Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(Feb. 2025 Vol. 29 #5) – *39 Years & Counting*

Featured

Not Happy with Student Progress? Here's What Teachers Can Do

Also in this issue
>**Quick links to online resources**
>**A Few Stories Excerpted from Various News Sources**
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Is this the situation at schools in which you are a stakeholder?

> "Far more American high school students are graduating compared to a decade ago. ... But these ... trends, detailed in a new federal study, come with a significant asterisk. Those same high school students scored no better, and in some cases scored worse, than graduates a decade ago on national exams...."
> https://www.chalkbeat.org/2022/3/16/22979947/high-school-grades-inflation-federal-naep-test-scores/

Not Happy with Student Progress? Here's What Teachers Can Do

There is general agreement that schools must become more proactive in preventing and responding to problems. The trend has been to wait and then react.

At this critical juncture in the school year, teachers need to work with students and learning support staff to turn things around for those youngsters who are falling further and further behind and especially those who have disengaged.

A proactive approach engages and reengages students by

(1) enhancing personalized learning in ways that match a student's motivation and current levels of development,
and
(2) responding as quickly as feasible with special assistance* as soon as problems are noted.

*Special assistance refers to student/learning supports offered in the classroom and schoolwide to help a specific student. When a student is identified as needing special assistance, personalized intervention decisions are informed by response to intervention (RtI) and involve strategies based on understanding *intrinsic* motivation (e.g., a student's need to *feel* sufficiently in control of what is happening, reasonably competent related to what they are asked to do, and positively connected to significant others). Special assistance is provided only for as long as it is needed.

For more on this, see Part II: "Moving toward Personalized Instruction and Special Assistance" in
Improving School Improvement.

Reengaging those who have disengaged from classroom learning is especially challenging

To personalize intervention, an in-depth conference and a series of follow-ups with the student and family usually are first steps. In essence, the content focus is on clarifying specifics related to the problem and formulating flexible steps to solve it; the process focus is on establishing and continuously enhancing a positive working relationship and monitoring the intervention steps closely to make immediate changes as necessary. Special attention needs to be paid to addressing any underlying factors interfering with school learning and performance.

Here is a brief set of school changes that have been suggested to help reengage students:

>*Enhance the professional development of teachers and support staff.* Ensure teachers have the knowledge and skills to apply intrinsic motivation strategies. Ensure that support staff know how to team with teachers in the classroom to rethink engagement, personalized intervention, and special assistance.

>*Offer multiple pathways.* Students need alternative career and vocational pathways that reflect high standards. The concept of multiple pathways focuses on ensuring choice among a variety of high school programs that prepare all students for both college and careers. The emphasis is on providing both academic and career foundations for advanced learning, training, and effective and responsible participation in society. Available choices reflect student interests and community strengths and opportunities. They include programs that provide real-world training in areas where graduates can apply for living-wage jobs.

>*Introduce non-traditional approaches.* Educational alternative programs provide a non-traditional approach to curriculum by utilizing alternative teaching strategies. Programs focus upon the needs and interests of students by offering positive school experiences, which are geared for achievement, enhancement of positive self-concept, motivation, reduction of truancy, and reduction of disruptive behavior.

>*Provide out-of-school opportunities.* Efforts using out-of-school opportunities to retain middle and high school students begin early. They include tutoring, mentoring, service learning, career advising, and more. When older students (including potential dropouts) work with younger ones, both can improve their literacy skills.

>*Integrate service learning into the academic curriculum.* Investigators have found that when rigorous study in academic disciplines is linked to serious work on real needs, students' motivation to learn increases. When teachers are rigorous about partnering with young people to design and carry out service-learning projects that are tied to curricular objectives and standards, there are academic, intellectual, civic, ethical, social, and personal benefits.

For more related to this topic, see the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

>*Motivation, Engagement, Re-engagement*

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"Schools and teachers need to become a bit more flexible and encouraging towards students who seem as if they are losing gusto and falling behind. Schools need to outreach to kids who seem to be having trouble, talk to them, make them feel important and connected and provide them with a plan to get back on their feet. Things like make-up assignments, make-up tests, tutoring opportunities, etc., should all be made available. If this has been implemented, and it doesn't help, get parents involved." -a recent high school graduate

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>Quick Links to Online Resources

>>**Disparities in High School Graduation by Identity and Disability Using Intermediate and Long-Term Educational Outcomes**

>>**Are America's rising high school graduation rates real – or just an accountability-fueled mirage?**

>>**Changing our mindset about at-risk kids during the midyear stretch**

>>**Students Need Human Relationships to Thrive. Why Bots May Stand in the Way**

>>**The Portable Mentor: Expert Guide to a Successful Career in Psychology**

>>**The Side Effects of Universal School-Based Mental Health Supports: An Integrative Review**

>>**Teens and social media use: What's the impact?**

>>**Banning cellphones in schools gains popularity in red and blue states**

>>**What teachers want Donald Trump to know about their schools and their jobs**

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"I find a new current trend to be that folks misunderstand human diversity for pathology. I believe the self-diagnosis movement and social media, which regards almost all human idiosyncrasy to be a "neurospicy trait", to contribute to this." Michelle McDonald, Ph.D.

