

# Students & Schools: Moving Forward\*

(September, 2021 (Vol. 25 #12) – 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>**

## >About Students Who Are Having Problems Adjusting to School

Even before the COVID-19 disruption, teachers experienced a range of students having trouble adjusting to a new school year. And before schools closed last year, many already were addressing traumatized students. With the new school year, it is likely that these and other students (as well as families and staff) will have difficulty readjusting to school. Of particular concern, are those with lingering anxiety reactions, those who have been traumatized, and those grieving over someone who died. And, of course, any student who has a learning, behavior, or emotional problem is likely to need some supports.

The first weeks back are a critical period in the transition process. Besides reactions to the mitigation practices, some students are experiencing difficulties adjusting to new classes, new schools, new teachers, new classmates, etc. It is particularly poignant to see a student who is trying hard, but just can't handle what classroom and school requirements.

Over the first few weeks, teachers realize quickly who has and hasn't made a good adjustment to their classroom and to the school. This is the time to address any problems before they get worse. If adjustment problems are not addressed, student motivation for school dwindles, and behavior problems increase. Misbehavior often arises in reaction to learning difficulties.

Whatever the cause, it is imperative in the first month to be proactive so that school adjustment problems are addressed as soon as feasible.

Here are some steps to take:

### ***(1) Quickly identify any student, family, or staff having adjustment problems***

As school gets underway, teachers can readily identify those students who are having difficulty readjusting to school. (And administrators can monitor and identify staff who are having adjustment problems.)

## **(2) Provide personalized supports to aid those with minor adjustment problems**

(The focus here is on students. For staff support, see *Promoting Staff Well-being and Preventing Burnout as Schools Re-open* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/staffwellbeing.pdf> .)

This is the time for student support staff to team with teachers *in their classrooms* to intervene before problems become severe and pervasive and require referrals for out-of-class interventions.

(a) Here are some guidelines to begin problem solving in addressing students in need:

- Enhance personal contacts with these students and their families to ensure a positive working relationship.
- Focus first on clarifying a student's assets (e.g. positive attributes, outside interests, hobbies, what the student likes at school and in class).
- Ask about what the student is finding as problems at school.
- Explore the reasons for problems (e.g., Are students feeling overly anxious? Grieving? Traumatized? Are assignments seen as too hard? as uninteresting? Are students embarrassed because others will think they don't have the ability to do assignments? Are students picked on? rejected? alienated? Problems at home?)
- Explore other possible causal factors.
- Explore what the student and those in the home think can be done to make things better (including extra support from a volunteer, a peer, friend, etc.)

(b) Here are a few strategies for strengthening the environment to support student success.

Based on information about what is causing problems,

- >emphasize learning and enrichment options that are of current greatest interest and which the student indicates wanting to pursue
- >temporarily deemphasize areas that are not of high interest
- >enhance and teach new personal coping strategies
- >provide specific academic and social supports and accommodations as needed

And this is the time to intensify use of common practices. For example:

*Is the student frequently distracted?* Common practices are to

- identify any specific environmental factors that distract the student and make appropriate environmental changes
- have the student work in a group with others who are task-focused
- designate a volunteer to help the student when s/he becomes distracted and/or starts to misbehave, and as necessary, to help the student make transitions
- allow for frequent "breaks"
- interact with the student in ways that minimize confusion and distractions (e.g., keep conversations relatively short; talk quietly and slowly; use concrete terms; express warmth)

*Does the student need more direction?* Common practices are to

- develop and provide sets of specific prompts, multi-sensory cues, steps, etc. using oral, written, and other guides as organizational aids related to specific learning activities, materials, and daily schedules
- ensure someone checks with the students frequently throughout an activity to provide additional support and guidance in concrete ways (e.g., model, demonstrate, coach)
- support student efforts related to self-monitoring and self-evaluation and provide nurturing feedback keyed to the student progress and next steps

*Is the student having difficulty finishing tasks?* Common practices are to

- modify the length and time demands of assignments and tests
- modify the nature of the process and products (e.g., allow use of technological tools and allow for oral, audio-visual, arts and crafts, graphic, and computer generated products)

To accomplish the above,

Enhance use of aides, volunteers, peer tutors/coaches, mentors, those in the home, etc. not only to help support student efforts to learn and perform, but to enhance the social support network. Encourage structured staff discussions and staff development about what teachers can do and what other staff and volunteers ( student support staff, resource teachers, mentors, etc.) can do to team with teachers in their classrooms to enable school adjustment. Focus on what seems to be working; enhance staff development to address what's not working.

