

Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(August, 2025, Vol. 29 #11) – 39 Years & Counting

Featured

What's the Welcoming Plan for this School Year?

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What's the Welcoming Plan for this School Year?

Everyone knows the value of kicking the school year off with a series of welcoming and supportive activities that generate a sense of belonging, exciting renewal, and hope. A new school year provides the opportunity to start with a “clean slate.” Given recent events, all this particularly important now. Here’s a bit of what folks are planning:

Welcoming and supporting staff

Renewal begins with the events that kick-off the new school year with staff. Too often such events are dominated by pressure to cover the many bureaucratic things that need to be understood (e.g., procedures, regulations, requirements, rules). When this is the case, a perception of “more of the same” is generated. Creating an optimistic mood and a sense of excitement requires participatory activities that highlight

- how much all the staff are valued and the critical role they play
- an exciting agenda for renewal
- plans for revisiting school improvement to make renewal a reality

Then, from that first day, support efforts focus on promoting staff well-being and ensuring a school climate that is experienced by staff as a caring environment in which there is a strong collegial and social support structure, personalized opportunities for growth, and meaningful ways to participate in decision making.

Welcoming and supporting students and families

Starting a school year in a new school/a new class can be among the most stressful of the many transition challenges students and families cope with on a regular basis. As with most challenges, the experiences can yield opportunities for promoting positive learning and attitudes or can exacerbate student and school problems. To make the start of a new school year a positive experience, schools plan and implement a variety of school-wide and classroom activities. Examples include

- Welcome greetings at entrances to the school and classrooms
- Welcome assemblies or pep rallies
- Orientations to all facets of the school; introductions to the people who populate it
- Student exhibits/displays
- Personal introductions and greetings
- Peer buddies
- Watching for those in need of special assistance and taking steps for providing supports

As with any other intervention, welcoming and support efforts require institutional commitment, mechanisms for planning and implementation, and commitment to long-term evolution.

For more on this, see [*Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families*](#)

Some Need Special Assistance

A prime concern is to plan for those who need personalized special attention related to welcoming and support for the transition. For example, there always are students and families who have negative attitudes about coming to school, and those who are uncertain about how to interact with school processes and requirements or lack the skills for doing so. Such individuals require special invitations and personalized interactions.

For example, schools can ensure

- all staff (including office members) are provided with training and resources so they can create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere for *everyone* who enters the school, including those who seem overwhelmed, upset, don't speak English, etc.
- student/learning support staff and a cadre of teachers are prepared to invite a student and family to a Welcoming Conference where their special needs and interests are discussed and addressed; in some instances, cultural liaisons and/or peer buddies might join in the meeting
- access to supportive technology (e.g., for language translation, simplifying communication, preparing and printing out an individual plan for moving forward)

Planning special assistance also applies to those who enroll at different times throughout the year. When these newcomers come to register, the front office staff can benefit from having a few trained volunteers to welcome and begin an orientation and tour, with initial introductions to teacher(s), principal, support staff, and others. Such welcoming orientations include providing information (in primary languages) about matters such as:

- (a) how the school runs each day
- (b) special activities for family members and students
- (c) community services they may find helpful
- (d) parents who are ready to help them join in
- (e) students ready to meet with new students to help them join in
- (f) how the family can help the child learn and do well at school

Supports include such matters as providing assistance with filling out admission documents (e.g., immunization records) and where and how to access missing documentation.

For more, see the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find

>[*Supports for Transitions/Grade Articulation/Welcoming*](#)

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Education is not a luxury. It's the engine of our democracy, the soul of our small towns, and the best economic development strategy we have.

Amy Caldwell

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>Quick Links to Online Resources

- >>Starting the School Year Strong
- >>Preparing Families for the New School Year
- >>'It's scary starting a new school': Children and young people's perspectives on well-being support during educational transitions
- >>About School Adjustment
- >>The role of teachers in guiding student peer interactions
- >>Autonomy support and students' perceived social-emotional competence
- >>Governors address youth mental health and well being amid federal funding cuts
- >>Kids Suffer as Nearly Half of U.S. Families Struggle to Meet Basic Needs
- >>Block granting federal education funds comes with trade-offs
- >>The Ripple Effect: The Impact of Untreated Mental Health on School Performance and Educator Retention

Here's what was discussed in the *Community of Practice* during July

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

How are schools mapping existing student/learning supports?
How important is student engagement to school achievement?
How can students lead an initiative to improve attendance?
A state safety net for children whose parents are deported
Cuts in Medicaid for Schools Call for Rethinking Student Supports
Collaboration in the classroom for student/learning supports
Students' Misguided Use of Social Media and Chatbots
Understanding what worries youth

If you missed the resources and news in previous issues of the Community of Practice, see
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

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Now more than ever, communities need trusted partners to connect research to action, align efforts across sectors, and elevate youth voice in decision-making.

