

Students & Schools: Moving Forward*

October, 2019 (Vol. 24 #1) – 33 Years & Counting

What's Here

>To what degree is student engagement a problem?

Quick Links to Resources from Across the Country

About transforming student/learning supports

Comments, requests, information, questions from the field

and more

****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



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

For discussion:

>To what degree is student engagement a problem?

Ask teachers: *On most days, how many of your students come to class motivationally ready and able to learn what you have planned to teach them?*

When we ask, the number we hear at too many schools is 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. And they all stress that those students who display low or negative motivation manifest significant behavior problems.

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 students who start out reasonably well, engagement may fall off a month or two into a school year. Many behavior, learning, and emotional problems increase at this time.

So it seems wise to spend some time right now helping staff understand how to focus *aggressively* on enhancing and maintaining student engagement in classroom instruction and re-engaging students who have become disengaged. Key here is applying practices that emphasize intrinsic motivation. (It is ironic that most school staff value intrinsic motivation, yet schools tend to *overrely* on extrinsic motivators.)

The ultimate aim 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 in mastering and assimilating what has just been learned.

Four Motivational Matters that Require Continuous Attention

In classrooms and schoolwide, the following points about motivation warrant constant 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, strategies are needed 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.
- **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. This includes minimizing practices that produce negative psychological reactions and avoiding overreliance on extrinsics to entice and reward since such strategies can decrease intrinsic motivation.

Note: The increasing focus on response to intervention (RTI) provides an opportunity to assess and work on enhancing student engagement.

Intrinsic Motivation

Some references are provided below for school staff who want to enhance their understanding of intrinsic motivation. The essence is that schools must

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- (1) promote feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness to significant others
 - (2) minimize threats to such feelings.

The seeds of significant learning, behavior, and emotional problems are planted when instruction is not a good intrinsic motivational fit. Personalized instruction, supplemented with special assistance when necessary, addresses both developmental and motivational fit.

Motivation is a fundamental concern for all students; many instructional approaches are effective when a student is motivated to learn what is being taught. But, for students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems, motivation for classroom learning often is the primary concern. 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 *perceive* the adults at school and in the classroom as supportive, rather than indifferent or controlling and the program as personally valuable and obtainable. The bottom line is that preventing and ameliorating learning, behavior, and emotional problems requires an intensive focus on intrinsic motivation.

For resources to stimulate discussion about enhancing engagement, see:

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

> *About Motivation* <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>

For more, see the online clearinghouse Quick Find:

> *Motivation, engagement, and re-engagement*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

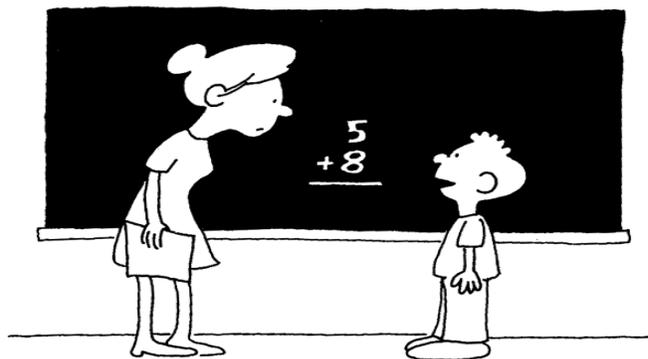
Did you miss the following discussions?

These were explored in September as part of the weekly School Practitioner Community of Practice.
See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

- > What's a positive way to help youth identify affinity groups?
- > Achievement gap or opportunity gap?
- > Are you playing a role in transforming student/learning supports?
- > What's the difference between teasing and bullying?

The Fall e-journal explored:

- > *Rethinking MTSS to Better Address Barriers to Learning*
- > *Is Society too Ready to Label Children and Adolescents as Mentally Disordered?*
- > *State Legislation Doesn't Effectively Enhance How Schools Address Barriers to Learning*



GOSH, MRS. THOMPSON, I WAS READY TO LEARN MATH YESTERDAY. TODAY I'M READY TO LEARN TO READ.