**(3) *Initiate specialized assistance and referrals when necessary for those who have major adjustment problems***

For student's who are still having major adjustment problems after significant efforts have been made to help, it is time to use the school's referral processes to ask for additional support services. Of course, as such services are added, it becomes essential to coordinate them with what is going on in the classroom, school-wide, and at home.

For more on this see

*Addressing School Adjustment Problems*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/adjustmentproblems.pdf>

*Over the past year-and-a-half, as a nation, we experienced struggles like never before. Schools, teachers, students, and families were challenged in ways none of us ever imagined. But from that struggle, came resilience. Teachers, principals, school staff, parents, and – mostly importantly – our nation's students rose to the occasion. They demonstrated what is possible if we follow key mitigation strategies to keep our students and school communities safe. Now, we must use our renewed strength to focus on what matters most: winning the fight against COVID-19, getting our students back in classrooms for full-time in-person learning—together—and making our education system better than ever before so that all students receive the excellent education they deserve.*

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona

**>A Few Cautions about Screening and Identifying Students at this Time**

As indicated above, teachers are able to identify students who are not doing well at schools; so are parents. What is or isn't done in response to such identifications determines whether students are appropriately helped. The way schools respond also affects whether they contribute to or counter trends to overpathologize and stigmatize children and youth.

With these matters in mind, consider the following:

- (1) Rather than adopting a universal screening instrument, schools should use the funds to develop a system of student and learning supports that responds quickly and effectively when teachers and parents identify youngsters experiencing problems.
- (2) COVID-19 has had an emotional impact on almost everyone, but it is presumptuous to assume that the majority of students are suffering from severe emotional distress and are traumatized. Many are quite resilient. The first steps for schools involve (a) providing academic and social supports for all who need it, (b) fostering a caring climate, (c) identifying those students who need something more, and (d) providing the added assistance they need.
- (3) Don't assume that just adding a few more personnel is the best approach in addressing the needs of identified students, and don't assume that a multi-tiered model (MTSS) is a sufficient intervention framework to improve how schools (and communities) help students. Appropriate and effective support for students requires a major transformation in how student and learning supports are provided.

For more on all this, see

- > *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
- > *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*
- > *Improving School Improvement*  
(available at this time as free resources  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving\\_school\\_improvement.html](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html) ).

Note: 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>

### Let Us Know:

*About what ideas are being proposed for transforming schools to better 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](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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*We know that students develop and apply social and emotional competencies in context, and that parents and caregivers are vital partners in students' social and emotional learning just as they are in academic learning. In some cases, the adaptations that were made to schooling throughout the 2020-2021 school year resulted in new connections and stronger collaboration between school and home and with the community. As students return to school this fall, educators can build upon those connections to create the positive developmental relationships that the science of learning and development demonstrates are critical to student thriving.* Sara Wolforth

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### >Quick Links to Online Resources

Resources That Go Beyond Basics and Support the Whole Child

<https://www.air.org/resource/field/resources-go-beyond-basics-and-support-whole-child>

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>

Visioning for Prevention: Protecting Children Through Strengthening Families – Moving Toward a Prevention-Focused System

<https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/prevention/vision-prevention/>

Moving Beyond Compliance

<https://www.ascd.org/blogs/moving-beyond-compliance-mike-anderson-august-2021>

About the Growing Demand for Mental Health in Schools

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/8-12-21.pdf>

Social Anxiety Groups <https://childmind.org/center/social-anxiety-groups/>

Overcoming Constraints of the Model Minority Stereotype to Advance Asian American Health

[https://www.americanpsychologist-digital.org/americanpsychologist/20210506/MobilePagedReplica.action?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=TXAME1210818002&utm\\_content=gtxcel&pm=2&folio=610#pg42](https://www.americanpsychologist-digital.org/americanpsychologist/20210506/MobilePagedReplica.action?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=TXAME1210818002&utm_content=gtxcel&pm=2&folio=610#pg42)