Phillip M. Robinson, Jr.

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>For more resources in general, see our website

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

>For info on the status of upcoming conferences

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

>For info on webinars

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

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The work we do—in classrooms and libraries and nurses' offices and school buses—is extraordinary. It's complicated and demanding and ever-changing, but it is also joyful, unexpected, deeply human—and incredibly collaborative. Ashlie Crosson

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>Calls for grant proposals

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/upcall.htm>

> job and training opportunities
when available

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/job.htm>

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

<https://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 moving in new directions for transforming 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 to ltaylor@ucla.edu

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

K-12 staff laid off so far before the new school year. School districts in California have laid off over 1,200 teachers ahead of the 2025-26 school year, according to the California Teachers Association. The sweeping layoffs come as districts across the state see declining enrollment and no longer have access to federal emergency pandemic funds. Some 1,246 certificated staff were laid off across 92 districts in the state... Some of those positions impacted by the layoffs include nurses, counselors, school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and librarians. While teacher layoffs are especially pronounced in California right now, it's expected that "most states are going to struggle with" K-12 budget and staffing challenges given nationwide .

Schools to teach disability history. In an effort to promote better treatment and protection of students with disabilities, a new Florida law will require public K-12 schools to develop curriculum on disability history and awareness. Florida's House Bill 447 was signed into law late last month. According to the bill text, Florida's forthcoming disability history curriculum will potentially cover key events and timelines on how services for individuals with disabilities and their civil rights have evolved, as well as the contributions of specific individuals and leaders with disabilities. The bill divides more specific learning topics by grade level groups. Kindergarten through 3rd graders will learn about bullying through conversations about the different types and what to do if they or someone they know is being bullied. The bill also requires that they learn about physical disabilities. For grades 4 through 6, the bill stipulates that the curriculum needs to include information on autism spectrum disorder, while 7th through 9th graders will learn about hearing impairment disabilities. In grades 10 through 12, students will learn about the different types of learning and intellectual disabilities.

Bayfield High School program helping bridge health worker gap. Durango (CO) Bayfield High School's Patient Care Technician program is trying to bridge the gap to fill entry-level workforce voids. The program certification allows graduating high school students to start working in entry-level health care positions, helping bridge that time gap before they obtain Certified Nursing Associate credentials. The program teaches skills that can be applied in health care settings such as hospitals or assisted living facilities. If students pass a National Health Career Association exam at the end of the school year, they will graduate with patient care technician certification.

National Association of School Nurses Statement on Passage of Legislation Cutting Medicaid, SNAP, WIC and CHIP. The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) expresses deep concern following today's House vote to approve H.R. 1... which includes sweeping cuts to core safety-net programs including Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). These programs are foundational to the health and well-being of children in the United States. Cuts of this magnitude will disproportionately impact low-income families and children with chronic health needs—many of whom rely on school nurses for care and support during the school day. School nurses serve on the front lines of public health in schools—addressing chronic illness, providing care coordination, supporting mental health, and responding to emergencies. Cuts to Medicaid and CHIP directly threaten school-based health services, while reductions in SNAP and WIC increase the risk of food insecurity and poor student health outcomes, all of which affect school attendance and learning. The cost of these cuts will be measured not only in budget lines but in missed school days, unaddressed health needs, and lost opportunities for millions of students.

'None of us were worrying about this': Trump's latest school money move has state authorities scrambling. Superintendents, teachers and budget wonks will now spend part of the summer measuring how much of a financial hole they can fill. The Trump administration's decision to withhold federal funds earmarked for key school programs tallies about \$7 billion, a top appropriator estimated as state officials rushed to assess the financial fallout. Word that the Education Department had halted plans to distribute grants for afterschool programs, teacher training initiatives, migrant student education and other initiatives on time has sent local authorities rushing to figure out how their classrooms will be hit.

