

# Students & Schools: Moving Forward\*

(January, 2022 Vol. 26 #4) – 36 Years & Counting

## Contents

>By this time, it's clear which students are not doing well –  
*What's being done to help? What's not Working?*

>Quick links to online resources

>A few news stories

>Comment from the field

*\*Concerned about addressing barriers to student learning and teaching & re-engaging disconnected students? about equity of opportunity? about whole child development? about school climate? All that and more is our focus.*



**We encourage you to forward this to others. If this has been forwarded and you want to receive it directly, contact: [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**



**For more on resources from our national Center, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>**

>By this time, it's clear which students are not doing well –  
*What's being done to help? What's not Working?*

Common laments heard from teachers about some students at this time of the year:

- *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!*

As the new year begins, it is essential for schools to identify whether they are making good progress with students manifesting significant learning, behavior, and emotional problems. In too many instances, the findings will indicate that much more is needed to address barriers to learning and teaching effectively.

A starting point in making things better involves focusing on reengaging disconnected students and using Response to Intervention (RtI) to determine what additional factors are interfering with progress. Typically, some students are found to be passively disengaged (e.g., bored, burned out); others are actively disconnected (often acting out at school or not attending).

Reengaging disengaged students requires reversing low and negative intrinsic motivation, mobilizing resilience for change, and enhancing coping strategies. It involves paying particular attention to minimizing threats to and maximizing feelings of self-determination, competence, and connectedness with significant others.

*Teachers can't do all this alone!*

For example, teachers need student and learning support staff to work collaboratively with them (often in the classroom) to initiate reengagement strategies and implement RtI in ways that enhances (a) understanding of the causes of students' problems and (b) better ways to pursue progress.

In pursuing RtI, the first step is to fully engage the student in exploring what's wrong. Then, the aim is to understand the reasons underlying the student's motivation and behavior related to school. While schools can only do so much about nonschool factors, they can do something to counter a student's negative experiences at school by (a) heightening instructional success and (b) enhancing interpersonal relationship with teachers, other staff, and peers.

***Making it Happen:*** The work is hard and often frustrating, but the attention to specific students can pay dividends in terms of improving class climate and learning how to address future problems.

### ***1. Make time for Individual Conferences***

To accomplish this, teachers collaborate with other teachers, student/learning support staff, and administrators. Colleagues help in ways that free up time to conference individually with each student (and perhaps parents) having problems. For example, colleagues such as student support staff can play a role in arranging such conferences and then covering the class while the teacher conducts the session. The objectives are to renew positive relationships, reengage and mobilize the student, and initiate RtI. The session (a) covers why there has been a problem (without getting into a "blame-game"), (b) explores some new ways that the student thinks could make things better for all concerned, and (c) arrives at some mutual agreements (not one-way "contracts").

### ***2. Account for Individual Differences in Both Motivation and Capability***

Design and implement learning opportunities in ways that are a good match for the student's current interests and abilities and that enhance intrinsic motivation for ongoing learning at school. Focus on connecting the student with intrinsically motivating activities and projects. Such activities can consolidate something that has been learned recently or lay a foundation for future learning. Accommodations may be needed with respect to the physical arrangement of the classroom, presentation of material, workload, rules, nature of feedback, and more. If necessary, special assistance can be added into the mix.

### ***3. Keep Making Them Feel Cared About, Supported, and Positively Special***

Teachers need to take special steps to bond with these students and help them reengage in positive activities and learning. Use of volunteers, aids, and/or other students can provide additional supports for these particular students. Student/learning support staff, administrators, and other staff can also make bonding efforts. Support staff often have special opportunities 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 at school.

Design supports to provide real opportunities for discovering the value of learning and eliminate threats to feelings of self-determination, competence, and connectedness to significant others. 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). These examples also reflect natural opportunities for promoting social and emotional development.

#### **About Peer Relations**

For many students, school engagement is strongly associated with peer relationships and social dynamics. (*Who's in and who's out? Who is my friend? Who likes me and who do I like? Can I avoid being bullied?*) It is essential for schools to help with peer connections for students who haven't found a supportive group of friends and feel isolated/alienated and unsafe. Teachers working collaboratively with student/learning support staff can create a range of opportunities inside the classroom, schoolwide, and in the neighborhood to help these students establish positive peer connections.