Quick Links to Resources from Across the Country

A few relevant resources, reports, and publications

School Choice in the United States: 2019 –

<https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019106>

Pro-kid policy agenda – <https://www.childrennow.org/portfolio-posts/2019pkagenda/>

A roadmap to reducing child poverty –

<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25246/a-roadmap-to-reducing-child-poverty>

A road map to quality collective impact programming with fiscal independence

<https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/pennstate-aroadmaptoquality-2019.pdf>

The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans –

https://rems.ed.gov/docs/District_Guide_508C.pdf

About promoting social emotional development at school: "Kernels" and natural opportunities -

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

About peer contagion effects - <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/contagion.pdf>

Investing in native communities: Philanthropic funding for Native American communities and causes -

<https://nativephilanthropy.candid.org/reports/investing-in-native-communities-philanthropic-funding-for-native-american-communities-and-causes/#content>

About first generation college students - <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/first-gen.pdf>

Fostering healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development in children and youth: A national agenda -

https://www.nap.edu/login.php?record_id=25201&page=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nap.edu%2Fdownload%2F25201

Direct and indirect effects of strength-based parenting on adolescents' school outcomes:

Exploring the role of mental toughness. (2019) A.Sagka. *Journal of Adolescence*, 76, 20-29.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140197119301319>

Deconstructing and reconstructing resilience: A dynamic network approach (2019) R. Kalisch,

A. Cramer, H. Binder, et al. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 14,

<http://www.psychologicalscience.org>

Depression screening and health outcomes in children and adolescents: A systematic review

(2017). *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 62, 813-817.

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0706743717727243>

>For more resources, see our website

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

>For info on upcoming conferences, initiatives, workshops

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

>For info on webinars

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

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Teaching is among one of the most demanding professions a person can choose.... Even tasks that an individual might perceive as rewarding under the right circumstances, such as working with a challenging student, can become a drain when a person lacks the time, resources, or freedom to address a task to the best of their abilities. Arnold Bakker

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About Transforming Student and Learning Supports

>A superintendent reports on making a major shift: *I realized that we were approaching student improvement the wrong way ...*

I am the Superintendent of a Joint Union High School District. I just wanted to send a message to you to thank you for all the work you have done ... and let you know how this impacted our district. In 2009, as an Assistant Superintendent I happened to get an e-mail from SMHP that had an article about how schools were trying to do school improvement the wrong way. It indicated that the only to have student improvement was to improve student support systems. I read it very carefully and then started receiving your articles regularly. I realized that we were approaching student improvement the wrong way, through just academic improvements. During that time we had the lowest graduations rates and highest dropout rates in our county, 70% and 30%. So, because of your work we started the road of providing more extensive support in all areas. We increased the number of psychologist in our district from 1 districtwide to 1 on every campus. The number of counselors were increased, we partnered with the local Mental Health agency to contract with them to have mental health services on all our sites. We brought in Chaplains at every campus, we increased our services for drug and alcohol counseling. We brought in counselors specifically to deal with students in gangs. We provided other intensive interventions. AND we started seeing the results. We increase the graduation rates every year, from 70% to 75% initially but continued that growth.

We now have the highest graduation rate in the county, 95.7%. The dropout rates are also the lowest in our county with a 4% dropout rate. Our attendance rate went from the low 80% to now being at the highest it has ever been at 97%. This means our students want to come to ours schools because we offer so many support systems for them. What I learned was that to create enduring change and improvements we needed to change our entire system and not do a band-aid approach. Of course our job is never done because like I tell my team, we still need to reach that 4% of students that dropout. So, to you and to your team, a thank you for the work you do in this area. Your ideas and strategies guided me in our work.

Let Us Know:

About work being done to transform student/learning supports

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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We miss opportunities for discovery every time we're pressured to conform to the prevailing wisdom rather than innovate and risk failure.

Lisa Feldman Barrett

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I diagnosed 'abdominal pain' when the real problem was hunger; I confused social issues with medical problems in other patients, too. I mislabeled the hopelessness of long-term unemployment as depression... My medical training had not prepared me for this ambush of social circumstance. Real-life obstacles had an enormous impact on my patients' lives, but because I had neither the skills nor the resources for treating them, I ignored the social context of disease altogether. Laura Gottlieb, MD

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

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

News from around the country related to addressing barriers

No measurable differences in reading and math scores between public-school and charter-school students in 2017. See the report from the US Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. (The report also indicates that charter-school enrollment in the US grew by 571% from 2000 to 2016.) <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019106>

Volunteers welcome students back. Project Connect volunteers aim to “model kindness and human connection,” while also promoting safety in school. More than a year ago, a group of parents decided to organize after the mass shooting in Parkland, Florida. District leaders told the group that just the presence of adults could be helpful. The volunteers are there to offer support to students, especially those who may struggle in school. The group consists of parents, but also retired folks, religious leaders and a member of the National Guard. Training for volunteers has included presentations by school counselors and the school resource officer.
<https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/news/education/volunteers-at-bozeman-high-welcome-students-back/article%e2%80%9494c2bfccde-10d1-5e19-9428-d8fd2a25b69e.html>

