Students & Schools: Moving Forward*
(August, 2021 Vol. 25 #11) – *35 Years & Counting*

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*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.

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We encourage you to forward this to others. If this has been forwarded and you want to receive it directly, contact: Ltaylor@ucla.edu
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For more on resources from our national Center, see
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

>*WELCOMING* -- **it seems more important than ever this school year**

A critical facet of school climate involves how well students, families, staff, volunteers, and visitors are welcomed and supported as the school year begins. Each initial encounter by school staff presents both an opportunity and a challenge for welcoming and providing supports. Currently, the tasks related to implementing mitigation strategies to limit transmission of COVID-19 can be expected to complicate establishing a psychological sense of well-being at school.

This year making a school feel welcoming involves
- welcoming, orienting, establishing positive connections, and providing social and academic supports at the start of the year and for those who enroll later
- outreaching to those students and families who were expected but did not return
- quickly identifying those not adjusting well to school and providing them with social and academic supports

The focus in planning to address these matters involves strategies that maximize perceptions of the school as friendly, inviting, helpful, and caring.

> This year, while many students will be returning to their former schools, some will be entering a new school. Many will be more than pleased to return to school, many others will not. Some will be "stressed-out" and need immediate special assistance. Personalized outreach will be necessary to reengage those who were expected but didn't arrive

Welcoming Strategies as the Year Begins

The following are a few examples of welcoming and social support strategies.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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).

5. PARENT/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.

6. 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 who entered the school during the past 1-2 weeks, information on tours and orientations, special meetings for new students, and so forth.

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

8. 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).

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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").

Also see: *What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/welcomeguide.htm

Outreaching to & Reengaging Disconnected Students http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/summer21.pdf

>About Supports for Transitions

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 guided by their goals for enhancing personal and social functioning and enhancing student engagement in learning. This requires schoolwide and classroom-based intervention systems designed to facilitate successful transitions and prevent transition problems.

The start of a new school year is one such transition. And it is one of the best times for school staff to establish positive connections with students, their families, volunteers, and each other. This is especially important for newcomers.

A primary consideration at all times is to ensure that most communications and interactions from the school convey a welcoming aura. This is especially important when families are transitioning to a new school. For example, when a family comes to register, the transition is facilitated by having a designated staff person or volunteer welcome and provide information (in primary languages to the degree feasible). Newcomers can benefit from information about such matters as (a) how the school runs each day, (b) available activities to parents and students, (c) parents and students who are ready to help them join in, (d) community services they may find helpful, (e) available student/learning supports, and (f) how those at home can help the student do well at school. And, also to the degree feasible, orientations and tours should include initial personal introductions to staff they will be encountering.

Besides starting the school year (and perhaps enrolling in a new school), students experience transitions each day at at specific times of the school year. That is why we designate support for transitions as one of six major domains in framing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports. See

Supports for Transitions
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/ch5trans.pdf

Examples of programs include schoolwide and classroom activities that welcome new arrivals (students, their families, staff) and provide ongoing social support; before and after-school and inter-session activities to enrich learning and provide recreation in a safe environment; teaching daily coping strategies; counseling to support grade-to-grade and school-to-school transitions and moves to and from special education, college, and post school living and work.

Anticipated overall outcomes are reduced alienation and enhanced motivation and increased involvement in school and learning activities. Over time, effective transition programs help reduce school avoidance and dropouts.

As with any other interventions, supports for transitions require institutional commitment, organization, and ongoing maintenance. That is, this domain of student/learning supports must be a high priorty, and there must be a mechanism (e.g., a workgroup) dedicated to effective program planning, implementation, and long-term evolution.

> **Want to map what a school is doing related to transition supports?**
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> The Center has developed a self-study survey you can use. It's free at
> http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/transitionssurvey.pdf

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There is little in life so reassuring as a genuine welcome.

Robin Hobb

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>Quick Links to Online Resources

Ed Department To Release Extra IDEA Funds, New Guidance
https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2021/07/13/ed-department-to-release-extra-idea-funds-new-guidance/29403/

Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/evolvecomm.pdf

School-Based Strategies for Addressing Youth Mental Health in the Wake of COVID-19
https://www.nap.edu/resource/26262/interactive/?utm_source=NASEM+News+and+Publications&utm_campaign=5a18e2cbc1-Eblast_youth_mental_health_2021_07_15&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_96101de015-5a18e2cbc1-103064593&goal=0_96101de015-5a18e2cbc1-103064593&mc_cid=5a18e2cbc1&mc_eid=eac5cd8a62

5 more states get fed's approval for Covid relief spending
https://districtadministration.com/feds-approve-five-state-plans-arp-esser-covid-relief-funds/

Police Free Schools https://www.njjn.org/our-work/police-free-schools

Disparities in Learning Mode Access Among K–12 Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic
https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7026e2.htm?s_cid=mm7026e2_w#F1_down

Where do we go next? Youth Insights on the High School Experience During a Year of Historic Upheaval https://www.americaspromise.org/resource/where-do-we-go-next

Making Restorative Justice Work https://www.edutopia.org/article/making-restorative-justice-work

School- and Student-Level Prevalence and Predictors of Weapon-Related Behaviors and Experiences among Secondary Schools in California
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15388220.2021.1935979?journalCode=wjsv20

Addressing Economic Hardship Key to Preventing Child Welfare System Involvement
https://www.chapinhall.org/research/economic-supports-child-welfare/

Millions of Young People are Struggling to Meet Basic Needs during COVID-19, with Large Racial Disparities https://www.chapinhall.org/research/untold-stories-covid-19/

Restoring An Inclusionary Safety Net For Children In Immigrant Families: A Review Of Three Social Policies https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34228532/