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Here's what was discussed in the *Community of Practice* during Jan.
https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm

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

>Supporting students impacted by threat of family deportation
>Positive working relationships in the classroom
>Concerns about online therapy for adolescents
>Adverse and Positive Childhood Experiences and Resilience
>Holidays are Special Social and Emotional Development Opportunities
>Are you part of a school stakeholder collaborative?
>Behavior Problems: What's a teacher to do?
>Student news broadcasts as a platform for participatory civics

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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>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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"True leadership involves not only encouraging teachers to reconnect with their purpose but also ensuring that they are seen, heard and supported. When calls for purpose are matched with actionable support, remembering your why can regain its power as a shared, transformative affirmation of our collective dedication to education. " Ryan Burns

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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

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

AI transforms learning for students with disabilities, but schools still mastering it. Artificial intelligence holds the promise of helping countless students with a range of visual, speech, language, and hearing impairments to execute tasks that come easily to others. Schools everywhere have been wrestling with how and where to incorporate AI, but many are fast-tracking applications for students with disabilities. Getting the latest technology into the hands of students with disabilities is a priority for the U.S. Education Department, which has told schools they must consider whether students need tools like text-to-speech and alternative communication devices. New rules from the Department of Justice also will require schools and other government entities to make apps and online content accessible to those with disabilities. In Iowa, a new law requires students deemed not proficient — about a quarter of them — to get an individualized reading plan. As part of that effort, the state's education department spent $3 million on an AI-driven personalized tutoring program. When students struggle, a digital avatar intervenes.

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LAUSD principals say demands are too high, hours too long. They are joining the Teamsters Los Angeles Unified school principals — saying their workload is too heavy and the pressure to raise student achievement, manage complex budgets and keep campuses safe is too intense — have voted to join the Teamsters union in a rebuke to the leadership of Supt. Alberto Carvalho and the Board of Education. In an election that concluded last week, 85% of voting members, who include principals and other mid-level administrators, chose to unionize. In essence, the leaders of 1,300 public schools in the nation's second-largest school system — known for strict adherence to policies and for echoing the district's messaging — have said their burden is unfair and their voices go unheard. Last year, school administrators in the Richmond, Va., public schools joined the Teamsters.

Reimagine the Department of Education as the Department of American Competitiveness. Opposition to the Education Department has always been the fear that it would infringe on states and localities' ability to set their own academic curricula. Transforming the country and competing on a global scale requires, among other things, a national innovation strategy that begins with rethinking the pre-Kindergarten through college education system. The country does not have a coherent education strategy for science, technology, engineering and math fields, and as artificial intelligence rapidly evolves, the skills needed for the U.S. to remain the global tech leader will evolve just as quickly.

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"We should get out of this habit of 'everything's a mental health problem' and understand that often a challenge, a stress, a worry can be turned into advocacy, activism, or a reach for new knowledge to change the situation." Vickie Mays

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>Comments and sharing from the field

Responses to the Center's 1/9/25 note about the Los Angeles fires:

1. "Let's not forget the destruction that is STILL being worked out in Western North Carolina. I do not recall seeing any correspondence regarding those affected by Hurricane Helene. Those folks are still trying to make do with the VERY LIMITED federal help they have received or are receiving."

2. "Thanks for all your dedication to the long term work of supporting students. I have learned so much from you."

Response to the 1/14/25 practitioner about positive assets and resilience

"Just a big thank you for including the power of Positive Childhood experiences and Resilience. Sometimes I get tired of Trauma and "adverse" language. It is disempowering, esp when you see so much happening that is good in spite of the hardships."

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
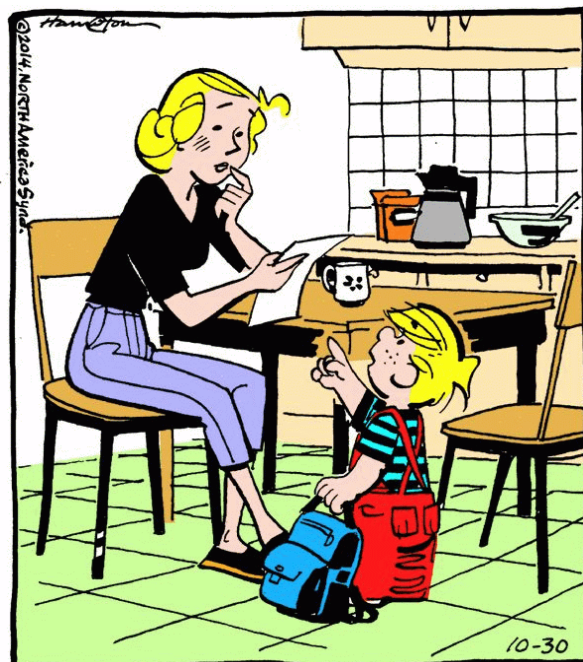
"DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT THE TEACHER SAYS. SHE'S BEEN IN KINDERGARTEN FOR 15 YEARS."