

# Students & Schools: Moving Forward\*

(October, 2021 (Vol.26 #1) – 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.*



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>

## >How are Schools Enhancing Student Engagement? (in person, in quarantine, online, in independent study....?)

The challenges related to engaging and reengaging students in learning will require greater attention this year with in-person, hybrid, and other variations in how instruction is delivered.

As noted in a Hechinger report:

While some students thrived during the coronavirus inspired spring of remote learning, educators, parents and students themselves have reported frighteningly low engagement. Among 20,000 middle and high school students surveyed by Youth Truth, a national nonprofit research organization, just 41 percent of them said they could motivate themselves to do schoolwork while their school buildings were closed. Broken down by grade, 57 percent of fifth graders said they could motivate themselves, and that portion steadily dropped by age with barely one quarter of 12<sup>th</sup> graders saying the same.

*Unfortunately, the motivation problem was bad in too many schools even before the pandemic.*

## About Enhancing 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 structure.

The key to maximizing motivation is to aggressively focus on *enhancing and maintaining* student engagement. This 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.

Fundamental implications for classrooms include ensuring there are a broad range of options with respect to content, processes, and outcomes. With valued options comes valued opportunities for involving learners in decision making. A motivational focus also stresses development of nonthreatening ways to provide information about learning and performance.

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.)
- *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.

### **About Students Manifesting Learning, Behavior, and Emotional Problems**

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.

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.

With 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.

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.

### **About Disengaged Students**

Disengaged students can be expected to have well-assimilated negative attitudes and behaviors about schooling that are not easily changed. As already noted, before such students will reengage, they

have to perceive the learning environment as positively different – and quite a bit so – from the one in which they have come to dislike. This raises the question of how far folks are willing to go to reengage such youngsters since it usually requires temporarily putting aside standard practices and proceeding with a set of intensely personalized strategies.

Personalized interventions require the capability of entering into a dialogue with the youngster. The discussion is a starting point for (a) understanding the motivational underpinnings of the disconnection, (b) formulating a personalized plan for re-connecting the youngster with formal instruction, and (c) continuing to modify the plan when necessary. (The information accumulated from discussions with a number of these students also provides a basis for planning ways to prevent others from disengaging.)

### **Dialogue to Establish Personalized Reengagement Strategies**

The focus of the dialogue is on

*Clarifying the youngster's perceptions of the problem* – talking openly about why the student has become disengaged. Reframing school learning – exploring changes that help the youngster (a) view instruction and those involved in facilitating it as supportive (rather than controlling) and (b) perceive content, outcomes and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable. Examples include reframing content and processes to convey purpose in terms of real life needs and experiences; enhancing expectations of personal benefits; eliminating threatening evaluative measures .

*Renegotiating involvement in instruction* – developing new and mutual agreements (not unilateral contracts) that will be evolved over time. The intent is to affect perceptions of choice, value, and probable outcome. The focus throughout is on clarifying awareness of valued options (including valued enrichment opportunities), enhancing expectations of positive outcomes, and engaging the student in meaningful, ongoing decision making. Arriving at and maintaining an effective mutual agreement involves assisting the student in sampling what is proposed and ensuring provision for reevaluating and modifying decisions as perceptions shift.

*Reestablishing and maintaining an appropriate working relationship* – ensuring that ongoing interactions are designed to create a sense of trust, open communication, and provide personalized support and direction.

### **Maintaining Reengagement and Preventing Recidivism**

In addition to addressing barriers to learning and teaching, special attention must be given to maintaining re-engagement and preventing relapses. The emphasis is on

- minimizing threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others
- maximizing such feelings (for those returning to school this involves taking steps to enhance the school and classroom image as welcoming, caring, safe, and just places)
- providing a wide range of potentially interesting options and including students in decision making
- guiding and supporting motivated learning and providing opportunities for continued application and generalization (e.g., ways in which students can pursue additional, self-directed learning or can arrange for additional academic and social supports and guidance)
- ensuring a range of enrichment opportunities
- providing continuous information on learning and performance in ways that highlight accomplishments and strengths
- implementing special assistance as needed.

**Here are links to a few resources related to enhancing engagement:**

- > *Intrinsic Motivation: Engaging and Re-engaging Students, Families, & Staff* (powerpoint) online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/rfl/sessiv.ppt>
- > *About Motivation* (Practice Notes) <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/motivation.pdf>
- > *Engaging and Re-engaging Students and Families: (Four Units for Continuing Education)* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagei.pdf>
- > *School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schooleng.pdf>
- > *Finding and Reengaging Students who Went Missing During the COVID Pandemic* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Findingdisconnectedstudents.pdf>

For more, see the Center Quick Find: *Motivation, Engagement, Re-engagement* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

**Let us Know:**

**How is enhancing student engagement being accomplished at local schools?**

**Is there a special focus on:**

- (1) increasing staff understanding of the motivational bases for enhancing school engagement?
- (2) implementing new ways to enhance school engagement and minimize problems arising from low or negative motivation?