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from the news story about disruption in school funding above

This is not about political philosophy, this is about reliability and consistency. None of us were worrying about this. School systems with ample reserves and solid local tax bases will be better positioned to manage the cuts through the school year, but high-poverty districts that are more reliant on federal funds are less likely to be able to keep some teachers on the books for more than a few weeks. This is not business as usual and we don't have any good direction as to what it means. Alabama state Superintendent Eric Mackey

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>Comments and sharing from the field

>In **Concerned about the impact on schools and student/learning supports of changing federal policies and practices?**, we asked for responses to

- *In what ways will changes in the way the federal government plays its role in the nation's education system have implications for students and schools?*
- *What do you think can be done to minimize negative outcomes for students?*

Here are two responses.

(1) The changes that the federal government proposes will negatively impact low-income and middle-income families who seek loans to attend college. The service for children with disabilities, English language learners, and services for low-income children (after school & summer programs) will be decreased. The loss of Medicare for families will result in a decline in health care. Responsibility for funding and providing programs is being returned to the individual states. At this point, the support of state and local governments seems crucial in order to provide services. Professional organizations, physicians, and teacher unions should be focused on advocacy and support. It is clear that the federal government does not care if programs are lost or minimized. Therefore, advocacy and awareness on the state and local level at this time is critical.

(2) I think the answer to this will unfold slowly and haphazardly. So much depends on state policies, commitment to education, reaction, and also to individual district foresight, planning, and priorities. I think the ensuing chaos will lead some parents to pull their kids out of public education and take advantage of vouchers-- and I think this is fully intentional. The process of dismantling the DOE is far from complete. The relocation of special education services to DHHS is a complete unknown. What it does mean is that coordination across programs and populations will be far more difficult. Special education seems likely to return to its silo stage, with a focus on minimal remediation resources and greater expectation for the children and families involved to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Again, I believe the chaos is a deliberate strategy to thwart any organized and effective response to cruel destructiveness.

Regarding what can be done to minimize negative outcomes for students? As noted above, I think we will see better funded and organized systems able to respond relatively well and those not well funded and organized perform more poorly. The rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer. Again, pressure will be placed on parents to exit their kids from failing systems. Overall, we have to prepare educators to be even more resilient, trauma-informed, well versed in social-emotional and character development, and mindful of the need to provide a positive climate for learning. I have created a resource anticipating this need (see below). Remember, the children will be suffering from more than the education-related issues. Many will be hungrier, lack health care, dealing with deportation threats to relatives, and have parental job instability. Helping our kids learn under these conditions will be an additional challenge-- paradoxically, especially in red states.

>Request re. 6/17 email ***School improvement: Moving into the age of Implementation Science***

"I'm interested in this information. Is it only a PDF or is there a live session to join? If so, what time? Is there free CE?"

Center response: This is one of many resources we put online and hope it does contribute to Continuing Education (CE). Our Center doesn't provide CE credit, but if you are interested in audio-visual resources, go to the listing we offer of *Upcoming/Archived Webcasts of Interest* – <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>. The Center also has recorded a 30 minute online introductory webinar on *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* – <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/powerpoint/briefintrosldesrec.pptx>

>Two principals sent some general feedback on recent work sent to our listservs:

- (1) “Thanks for reaching out and taking time to send your email. I'm not sure how I got on this list, but I'm glad I'm on it. With a background in mental health and a history of teaching students with emotional disabilities, I've long thought it is time to redefine success for our students and change the way we allocate support. Our school district started weighted student funding last school year (24-25) and the school board voted to continue it. It gives additional funds to schools based on a formula revolving around three groups of students: students who are English language learners, students with disabilities and students of poverty. These additional funds can be used at the principal's discretion as long as we clearly show how the funding is impacting those groups of students and the data to support it. I don't think WSF is new to education, but it's definitely new to our district and we are thrilled... Thanks for the work you do and the advocacy for public education!”
- (2) “THANKS for these updates: I enjoy getting them throughout the year and then taking time on the weekends and in the summer to digest them further!

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

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 <https://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