NYC school diversity panel recommends ending gifted programs in public schools. A panel was appointed by NY’s Mayor to find ways to diversify schools in the nation’s largest system just came out with a surprising recommendation: eliminate gifted programs in the city’s public schools. The issue has been of concern for years in New York City, which has among the nation’s most segregated schools, with a lack of diversity extending to its gifted programs in the lower grades and to selective high schools that admit students based on a single standardized test score.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2019/08/27/nyc-school-diversity-panel-recommends-ending-gifted-programs-public-schools-one-member-explains-surprising-decision/>

Tri-State educators discuss KY teacher shortage. Kentucky Department of Education has sounded the alarm on growing teacher shortages, a problem caused in part by a shrinking number of college students pursuing education degrees — a 13% decline over a five-year period, according to the department. The department also points to evidence of teacher shortages over several years based on openings posted on the department’s Kentucky Educator Placement Service. The online service showed 6,247 open positions in 2014-2015, a number that jumped to 8,855 in 2016-2017, according to the department. The fear, both locally and statewide, is that shortages will make it difficult to adequately teach in critical disciplines.
https://www.dailyindependent.com/news/tri-state-educators-discuss-ky-teacher-shortage/article_e479b180-cb54-11e9-8973-43b3825f0164.html

School districts double down on drug testing. The middle and high schools in their community of Fort Scott, Kansas, are among the latest to require random drug testing of students who want to participate in sports, clubs, dances or any other extracurricular activity. Fort Scott and the Bushland Independent School District near Amarillo, Texas, join the growing number of communities across America that are testing kids as young as 11 for illicit drug use. Nationally, a federal government survey shows nearly 38 percent of school districts had such policies in 2016, up from a quarter of districts a decade earlier. But over that time, the number of schools employing other drug prevention strategies dropped. The latest School Health Policies and Practices Study shows that a declining number of districts require elementary schools to teach drug and alcohol prevention, have arrangements with off-site organizations to provide drug treatment and provide funding for professional development on drug prevention. .
<https://www.nbcnews.com/health/kids-health/school-districts-double-down-drug-testing-targeting-even-middle-schoolers-n1049381>

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You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement.

Woodrow Wilson

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Comments and sharing from the field

>Among the responses to our post about Child Trend’s blog stating that “School mental health training for teachers leaves room for improvement” was the following response from the authors at Child Trends:

My co-authors and I sincerely thank you for reading our blog and reaching out to share this feedback. Like you both, we believe that strengthening the focus on mental health in schools is vital. We also acknowledge that making schools more sensitive — and ultimately more responsive — to the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students is deeply complex and requires systems change. However, we believe that training teachers to identify and address student mental health needs ought to be part of this change and can be an important first step. We chose to focus on teachers in this blog, in part, because our research finds that students are often more comfortable seeking help from teachers than from other school staff. Thank you, again, for your thoughtful feedback and dedicated work in this area.

>Among the appreciations for the Center resource mailings, we heard from superintendents, board members, principals, teachers, support staff, university faculty, and more. Here’s a few:

>>*From a deputy superintendent at a state department of ed: Thank you for your on-going efforts to caution professionals about mental health screenings. We are taking the same position but local school districts, some mental health professionals, and a few grantors are encouraging the use of universal screening. I forwarded your latest discussion of that topic to several people.*

>>*From a member of a board of education: I appreciate these helpful messages and would like to continue receiving information from the Center.*

>>*From a principal: Thank you for sharing this good thought-provoking and discussion information. The topics of the articles I downloaded this afternoon are very timely. I appreciate your sharing this information with the field.*

>>*From a district superintendent: Thank you for sharing information about trends that concern many schools and community stakeholders. I will send this information to our Senior Director of Student Support and to the Culture and Climate team.*

>>*From a colleague at a school mental health center at a university: Thank you for sharing your conversations and resources with us. We have had many similar conversations as we work with state leaders, districts and school personnel around how to address mental and behavioral issues in the schools. We are of like-minds in that we see behavioral health as being a whole child approach. We look forward to following your work in this area as we too try to support the uptake of comprehensive behavioral health programming in schools.*

*Information is online about the

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

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

Also online are two free books

Improving School Improvement

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html



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