

Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(October, 2023 Vol. 28 #1) – 37 Years & Counting

Featured

Enhancing Student Engagement (and attendance)

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Enhancing Student Engagement (and attendance)

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 fade and learning problems increase. In turn, learning problems generate an emotional overlay and usually behavior problems.

The key to minimizing learning, behavior, and emotional problems is to aggressively focus on enhancing and maintaining 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 supports and guidance (structure).

The seeds of significant problems are planted when instruction is not a good fit. A focus on enhancing intrinsic motivation through improving instructional fit using response to intervention (RtI) can help personalize instruction and enhance student engagement. School staff not only need to try to increase motivation but also to avoid practices that decrease it. While motivation is a fundamental concern for all students, for those with problems an emphasis on intrinsic motivation is essential. And in addressing 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.

Intrinsic motivation 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.**

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.

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 is 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, providing information about learning and performance that threatens feelings of competence and connectedness to significant others.

A unhappy reality is that 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.

One fundamental implication for classrooms is to ensure there are a broad range of *options* with respect to:

- content
- outcomes
- processes – including a personalized support and guidance to facilitate learning

With options that the student perceives as of value and obtainable come real opportunities for involving learners in decision making and enhancing engagement in learning and instruction.

With the above in mind, this is a critical time to focus on increasing ways for a school to

>avoid overreliance on extrinsics

>emphasize intrinsic motivation

>minimize practices that produce negative psychological reactions and unwanted behavior

A Few Resources for Staff Development Related to Enhancing Student Engagement

>[*About Motivation*](#)

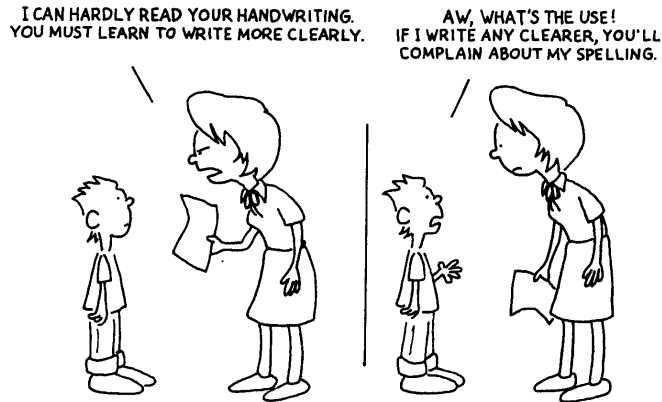
>[*Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School*](#)

>[*School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate*](#)

>[*The Role of School and Home in Promoting Student Engagement*](#)

>[*About School Engagement And Re-engagement*](#)

For more see the Center Quick Find on >[**Motivation, engagement, re-engagement**](#)



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We need to be experts about children: who they are, where they live, what they need and what can go wrong. We need to be family and school systems experts because to fail to know families and schools is to fail to know children. J. C. Conoley

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>[**Quick Links to Online Resources**](#)

[*Challenges to Developing and Implementing Performance Partnership Pilots to Serve Children*](#)

[*Young people's recovery processes from mental health problems*](#)

[*Operationalizing children's participation: Competing understandings of the policy to practice 'gap'*](#)

[*The Complexity of Teacher Job Satisfaction: Balancing Joys and Challenges*](#)

[*The Benefits and Challenges of Home-School Communication*](#)

[*MHTTC Network's Diversity Equity and Inclusion \(DEI\) Reference Guide*](#)

[*IES Equity in Education Dashboard*](#)

[*Suicide Awareness & Prevention for Healthcare Students*](#)

[*Declining Enrollment, School Closures, and Equity Considerations*](#)

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When it comes to cohesion and us coming together to work together to try to build a better community and a better society, I think we need to do better at that. A lot of people are working on that in different ways. Part of it is through strengthening our democracy and fighting to make sure everyone has equal access to voting and housing and resources that they need... John Legend

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Here's what was discussed in the *Community of Practice* during September

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

Note: *All community of practice editions contain Links to relevant shared resources.*

- >Sources of youth distress in enhancing resiliency
- >How students perceive the causes of problems they experience and enhancing their attitudes about help-seeking
- >School support for homeless families and students
- >Teachers Can't and Shouldn't be Expected to Do it Alone
- >Can the Arts be Used to Enhance Students' Empathy and Compassion?

If you missed the resources and news in previous issues of the *Community of Practice*, see <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

>For more resources in general, see our website
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

>For info on the status of upcoming conferences
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/upconf.htm>

>For info on webinars
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

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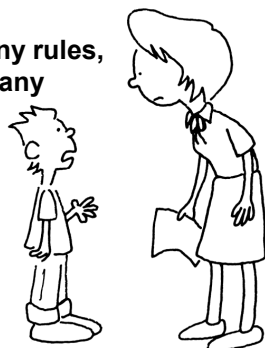
We will always argue over what we should teach, and in a democracy we should. But let's enter this year focusing on what we share and what binds us together, rather than what separates us. There is so much pulling us apart today. It's a shame that our public schools have become one more thing to fight over because we need them. We benefit individually and collectively from an educated public.... Johann Neem

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>Calls for grant proposals
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/upcall.htm>

**> job and training opportunities
when available**
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/job.htm>

If you didn't make so many rules,
there wouldn't be so many
for me to break!



