Featured

(1) Too many students with emotional, behavior, and learning problems? **What can schools do immediately to start improving student/learning supports?**

(2) Improving Student/Learning Supports is Essential to Enhancing School Climate

(3) Peer Influences on School Engagement and Disengagement

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For discussion and interchange:

> *Too many students with emotional, behavior, and learning problems?* **What can schools do immediately to start improving student/learning supports?**

These are questions we regularly receive. While we stress that in the long-run schools need to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, we understand that most schools are not ready to make the transformation. But the need to make improvements is evident.

Here are some things our Center is ready to help you do to make immediate improvements in student/learning supports and also create readiness for system changes.

We can work with you to

(1) establish a local continuing education initiative for a group of your colleagues who share your concerns about improving supports for students manifesting learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

(2) establish a Leadership Team to

    (a) map existing resources for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students - see

        > *Mapping & Analyzing Learning Supports*

        > *An Aid for Initial Listing of Current Resources Used at a School for Addressing Barriers Learning and Teaching*

    (b) analyze what's working, what needs strengthening, and critical gaps

(3) develop a set of prioritized recommendations for moving forward and present the recommendations to administrators and school boards.

If you would like to pursue any of this or have other thoughts about how our Center might be of assistance, contact Ltaylor@ucla.edu .

> **>Improving Student/Learning Supports is Essential to**
> **Enhancing School Climate**

School and classroom climates range from hostile or toxic to welcoming and supportive and can fluctuate daily and over the school year. Because of the association between student well-being and school and peer factors, the call for enhancing school climate is everywhere. Implied in these calls is the intent to establish and maintain a positive context that facilitates classroom learning and behavior (see the following research example).

From: **Student- and School-Level Factors Associated With Mental Health and Well-Being in Early Adolescence**

" High-quality research considering the role of schools in the mental health of young people is limited. Yet, conceptually, student- and school-level factors could be key to the mental health and well-being of young people, and schools offer an acceptable and efficient opportunity for intervention....

Recent research suggested that a positive school climate is associated with a lower risk of not only behavioral but also emotional problems in children and youth; improved student learning, academic achievement, and graduation rates; and higher teacher retention rates...

Our study suggests 3 key messages:
> there are significant levels of mental health problems among adolescents, which worsen from ages 11 to 16, particularly in girls;
> schools account for a small but statistically significant amount of the variation in students' mental health and well-being; and
> school climate (particularly as perceived and reported by the students) is the single most important factor associated with these outcomes....

Our findings suggest that schools could enhance the mental health of young people through creating a school climate that students view as positive, including positive peer relationships, caring and respectful adults, and effective school leadership and involvement....

School climate has consistently been associated with a range of important outcomes, including better attendance, less substance use, and better academic performance. A recent review suggests that establishing peer networks that foster belonging and prosocial behavior could contribute positively to both school climate and student mental health and well-being...."

While everyone agrees that schools should ensure a positive school climate, less agreement exists about what this means and how to accomplish it. This is especially so when the call is for developing a safe and supportive environment that also is nurturing and caring and that provides all students with an equal opportunity to succeed. Equity concerns are heightened when schools are viewed using the lens of how they interface with students who are struggling academically, acting out, and experiencing conflictual relationships with school staff and peers. Findings suggest that general strategies designed to enhance school climate often are insufficient for changing the perceptions of such students. Our work suggests the importance of improving a school's system of student/learning supports as essential to enhancing school climate.

For more on this, see

> **>Designing School Improvement to Enhance Classroom Climate for All Students**
> **>Creating caring schools**
> **>Schools as Caring, Learning Communities**
> **>School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate**

>Peer Influences on School Engagement and Disengagement

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. Conversely, for many students, disengagement is associated with behavior problems, and behavior and learning problems may eventually lead to dropout. The degree of concern about student engagement varies depending on school population.

From a psychological perspective, student disengagement is associated with situational threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and/or relatedness to valued others. The demands may be from school staff, peers, instructional content and processes. Psychological disengagement may be internalized (e.g., boredom, emotional distress) and/or externalized (misbehavior, dropping out). Reengagement depends on use of interventions that help minimize conditions that negatively affect intrinsic motivation and maximize conditions that have a positive intrinsic motivational effect.

From: **Peer Influences on (Dis)Engagement in Early Adolescence: The Role of Friendship, Social Status, and Academic Status**

"...This study explores the roles of friends, popular students, and intelligent students in shaping peers' behavioral and emotional (dis)engagement....

School engagement is a vital component of a thriving educational career. It has been linked to several indicators of school success, such as achievement, school attendance, and academic resilience....

Behavioral disengagement describes students' active disruption of their own learning process and the classroom environment in general. Emotional disengagement captures the feelings of frustration and disinterest that students might experience in the classroom.... Behavioral and emotional engagement and disengagement are grounded in students' social experiences.

Students who feel valued and appreciated by their peers have more supportive interactions with their peers than less accepted students. This will foster their feeling of relatedness in the classroom which, according to self-determination theory, is an innate psychological need and an essential requirement for motivation and engagement.

On the other hand, students who feel left out and rejected by their peers, often engage in more negative interactions with their peers causing them to disengage from the school environment and withdraw from their learning process ...

Results from this study show the importance for teachers to be aware of the social context within their classroom. When teachers have insight in the social relationships between their students, they can use this information to reinforce the distribution of positive peer influences by increasing students' exposure and access to highly engaged friends, popular students, and intelligent students and by keeping students' exposure to disengaged students low. Research has shown how students tend to befriend the students that are seated close to them in the classroom. By avoiding grouping highly disengaged students together, teachers could prevent these students from negatively influencing each other and lower their engagement levels even more.

Findings from this study make clear that it pays off to invest in the emotional engagement of intelligent students. When these students enjoy learning activities and feel good at school, this will create a flow through effect in the larger peer group whereby they will positively influence the emotional engagement of their classmates. In the case of popular students, it is important to keep their levels of emotional disengagement low to prevent them from dragging their peers with them....

Educators should attempt to create positive classroom climates where students are treated with respect. If students feel valued and accepted in their classroom, they might be less prone to peer influences because they do not feel the need to adapt their behavior to feel valued by their peers..."

For more on peer relationships and effects, see

>*Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School*

>*Peer contagion effects*

>*Working with Disengaged Students*

And see the Quick Find on *Peer Relationships, Peer Support, and Peer Counseling*

>**Links to a few other relevant shared resources**

>**Enhancing school connectedness**

>**Spotlight on youth mentoring**

>**Achieving Equity in Child and Adolescent Mental Health by Addressing Racism Through Prevention Science**

>**Identifying protective and risk behavior patterns of online communication in young people**

>**Parenting in the Context of Adversity: Investigating Buffering Effects of Positive Relationships and Community Connections**

>**Adolescents' motivation to use social network sites from a psychological needs perspective**

>**The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime Earnings**

>**How to Help Your Teen Through a Breakup**

>**In Tennessee, the Microschooling Movement Shows No Signs of Slowing Down**

>**A Strong Start for College and Career: Dual Enrollment Participation From 9th to 12th Grade**

>**Advancing Towards a Student-Centered Approach to Education**

>**Leveraging the Opportunity of Adolescence to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism**

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Resources about Improving Systems of Student/Learning Support

>**Integrated Student Support State Policy Toolkit**

>**Rethinking MTSS to Better Address Barriers to Learning**

>**Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports**

>**Rethinking Student and Learning Supports**

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

>**Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions**

>**Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide**

>**Transforming Student/Learning Supports & Enhancing Equity of Opportunity: A Journey of Lessons Learned**

>**Implementation Science and School Improvement**

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A Few Upcoming Webinars

For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts – **https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm**

4/3 Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Students Experiencing Homelessness

4/17 Family guide to support students mental health

4/17 Foster care and unhoused families

4/17 Bullying in elementary and middle schools

4/18 Mentoring https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/events/conversations-youth

4/24 Legal and Ethical Complications in Working with Minors in Schools

4/25 Cyberbullying

4/25 Social determinants of health

5/8 Enhancing School Safety Using Behavioral Threat Assessment (part two)

>*How Learning Happens* (Edutopia's updated series of videos explores how educators can guide all students, regardless of their developmental starting points, to become productive and engaged learners.

>Webinar recording: **Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth**

How's your school climate?

Cold!

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

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National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

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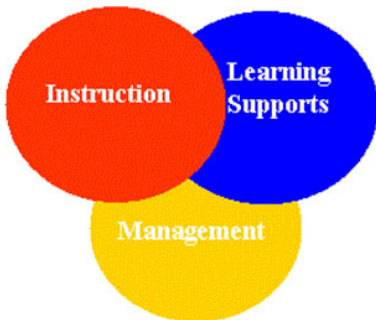
Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to promoting whole child development, advancing social justice, and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.

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THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!

For new sign-ups – email Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.

THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER

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.