Send info to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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Research supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has shown that being connected to school is as close as we have to a universal prevention measure. School connectedness is driven by four experiences, all of which are measurable, can be tracked with early-warning systems, and are within schools' capacity to improve. Students must believe that there is an adult in the school who knows and cares about them as a person, have a supportive peer group, engage in meaningful activities that help others, and feel that the school welcomes them for who they are.... Robert Balfanz

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**>Quick Links to Online Resources**

Promising Practices to Accelerate Learning for Students with Disabilities During COVID-19 and Beyond.

[https://www.nclد.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2021-NCLD-Promising-Practices-to-Accelerate-Learning\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.nclد.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2021-NCLD-Promising-Practices-to-Accelerate-Learning_FINAL.pdf)

A What Works Clearinghouse Rapid Review of Distance Learning Programs.

[https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/ReferenceResources/Distance\\_Learning\\_RER\\_508c.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/ReferenceResources/Distance_Learning_RER_508c.pdf)

The Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development <https://www.blueprintsprograms.org/>

School Climate Survey Compendia

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/school-climate-measurement/school-climate-survey-compendium>

School Climate Improvement Resource Package <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/scirp/about>

School culture and climate assessments

[https://rems.ed.gov/docs/Culture\\_Climate\\_Assessments\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_508C.pdf](https://rems.ed.gov/docs/Culture_Climate_Assessments_Fact_Sheet_508C.pdf)

A Comprehensive School Employee Wellness Approach Can Reduce Staff Stress and Attrition  
<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/a-comprehensive-school-employee-wellness-approach-can-reduce-staff-stress-and-attrition>

How Toxic Positivity Demoralizes Teachers and Hurts Schools  
<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2021-09-13-how-toxic-positivity-demoralizes-teachers-and-hurts-schools>

Leadership That Alleviates Stress <https://www.edutopia.org/article/leadership-alleviates-stress>

Accelerating the Rate of Progress in Reducing Mental Health Burdens: Recommendations for Training the Next Generation of Clinical Psychologists <https://bit.ly/3z2xaDA>

Help for Cutting and Other Self-Injury  
<https://childmind.org/article/what-drives-self-injury-and-how-to-treat-it/>

All Children Thriving: A New Purpose for Education <https://www.aft.org/ae/fall2021/cantor>

State of Our Schools 2021 report  
<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/1610b2khxv2rad9s2askj/SOOS-Promotional-Toolkit-1.docx?dl=0&rlkey=beok7se64omlg8zvh9gvuevcr>

What Will Online Learning Look Like in 10 Years? Zoom Has Some Ideas  
<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2021-09-15-what-will-online-learning-look-like-in-10-years-zoom-has-some-ideas>

An Inside Look at the Spy Tech That Followed Kids Home for Remote Learning — and Now Won't Leave  
<https://www.the74million.org/article/gaggle-spy-tech-minneapolis-students-remote-learning/>

Current Understandings of Microaggressions: Impacts on Individuals and Society  
<https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/releases/2021-sept-microaggressions.html>

### Center's Quarterly eJournal

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fall2021.pdf>

>Schools and Mental Health: A Position Statement

>About Promoting Mental Health

>Everyone's Talking about Students' Mental Health:  
 Schools Need to Avoid Five Potential Pitfalls

### Recent Center Reports

- *2021-22: Addressing Learning, Behavior, and Emotional Problems Through Better Use of Student and Learning Support Staff* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/supports.pdf>
- *Enhancing Student/Learning Supports in Classrooms*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/classroomredes.pdf>
- *Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/evolvecomm.pdf>
- *Implementation Science and Complex School Changes*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/implemreport.pdf>

### 3 Books Available Online for Free Access

*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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Nationally, we know that disparities in access to educational opportunity—including access to rich, rigorous learning experiences; talented and diverse teachers; school counselors and high-quality social-emotional supports; and safe, welcoming schools existed long before COVID-19. Our work as a nation must be to eliminate these disparities, and we must do so with urgency. Our students don't have a moment to wait.

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona

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

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

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

Topics:

- >What's planned for students (and teachers/staff) who are quarantined?
- >About Improving Mental Health Support at Schools: Meeting Immediate Needs, Rebuilding Systems to Enhance Capabilities
- >Follow up on mask bullying
- >About addressing the impact of lost instructional time
- >How much input are you having about supporting students as the school year begins?
- >About making teams and work groups effective

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**For an update on how the center is responding to the Coronavirus pandemic, 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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Definitely, the high school calendar is full. The hope is that we're able to find a safe way to do all those things, so that while catching up on the academics, students also have their other opportunities for music, sports, extracurriculars. If we can try to do more safely, we'll have happier kids. Lucie McGee

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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>**

**NOW IS THE TIME TO RETHINK STUDENT/LEARNING SUPPORTS**

*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 about**

***What's being proposed to improve student/learning supports?***

*If anyone is thinking about moving toward a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, we can help. Send all info to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)*