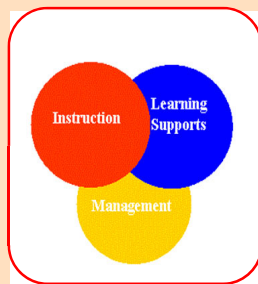
National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

Our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

Let Us Know about what ideas are being proposed for moving in new directions for transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

And if anyone is thinking about increasing the capacity of a district or school with respect to developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, we can help. Send all info to ltaylor@ucla.edu



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

A Few News Stories (excerpted from various news sources)

Instruction collaboration agreements. California SB 941 allows boards to enter into agreements with other districts to address teacher shortages. Senate Bill 941, which became effective Jan. 1, 2023, is intended to address the issue of teacher shortages in STEM and dual-language immersion programs. SB 941 allows boards to enter into agreements with other districts, COEs or charter schools to offer the same or similar corresponding individual classes and coursework to students from another LEA that has been impacted by disruptions, cancellations or teacher shortages in STEM classes and dual-language immersion programs. These agreements — called instruction collaboration agreements — enable districts to broaden their reach, allowing more students to access quality education options. For example, a district that has been unable to hire a teacher to offer a biology high school course can allow its students to attend that class in a school in a neighboring district

District taps retirees and others to fill teacher vacancies. Subs, retired teachers and teachers on special assignment temporarily fill gaps as district works to hire more teachers. Amid the ongoing national teacher shortage, West Contra Costa Unified started its second week of the 2023-24 school year with 80 teacher vacancies. The district has ensured coverage for all vacancies by reassigning instructional coaches and other teachers on special assignment to cover temporarily while new teachers are hired and processed. The district is also using substitute teachers and retired educators. The San Francisco Chronicle reported that neighboring Oakland Unified started its school year short 60 teachers and that San Francisco was still looking for more than 140 teachers.

Millions of kids are missing weeks of school as attendance tanks. Across the country, students have been absent at record rates since schools reopened during the pandemic. More than a quarter of students missed at least 10% of the 2021-22 school year, making them chronically absent, according to the most recent data available. Before the pandemic, only 15% of students missed that much school. All told, an estimated 6.5 million additional students became chronically absent. Kids are staying home for myriad reasons — finances, housing instability, illness, transportation issues, school staffing shortages, anxiety, depression, bullying and generally feeling unwelcome at school.

Schools are cutting advisers and tutors as COVID aid money dries up. An unprecedented infusion of aid money the U.S. government provided to schools during the pandemic has begun to dwindle. Some districts already are winding down programming like expanded summer school and after-school tutoring. Some teachers and support staff brought on to help kids through the crisis are being let go. The relief money, totaling roughly \$190 billion, was meant to help schools address needs arising from COVID-19, including making up for learning loss during the pandemic. In a June survey of hundreds of school system leaders by AASA, The School Superintendents Association, half said they would need to decrease staffing of specialists, such as tutors and reading coaches, for the new school year. Half also said they were cutting summer-learning programs.

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There is a tendency in our society to label typical uncomfortable emotions with words that equate to serious mental health disorders. Teenagers should feel nervous, sad, bored, angry, frustrated, and other typical emotions. But it has become pervasive to say these emotions are depression or anxiety..... These misunderstandings cause harm for everyone.... Ross Szabo

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>Comments and sharing from the field

Responses to 9/7 Center email on [Addressing Attendance Problems](#)

>“I also think that education is not engaging for the 20-30% chronically absent. A consultant from California once told us that worksheets are educational malpractice. We see worksheets daily in the classrooms. We do not see engaging relevant instruction happening. We also see individualized punitive plans to address this. If 51% have missed 15 or more days and if teachers also miss 15 or more days, something is wrong with the school culture. We need a positive systemic approach to making schools communities that teachers and students want to be in. We are a long way from that.”

>“Thank you for your timely information and resources. I have published a quick reference guide on Chronic Absenteeism with National Professional Resources, Inc. It is one of their top sellers and would love to share a copy with you to vet resources to share with your practitioners. I was really excited when I read the statement below in your most recent email. Please view the links below and let me know where I can send your complimentary copy of "Chronic Absenteeism: Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Schools, Families and Communities." I also facilitated and attendance webinar this summer that has been requested for an encore this fall.” <https://www.nprinc.com/chronic-absenteeism/>

*Response to 9/13 Center email on **Homeless Families and Students***

>“Regarding districts that are using closed schools as temporary housing. San Francisco Unified School District has a school that uses a gym from 7pm-7am to house homeless families in the district. I refer families there and they are supposed to fastrack families to housing.... I refer families to Dahlia, which is the city's low income housing website. It can take 3-4 months or more to get to apply for an apt. I also refer families to the 4 service points in the city as well as refer them to surrounding county's for section 8, which can also take ages as the list in SF is closed.”

Some positive feedback:

- > “... I have talked to district psychologists, counselors, and professors of psychology who understand the importance of mental health (rather than waiting until instances of chronic stress with improper support and knowledge inevitably lead to mental illness). I read ***Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*** and ... it appears that this issue still requires both more data-gathering and bringing up the importance of this in mainstream culture.... I would love to help with research on developing a multifaceted intervention prototype or to find more ways to bring these ideas up....”
- > “I subscribe/follow your emails from the UCLA center and think this is a great service with excellent perspectives on the everyday issues in schools. All the best to you and the center for its good works.”

To Listserv Participants

- **Please share this resource with others.** (Everyone has a stake in the future of public education and this is a critical time for action.)
- **Let us know what's going on** to improve how schools address barriers to learning & teaching and reengage disconnected students and families. (We can share the info with the over 130,000 on our listserv.)
- **For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**
- **Looking for information?** (We usually can help.)
- **Have a suggestion for improving our efforts?** (We welcome your feedback.)

We look forward to hearing from you!

Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF ENEWS

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

For more information about the Center and its many resources, go to the website at <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> or email Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu

Send info to share with others or ask for specific resources by email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu