rise. The projected average total college costs for a child born in 2015 are nearly $550,000 for a four-year private college and $240,000 for a public college.1 If you are looking for tax-advantaged ways to get ahead of the curve, you have several choices — 529 plans, Coverdell Education Savings Accounts, and custodial accounts created under the Unified Gifts to Minors Act (UGMA) or Unified Transfers to Minors Act (UTMA) — but which ones may be right for you?



Nic Abelow

Generally, 529s, Coverdells, and UGMA/UTMA share the following characteristics:

· Earnings accumulate free from taxes.

· Qualified withdrawals are federally tax free. Nonqualified withdrawals may be subject to income taxes and a 10 percent additional federal tax.

· Contributions are treated as gifts for federal tax purposes (although contributions may be capped below the annual limits set by the IRS).

· Contributions are not deductible for federal income tax purposes (however, some states offer state tax credits or deductions).

Yet there are significant differences between the account types, including the definition of qualified expenses, contribution limits, income limits, ownership of the account, and other restrictions. Keep these in mind as we examine each option.

The lowdown on 529 plans

Named after the section of the federal tax code that governs them, 529 plans are generally sponsored by individual states or, in some cases, by qualified educational institutions. They are administered by investment companies, which also oversee the underlying assets.

There are two types of 529 plans. The more familiar one, the college savings plan, allows for the investment of contributions into portfolios of mutual funds or similar financial instruments. Most are national plans – that is, residents of one state may use a plan sponsored by another state.

Other key features of 529 college savings plans include:

· Generous lifetime contribution limits that often exceed $200,000 per beneficiary.

· Tax rules that let anyone give up to $14,000 in 2016, free from federal gift taxes, to as many individuals as they choose. Donors also have the option of averaging a single lump-sum contribution over five years, effectively allowing them to give up to $70,000 at one time, gift tax free.

· No income restrictions on contributors to a 529 plan.

· Money in a college savings plan may be used at any eligible college or university for qualified expenses such as tuition, books, and computer equipment.

· Qualified withdrawals may be exempt from state taxes as well (tax rules vary from state to state).

· The individual who creates a 529 plan account on behalf of a beneficiary generally maintains complete control over the account.

· Account owners may also change beneficiaries.

· Contributions to 529 plans may provide a state tax deduction for residents of the sponsoring state. If your state or your designated beneficiary’s state offers a 529 plan, you may want to consider what, if any, potential state income tax or other benefits it offers before investing.

The second type of 529 plan, called a prepaid tuition plan, lets you pay future tuition at today’s rates, essentially taking inflation out of the equation. These plans are, in general, available to residents of the sponsoring state for in-state tuition only, although some state schools offer them to out-of-state students, too, and some private schools offer them as well.

Coverdell: New name, better benefits

Coverdell Education Savings Accounts, known previously as Education IRAs, allow tax-free withdrawals for elementary and high school expenses in addition to college costs.

· Contributions are capped at $2,000 annually per beneficiary and are made with post-tax money. Excess contributions are subject to a 6 percent federal excise tax.

· Contributions are not deductible from income for federal tax purposes.

· The deadline to contribute to a Coverdell is generally April 15, the same deadline that applies to IRAs.

· Account owners may also change beneficiaries.

· You cannot contribute if your modified adjusted gross income is more than $110,000 if you file singly or more than $220,000 if you file jointly.

· Qualified withdrawals may be used to pay for an elementary, secondary, or college education.

· The beneficiary can take withdrawals at any time, but any amounts in excess of his or her qualified education expenses will be taxable as jointly.

· Qualified withdrawals may be used to pay for an elementary, secondary, or college education.

· The beneficiary can take withdrawals at any time, but any amounts in excess of his or her qualified education

expenses will be taxable as income. A 10 percent additional federal tax may also apply.

· Assets must be used before the beneficiary’s 30th birthday.

UGMA/UTMA accounts

UGMA/UTMA custodial accounts are not college savings accounts, per se, but do offer gift tax and estate tax benefits to contributors as well as income tax benefits to the minors for whom they are established. Under the guidelines of UGMA or UTMA — nomenclature varies by state — adults may establish and contribute to a custodial account in a minor’s name without having to create a trust or name a legal guardian.

Other key features include:

· No limits on contributions.

· No withdrawal restrictions as long as the money is used for the benefit of the minor.

· Ownership of the assets by the minor, not the contributor.

· Investment earnings accumulate tax free for the contributor, but the minor may be subject to taxation at the kiddie tax rate.2

· Upon reaching adulthood, the child gains complete control of the UGMA/UTMA and is not required to spend the money on college.

Considerations

Choosing a college investment vehicle is not necessarily a “one or the other” decision — it may make sense for you to contribute to more than one type of account simultaneously. Speak with a financial and tax advisor about your particular needs.

Source/disclaimer:

1Source: ChartSource, DST Systems Inc. Estimates are based on average total costs (including tuition, fees, room and board, and other expenses). Projections are based on 2015-2016 costs of $47,831 for a four-year private college and $24,061 for a four-year public college, as reported by the College Board, and assume annual increases of 6 percent.

2During 2016, the first $1,050 is tax free, the next $1,050 is taxed at the child's rate, and any excess is taxed at the greater of the parents' rate or child's rate. Once the child reaches age 19, or 24 if a full-time student whose income does not exceed half of his or her annual support, all income is taxed at his or her rate.

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1 man released, 2 others arrested in EDC homicide

By Benjy Egel And Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

A man detained for questioning has been released and two other men arrested in Tuesday's stabbing death of a 35-year-old Pollock Pines man.

The El Dorado County Sheriff's Office identified the victim as Jeremy Fortuin. Deputies found him with multiple injuries when they responded just after 4pm Tuesday to a report of a stabbing on Pony Express Trail in Cedar Grove.

Read the whole story