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

**The National Guard is driving kids to school in Massachusetts amid a bus driver shortage.** The governor of Massachusetts on Monday activated the state's National Guard to help with busing students to school, a growing issue in states across the country. 250 Guard personnel will be available to serve as drivers of school transport vans. They'll begin training, with some 90 of them to be initially deployed in four diverse cities north of Boston. The Guard troops will complete vehicle training like any school transportation worker and operate transport vans known as "7D vehicles," not the familiar yellow school buses. Milwaukee Public Schools said the district was about 100 drivers short for its fleet of 700 buses.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2021/09/13/massachusetts-national-guard-drive-kids-school/8326341002/>

**Schools prep for 'disengagement and downright trauma' of pandemic.** After the COVID-19 pandemic sent schools remote in March 2020, students in public schools have oscillated between in-person and distance learning as cases ebbed and flowed. Now, on the cusp of the third school year impacted by the pandemic, administrators at the St. Cloud school district are preparing for an in-person start with additional staff to address the "disengagement and downright trauma" experienced throughout the pandemic. The most prominent issue that students experienced last school was disengagement, likely caused by the transition from in-person to distance learning

and other mental health concerns exacerbated by the pandemic. The district is adding a fourth chemical health counselor, three additional counselors, two additional nursing positions and a public health coordinator who will help with contact tracing.

<https://www.startribune.com/st-cloud-schools-prep-for-disengagement-and-downright-trauma-of-pandemic/600092695>

**Not enough subs: schools face severe teacher shortage.** Long underpaid and underappreciated, substitute teachers are key to keeping schools open this year. But a shortage of subs has created another layer of chaos to this pandemic school year. Administrators are taking desperate steps to make sure there's an adult in the classroom when teachers are absent, resorting to using non-teaching staff who have their own critical responsibilities during the typical school day, especially during the first fully in-person school year of the pandemic. Some school districts, especially those in rural communities, rely heavily on retired teachers to work as substitutes. But for those older educators, the risk of returning to the classroom is even greater. In the 2020-21 school year, 13,558 of California's teachers retired, 1,000 more than the previous year. The Commission on Teacher Credentialing said the agency must credential about 20,000 teachers a year to keep up with the staffing needs of districts across the state. Last year, only about 14,000 teachers received their credentials.

<https://calmatters.org/education/k-12-education/2021/09/california-teacher-schools>

**New Mexico to hire 500 educational assistants amid teacher shortage.** In response to educator shortages in New Mexico, the state has launched a new program intended to support careers in education. The Educator Fellows Program will use about \$37 million in American Rescue Plan funds to create educational assistant and support staff positions. The new educators will provide small-group instruction and tutoring to accelerate learning for students. The program will fund 500 new educational assistants across New Mexico. <https://www.lcsun-news.com/>

**Covid closes rural schools as Delta variant spreads.** Just weeks after schools reopened for the school year, some rural California campuses are closing temporarily to stop Covid outbreaks from spreading among students and staff. This situation is the reverse of what happened last year, when most urban and suburban school campuses were closed and many rural schools remained opened for in-person instruction amid low Covid rates. This year, with Covid rates and teacher shortages worse in rural communities, these schools are struggling to stay open. Complicating matters more is the requirement that quarantined students no longer have the option of distance learning. Instead, they are required to enroll in independent study, which comes with a list of requirements rural districts are having trouble meeting.

<https://edsources.org/2021/covid-closes-rural-california-schools-as-delta-variant-spreads>

**Schools go blue for health care professionals.** The Jonesboro School District is leading the way to honor medical personnel in the area. Superintendent Kim Wilbanks said it was her district's idea to create the campaign, "Schools Go Blue." School officials have appointments to drop off cards, letters and photos to give to medical personnel. The cards, letters and photos were created by the Jonesboro Kindergarten Center and all five of the magnet schools. Westside Superintendent Scott Gauntt said his district is also wearing blue, but their focus is a bit more on their own medical personnel. "Our school nurses are amazing," he said. "I have never worked with a group of people who have worked so hard to keep our kids healthy."

[https://www.jonesborosun.com/news/schools-go-blue-for-health-care-professionals/article\\_bcf2083d-fab5-517a-a7de-879da8af6361.html](https://www.jonesborosun.com/news/schools-go-blue-for-health-care-professionals/article_bcf2083d-fab5-517a-a7de-879da8af6361.html)

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*Not a single one of us knows how our kids are going to show up. Our kids have missed out on a lot of their childhood, their education.*

*Laurie Putnam, assistant superintendent St. Cloud, WI*

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### **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)

### **Here's are a couple of Encouraging Comments We Recently Received**

*Just finished reading one of your newsletter/blogs on misbehavior, and I really loved it. It cued me to drop a note to you just to say how much I appreciate the clarity of your posts and the spirit of them, They are truly great resources for educators.*

*Thank you so much for sharing the many resources of the Center. We received a grant from the Indiana State Department of Education to have our Indiana University college students provide k-12 students tutoring, mentoring and social emotional supports and your messages have helped us in so many ways.*

#### **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)**