For resources related to *Reengaging Students*, see the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

- > *Motivation, Engagement, Re-engagement* – <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>

For more indepth details on how schools can better address barriers to learning and teaching, see

- > *Improving School Improvement*
- > *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
- > *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

all three can be accessed at

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving\\_school\\_improvement.html](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)

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*Students across the country have felt the impact of school building closures as a result of the pandemic. While the good news is that nearly 100 percent of America's schools have now returned to in-person instruction, we must provide the necessary supports to nurture all students' social-emotional well-being, mental health, and positive academic outcomes by addressing the impact of lost instructional time.* U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona

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### >Quick Links to Online Resources

Student Engagement in Adolescence <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jora.12619>

Fostering Student–Teacher Connections Could Help Keep Students Returning From Juvenile Detention in School  
<https://www.psychologicalscience.org/publications/observer/obsonline/2021-dec-students-juvenile-detention.html>

Immigrant Youth Resilience: Theoretical Considerations, Empirical Developments, and Future Directions <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jora.12656>

Importance of Digital Communication in Adolescents' Development  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jora.12643>

The Complementary Benefits of Racial and Socioeconomic Diversity in Schools  
<https://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo10.pdf>

How Families Can Support Social and Emotional Climate and Learning  
[https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/sec/sec\\_families.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/sec/sec_families.htm)

Policy makers guide to virtual schools  
<https://www.ecs.org/a-policymakers-guide-to-virtual-schools/>

How Are the Kids Doing? The Well-Being of Children and the Nation's Potential  
<https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/10/how-are-the-kids-doing-the-well-being-of-children-and.html>

Measuring the Opportunity Gap for Children from Birth to Age Eight and Understanding Barriers to Access <https://www.nap.edu/download/26416>

Raising Resilient Kids Who Are Prepared for the Future

[https://childmind.org/article/raising-resilient-kids-who-are-prepared-for-the-future/?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_campaign=publ\\_ed\\_nl\\_2021-12-21&utm\\_content=cta5\\_raising-resilient-kids-who-are-prepared-for-the-future](https://childmind.org/article/raising-resilient-kids-who-are-prepared-for-the-future/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=publ_ed_nl_2021-12-21&utm_content=cta5_raising-resilient-kids-who-are-prepared-for-the-future)

Advancing Equity: Five Districts Focus on Improving Outcomes of Black and Latinx Students

[https://www.wested.org/making-a-difference/advancing-equity-five-districts-focus-on-improving-outcomes-of-black-and-latinx-students/?utm\\_source=e-bulletin&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=2021-12-issue-2&mk\\_t\\_tok=NjgyLURCVS04MDkAAAGBfTu441vX\\_S5F4IH8OBpqfbuwrmRoAUOlz8S9esJbqHdrIbwxFD\\_HmLyIt0qZtjUHNvbtoiCgvR0pNxSjrcnc0VVc7M3kiGWLANXcunQ\\_A#](https://www.wested.org/making-a-difference/advancing-equity-five-districts-focus-on-improving-outcomes-of-black-and-latinx-students/?utm_source=e-bulletin&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2021-12-issue-2&mk_t_tok=NjgyLURCVS04MDkAAAGBfTu441vX_S5F4IH8OBpqfbuwrmRoAUOlz8S9esJbqHdrIbwxFD_HmLyIt0qZtjUHNvbtoiCgvR0pNxSjrcnc0VVc7M3kiGWLANXcunQ_A#)

What are social and emotional learning and culturally responsive and sustaining education — and what do they have to do with critical race theory? A primer

[https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SEL\\_CRSE\\_CRT-primer\\_Brief\\_Rd2-3.pdf](https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SEL_CRSE_CRT-primer_Brief_Rd2-3.pdf)

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*Unless the schools provide our children with a vision of human possibility that enlightens and empowers them with knowledge and taste, they will simply play their role in someone else's marketing schemes. Unless they understand deeply the sources of our democracy, they will take it for granted and fail to exercise their rights and responsibilities. -- Diane Ravitch*

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

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

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

- >About Expanding the Roles of Paraprofessionals During Staff Shortages
- >What are school staff saying about mental health resources and practices in their school?
- >About addressing trauma and doing so equitably
- >About the ever-present dropout problem
- >About taking mental health days
- >About student apathy

If you missed the resources and news in the Special Editions of the Community of Practice prepared in relation to the crisis, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

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For an update on how the center is responding to the Coronavirus crisis, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/centercorona.pdf>

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

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

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

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

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

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*There are uses to adversity, and they don't reveal themselves until tested. Whether it's serious illness, financial hardship, or the simple constraint of parents who speak limited English, difficulty can tap unexpected strengths. – Sonia Sotomayor*