## A Few Upcoming Webinars

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

8/30 The Future of Healthy Schools: Supportive Funding, Systems Change, and Community Collaboration

9/8 Strategies and best practices for returning to school

9/14 Advancing Black LGBTQ+ Behavioral Health: Contemporary Approaches to Understanding and Uprooting Intersectional Stigma to Promote Wellness,

9/21 McKinney-Vento 101: Basic Requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act

9/29 Fully Present: Leveraging Attendance Data to Ensure Ongoing Success

10/19 McKinney-Vento School Selection Rights

10/21 Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Students Experiencing Homelessness

11/9 Understanding Doubled up

11/22 Paving the Way to College for Students Experiencing Homelessness

Webinar recording: Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth

<https://preventioninstitute.us17.list-manage.com/track/click?u=5f4bf5a36bd9f72789255d49a&id=17f472fea9&e=b6757fd9d7>

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*Never follow anyone else's path. Unless you're in the woods and you're lost and you see a path. Then by all means follow that path.* Ellen DeGeneres

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## Here's what was discussed in the Community of Practice during August

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

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

>About integrating social/emotional with multicultural education

>In the News

>>Summer school: A mixed picture

>>We don't have big goals!: Leaders call for ed transformation after COVID-19

>A cautionary note about SEL: Manners? Morals? Mental Health?

>Improving student/learning supports: It's not just about more staff & stuff

>Can schools be safe without school police?

>Are folks overestimating the mental health impact of the pandemic?

> About promoting resilience

>In the News

>>Youth of the pandemic revisited: Hopeful, resilient, nervous

>>Using Common Sense: Teens turn to online sources for mental health support

>What plans are in place to address "mask bullying"?

>In the News

>>Resilience for All Act

>>Educators Leading in Times of Crisis

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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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*My therapist told me the way to achieve true inner peace is to finish what I start. So far I've finished two bags of M&Ms and a chocolate cake. I feel better already.* Dave Barry

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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>

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

**Vaccines, Variants, Masks and Mandates Cloud School Reopenings.** The alarming surge in the delta variant scuttled superintendents' well-laid reopening plans and turned what's typically a joyful time into a political maelstrom. With children under 12 not yet eligible for vaccines, the alarming surge in the delta variant scuttled superintendents' well-laid reopening plans, returned some students to virtual learning, pitted parents, public health officials and school leaders against each other. Nearly 5,000 children, educators and school staff were quarantined across Mississippi, where 69 outbreaks reported between Aug. 2-6 – the second week of school for some districts – resulted in nearly 1,000 children and 300 teachers and staff testing positive for COVID-19

<https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2021-08-12/vaccines-variants-masks-and-mandates-cloud-school-reopenings>

**Virtual schools see increased enrollment in Memphis and Nashville.** Memphis and Nashville virtual public schools are seeing their highest enrollments ever as the second school year is about to begin during the COVID-19 pandemic. Shelby County Schools says 200 students are enrolled in Memphis Virtual School, up from 106 in the 2019-20 school year. The school had 163 students the year before. Metro Nashville Public Schools says that MNPS Virtual School has 300 students enrolled this year. That's more than double its all-time high of 140 students in 2014-15 and more than triple the 90 in 2019-20. The Tennessee Department of Education approved 29 new virtual schools last month, bringing the total to 57 in the state. Memphis Virtual Schools uses pre-recorded lessons provided by Florida Virtual School. Students work

independently, a model known as asynchronous learning. And, they submit their work to their teachers, emailing them along the way if they have questions. Full-time virtual learners may visit a designated site during the day to receive in-person tutoring. Part-time students receive tutoring, when needed, after traditional school hours via a virtual platform

<https://tn.chalkbeat.org/2021/8/5/22610360/virtual-schools-virtual-learning-increased-enrollment-memphis-and-nashville>