Partnering with Young Adult Peer Mentors: On-Demand Training
https://www.cbhknowledge.center/partnering-with-yapm-online-training

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Want to review what was explored in the Community of Practice during July
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm

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

>How are schools supporting students this summer?
    >>A Learn and Earn Summer Program
    >>Community Service Learning
>About State Plans for Using Federal Relief Funds to Support Students
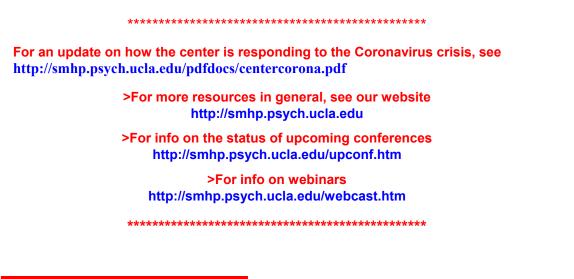>Do the mental health concerns arising from the pandemic make it essential for schools to promote mutual support groups for teachers and other school staff?
>Safe schools: Are school police essential?
>Professional Development This Summer: What Teachers and Principals Say They Need
>About legislative efforts for mental health in school
>In the News:
    Youth helping older adults access resources
    Reductions in school staffing
    Funds for homeless students

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The majority of high schoolers have been attending school remotely and there is a shorter runway to support them through graduation. Schools, in partnership with families and communities, will have to rebuild connections with students, prioritize relationships, strengthen pathways to postsecondary success, and embrace honest discussions about our nation's history. Rather than restoring schools to their pre-pandemic state, this moment calls for a transformation of the high school experience that will better, more holistically, support young people. Mike O'Brien, CEO of America's Promise

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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

About the **National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports**
http://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 transforming how schools address barriers to teaching and learning as they re-open.
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

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Teacher: *"Which book has helped you the most in your life?"*
Student: *"My parents' check book!"*

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

After enrollment dips, public schools hope for all rebound. School districts that lost enrollment during the pandemic are looking anxiously to the fall to see how many families stick with the education choices they made over the last year. school districts that lost enrollment during the pandemic are looking anxiously to the fall to see how many families stick with the education choices they made over the last year. In hopes of attracting students, many districts have launched new efforts to connect with families with young children, including blanketing communities with yard signs and enlisting bus drivers to call parents. There are early signs that enrollment may not fully rebound, and the stakes are high. If enrollment does not recover, public schools that lose students eventually could see funding cuts, though pandemic relief money is boosting budgets for now. Sustained drops in enrollment could also shift the demographics of America's public schools. A first-of-its-kind analysis by Chalkbeat and The Associated Press found that enrollment declines varied by student race and ethnicity. Enrollment in preschool to 12th grade dropped by 2.6% across 41 states last fall, and the decline was steepest among white students, whose enrollment fell more than 4%.
https://www.usnews.com/news/us/articles/2021-06-16/after-enrollment-dips-public-schools-hope-for-fall-rebound

Plano high school students use letters to lift up others. Plano West Senior High School juniors began a group called Letters of Gold and started writing words of encouragement to health care workers and others facing tough times amid the pandemic. The idea was to let people know that someone cares and is thinking about them.The letters tend to feature brief but encouraging messages such as "You can do this," or "You are not alone." They also provide sample letters if someone needs ideas for what to write. They began by enlisting the help of friends and fellow students. But their efforts have since gone global. Letters of Gold has drawn interest from people in countries as far away as India, Germany, Africa, Canada, China and Scotland. Letters of Gold recently reached the milestone of sending out more than 2,000 letters. The students plan to continue sending the letters even though the worst days of the pandemic appear to be over.
https://www.dallasnews.com/news/inspired/2021/06/21/plano-high-school-students-use-letters-to-lift-up-others/

20-year teaching veteran among the 150 laid off by Gilbert Public Schools. Gilbert Public Schools laid more than 150 staff members citing low enrollment numbers in the upcoming school year, among those is a 23-year veteran teacher. School officials say low enrollment numbers have been reported statewide, which shows a worrisome trend. Mesa Public School's Superintendent, Dr. Andi Fourlis, said they've seen parent's opt for home-schooling, while others have become disengaged. Before the pandemic struck, Arizona was facing a shortage of teachers, with many faculty members retiring early at its onset. The teachers laid off say they feel let down after a year of hard work juggling student's needs and their own health risks.
https://www.12news.com/article/news/education/20-year-teaching-veteran-among-the-150-laid-off-by-gilbert-public-schools/75-5a0b7328-9510-4bd1-b06f-fd361f773022

As indoctrination task force talks K-12 education, Idaho State Board issues statement. Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin's task force looking into indoctrination in Idaho schools met for the second time Thursday, with a focus on K-12 education. Parents who showed support for the task force gave presentations, while the members did not hear from Idahoans opposed to the panel's work or to the notion that indoctrination is taking place in classrooms. There also was no public testimony. Several students attended the four-hour meeting wearing T-shirts, most with the phrase, "Hands off our schools. Students told the Idaho Statesman that they wanted the task force to listen to their experiences in school and that they were scared about the impact the group could have on their education. They said in interviews that they want to learn more in school, not less, and sometimes feel that they're skimming over parts of history.
https://www.idahostatesman.com

Comments and sharing from the field

We really appreciate hearing from folks across the country.

In response to 7/8/21 Open Letter about *Improving How Schools Address Learning, Behavior, and Emotional Problems ...* (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/7-8-2021.pdf), a principal commented:

"This is the first time that I heard somebody describing the current educational crisis with a common sense approach and addressing the core of the issue. Well done and Kudos to you."

Another listserv participant wanted us to know that *"The resources and content you are providing are wonderful and I love to share them with our teachers in the District."*

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

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   or adelman@psych.ucla.edu

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