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

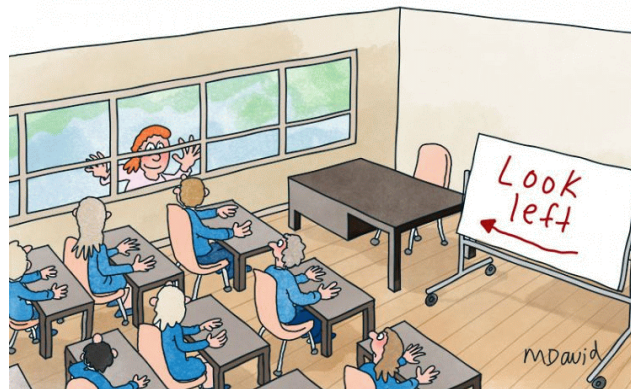
**National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports**

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

**And Let Us Know Whether Ideas Are Being Proposed for Transforming Schools.**

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](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)

*Social distancing for teachers*



**>A Few News Stories** (excerpted from various news sources)

**U.S. Department of Education launches two communities of practice to help states address impact of the pandemic on students.** The U.S. Department of Education launched two new multistate communities of practice to support states in addressing the impact of lost instructional time from the pandemic on students' social, emotional, and mental health, and academic well-being. The Department is launching the Evidence-Based Interventions: Using American Rescue Plan Resources to Accelerate Learning Community of Practice with the National Comprehensive Center. The Department is also launching the Toward an Equitable Education and Recovery: Transforming Kindergarten Community of Practice in partnership with the Campaign for Grade Level Reading and the Department's T4PA Center, among other partners. In addition, the Department will continue to support states who participated in the Summer Learning and Enrichment Collaborative through the Strategic Use of Summer and Afterschool Set-Asides Community of Practice.

<https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-launches-two-communities-practice-help-states-address-impact-pandemic-students>

**Tennessee goes all in on tutoring.** With student achievement lagging after COVID-19 restrictions and nearly \$2.5 billion in federal relief funding coming this year, Tennessee is making a big bet that a statewide program offering frequent, in-person, small-group tutoring will help push a swath of students to proficiency. The state will spend \$200 million to initiate a three-year tutoring project called Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning Corps serving 150,000 students in either math or English language arts in 79 districts. One of the program’s biggest rollouts will occur in Shelby County Schools, Memphis’ 110,000-student district. Shelby County is seeking to hire 600 tutors to serve 7,000 students in its 160 elementary schools.  
<https://www.the74million.org/article/tennessee-goes-all-in-on-tutoring-with-200m-statewide-program-for-150000-kids-who-are-just-below-grade-level-in-english-math/>

**New initiatives aim to address Nevada’s teacher shortage.** Nevada is the first state where education platform Study.com is launching its “Keys to the Classroom” initiative, which will provide \$432,000 in 600 Praxis test preparation scholarships in an effort to create a quick infusion of aspiring teachers. Passing the Praxis standardized tests is necessary in nearly all circumstances to obtain a teacher’s license in Nevada, but it is a hurdle for many aspiring teachers. The second initiative announced last week by the Nevada Department of Education will create a \$20.7 million “Incentivizing Pathways to Teaching” grant program, funded by federal coronavirus relief money. Nevada needs 3,000 additional teachers to achieve class sizes to ratios recommended by the State Board of Education.  
<https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/education/2-new-initiatives-aim-to-address-nevadas-teacher-shortage-2488113/>

**Kansas homeschooling numbers spike after families get a taste during COVID-19 pandemic.** Worried about safety, resistant to mask orders and troubled by a lack of confidence in public schools, thousands more Kansas parents are opting to teach their kids at home. The shift comes in the wake of the pandemic that convinced those families they could handle the job. During a normal school year, about 1,400 Kansas families newly register to home school. Last year that number more than tripled — to 5,527 — and the trend doesn’t seem to be slowing. So far this year, more than 2,250 new families have registered.  
<https://www.cjonline.com/story/news/2021/12/12/kansas-homeschooling-numbers-spike-after-pandemic-era-remote-learning/6461848001/>

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*Mental health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults are real, and they are widespread. But most importantly, they are treatable, and often preventable.*

U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy

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### Comment from the field

In response to 12/8 practitioner “Expanding role of paraprofessionals”  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practitioner\(12-8-2021\).pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practitioner(12-8-2021).pdf)

It doesn't appear to be a realistic expectation to add more expectations on what paraprofessionals can do when 9 times out of 10, they are already being stretched to meet basic academic needs.

### Invitation to Listserv Participants:

**Everyone has a stake in the future of public education. This is a critical time for action. Send this resource on to others. Think about sharing with the growing number who are receiving it. AND Let us know about what we should be including.**

Send to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto: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 <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> or email [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu) or [adelman@psych.ucla.edu](mailto:adelman@psych.ucla.edu)**

**Send info to share with others or ask for specific resources by email to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**