**Study Confirms School-to-Prison Pipeline.** New research found that early strict discipline causes an increase in adult crime. Students assigned to stricter middle schools are 3.2 percentage points more likely to have been arrested, 2.5 percentage points more likely to have been incarcerated as adults. They were also 1.7 percentage points more likely to drop out of high school and 2.4 percentage points less likely to attend a four-year college. The Education Department's Office for Civil Rights under the Biden administration is poised to putting schools on notice for disproportionate rates and severity of school discipline, school discipline data collection, an emphasis on social and emotional learning and support and training for teachers and other school staff. <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2021-07-27/study-confirms-school-to-prison-pipeline>

**Sparked by pandemic fall out, home schooling surges across U.S.** Although the pandemic disrupted family life across the U.S. since taking hold in spring 2020, some parents are grateful for one consequence: They're now opting to home school their children, even as schools plan to resume in-person classes. The specific reasons vary widely. Some families who spoke with The Associated Press have children with special educational needs; others seek a faith-based curriculum or say their local schools are flawed. The common denominator: They tried home schooling on what they thought was a temporary basis and found it beneficial to their children. The surge has been confirmed by the U.S. Census Bureau, which reported in March that the rate of households home schooling their children rose to 11% by September 2020, more than doubling from 5.4% just six months earlier. Black households saw the largest jump; their home schooling rate rose from 3.3% in the spring of 2020 to 16.1% in the fall. National Black Home Educators provides content for each academic subject pertaining to African American history and culture. Joyce Burges, co-founder and program director of National Black Home Educators, said the 21-year-old organization had about 5,000 members before the pandemic and now has more than 35,000. <https://apnews.com/article/health-religion-coronavirus-pandemic-race-and-ethnicity>

**Poll: Parents prefer "life skills" to SEL.** Social-emotional learning is popular among parents, but they do not like the name, according to a poll by YouGov commissioned by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Parents who were polled overwhelmingly preferred the term "life skills." <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/parents-like-social-emotional-learning-but-not-the-name/2021/08>

### 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)

### Comments and sharing from the field

>A sample of responses to the Center's recent report

*Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports*

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

1. "Very timely and to the point. I'm sure you know that we are also expanding community schools and I like that you call out the barriers and trouble spots so we can proactively avoid those."

2. “We can definitely look for ways to share this new report through our Attendance Awareness Campaign communications. The focus on alignment and integration is very much aligned with our own thinking.”
3. “We would like to send it out to our Mental Health Student Services Act grantees. I think this is an area that could use some clarification for involved. One of the seven negative outcomes of mental illness is school failure. ... I think we often see this as a hierarchy of priorities where a person’s mental health takes priority over an education. Or visa-versa. This has the potential to create greater tension between educators and mental health programs or other community-based programs. I think this would be an interesting discussion to have among our county leads to address the potential fragmentation of on-campus services which may be doing more harm than good.”
4. “I shared this with our Education Policy and Practice team, as well as those in charge of overseeing back to school/in-person learning reopening efforts. We care deeply about utilizing the Community Schools model across the nation so this is opportune timing.”
5. “I already forwarded it on to a few in our local public agencies, non-profits, and school districts. I am trying to push for how to facilitate collaboration between healthcare agencies and schools as I believe this would be an impactful way to advocate and support families with engaging more with schools and community agencies.”

>A colleague sent this for sharing related to the school police material in the 8/10 Community of Practice School Practitioner.

“The Round Rock ISD Police Department will be a leader in school policing by engaging in equitable and unbiased student advocacy to create the safest environment where students have the greatest opportunity to reach their full potential. Certified Texas Peace Officers serve the students, staff, and Round Rock ISD community at 55 campuses, and 14 special facilities within the 110-square mile District boundaries. We follow a four-pillar approach to school policing, focusing on safety and security, equity, behavioral health, and student advocacy.”

<https://police.roundrockisd.org/>

“Round Rock ISD Police Department recognized for positive school climate and prevention programs Texas State University’s Texas School Safety Center recognized Chief Jeffrey Yarbrough and the Round Rock ISD Police Department for their positive school climate and prevention programs. Built into the model is a team of social workers who work alongside District officers to find non-law enforcement solutions to address student needs and promote positive outcomes properly.”

<https://news.roundrockisd.org/2021/06/15/round-rock-isd-police-department-recognized-for-positive-school-climate-and-prevention-programs/>

### **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)**