Students & Schools: Moving Forward

Featured

Reengaging Disconnected Students

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Reengaging Disconnected Students

Addressing attendance problems and losses in enrollment require systemic changes in classrooms and schoolwide.

By this point in the school year, it is painfully evident that too many students are not doing well and are potential dropouts. Commonly heard laments from teachers:

>• *They could do it if they only wanted to!!!*
>• *These are smart kids, but they just won't do the work!*

Some of these students are passively disengaged and seemed bored or burned out; others are actively disconnected – often to the point of acting out at school or not attending. Disengaged students reflect low and negative intrinsic motivation. When students disengage, staff become frustrated, and this can have a negative effect on their relationship with disconnected students. But, of course, since giving up on these students is no option, the focus needs to be on *reengagement.*

As school resumes, school staff need to take some time to talk about **WHY?** and **WHAT TO DO?** about reengaging disconnected students (and families).

WHY? Factors away from school can affect engagement, but at this time, the focus mainly is on some common school-related reasons. For example, it is a common finding that some students are *not*

>• experiencing sufficient success in learning, so they give up;
>• having a good relationship with the teacher, so they react/resist;
>• connected with a supportive group of friends, so they feel isolated/alienated.
>>(For many students there is nothing more important than feeling connected to peers at school.)

WHAT TO DO? Teachers and support staff need to work as a team to build a positive relationship with difficult students (e.g., identify and build on strengths, re-establish mutual respect). Support staff often have the opportunity to get to know these students and can take the lead in helping others see what is "special" in a student who hasn't yet made good connections with teachers and peers.

For teachers and student/learning support staff, the following are a few specific practices to discuss for starting to turn things around.

(1) **Individual Conferences:** Open up a **dialogue** and listen to what the student dislikes and likes about school and work toward establishing a **working relationship.**

> Schools need to assist teachers at this time of year by facilitating time for them to conference individually with each student who has been having problems. In some cases, the student's parents need to be included. Student support staff can play a role in arranging such conferences and then covering the teacher's class while the teacher holds the conferences. The conferences can cover
>> (a) why there has been a problem (without getting into a "blame-game"),
>> (b) exploring new ways the student thinks could make things better for all concerned,
>> (c) arriving at some mutual agreements (not one-way "contracts").

2. **Opportunities for Immediate Changes of Image:** For students who have acquired a negative reputation, it is critical to develop some immediate opportunities for them to take on some attractive, positive roles (e.g., special monitor, photographer for the school newspaper, part of the design group for the school's website).

3. **Accounting for Individual Differences in Both Motivation and Capabilities:** Engagement is about motivation and especially *intrinsic* motivation. This involves attention to a student's feelings of self-determination, competence, and relatedness to significant others. A focus on minimizing threats to such feelings can play a significant role in reengagement as can maximizing such feelings. Accommodations may be needed with respect to presentation of material, workload and nature of feedback, and more

4. **Use Natural Opportunities to Enhance a Student's Positive Connections with Peers:** Some students need just a bit more help in connecting with other students in a positive way. Teachers working with student and learning supports staff can capitalize on a range of opportunities both inside the classroom, schoolwide, and in the neighborhood to address these problems. Consider how the school is promoting social and emotional development and plan ways to enhance the focus on such matters in class, during breaks, before and after school, during lunch, at student activities. Use volunteers, aids, and/or other students to provide additional supports. Such supports can provide opportunities to enhance peer relationships as well as learning. Think about such activities as cooperative learning and team play, groups of students engaged in project learning, students involved in service learning in the community and in other positive activities when not in school.

5. **Keep Making Them Feel Cared About and Positively Special:** Teachers and support staff need to keep taking special steps to bond with these students and help them re-engage in positive activities and learning. Again, use volunteers, aids, and/or other students to provide extra support.

Think about embedding concerns about engagement and reengagement into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. See

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

For more, see

> >Chapter 5. "Classroom Behavior Management: It's Not Just About Controlling Kids; It's About Engaging and Re-engaging Them in Learning" – In *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
> >*Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School*
> >*Motivation, engagement, re-engagement*

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What the new year brings to you will depend a great deal on what you bring to the new year.
Vern McLellan
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>Quick Links to Online Resources

Promoting positive development among refugee adolescents

The Role of Informal Sources of Help in Young People's Access to, Engagement with, and Maintenance in Professional Mental Health Care

Efficacy of the Fast Track Friendship Group Program for Peer-rejected Children

Mind the Gap… But Which Gap? The Distinctions Between Social Inequalities in Student Achievement

Framing community safety

How do you discipline an in-school overdose? In some districts, you don't

How 4 NYC high school students say AI-powered tools are changing their education

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I put a dollar in a change machine. Nothing changed. George Carlin
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Here's what was discussed in the *Community of Practice* during December
https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm
Note: *All community of practice editions contain Links to relevant shared resources*.

>Ideas about enhancing a school's efforts to prevent problems
>Are you supporting population based mental health?
>What supports can schools provide over winter break?
>Enhancing teacher/staff well being and retention
>The Youth Homelessness System Improvement Grants
>About Student Empathy and the Holiday Season
>How Much of a Problem is Student Engagement?
>Enhancing Student Engagement Over the Rest of the Year

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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An optimist stays up until midnight to see the new year in.
A pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves.

Bill Vaughan

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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 newdirections 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)

States weigh big changes to testing requirements. Fueled by worries over the pandemic,
equity and learning loss, Republicans and Democrats are rewriting decades' worth of strict
standardized testing and graduation requirements. As student scores scrape new lows in the
aftermath of the pandemic — U.S. math scores on a benchmark international exam dropped
sharply alongside the rest of the world between 2018 and 2022, according to results released this
week — education officials are reconsidering the high-stakes role tests play in the American
education system. Many states are already exploring testing tactics that go beyond
multiple-choice exams and easing test scores' burden on students.

End of COVID relief funding lead to cuts is student support positions. The Dysart (AZ)
Unified School voted to eliminate the role of social workers within their school district. The
decision was made when discussing the district's COVID-19 elementary and secondary school
emergency relief funds (ESSER). Dysart has received more than $56 million in COVID relief
funding since 2019. This year, nearly $2 million of the district's ESSER funding is budgeted for
its social workers. But as ESSER funds run dry, the district says it doesn't have enough to fund
these workers anymore. Social workers will remain on campus through the end of this school
year. The new funding structure will take effect for the 2024-2025 school year.

Schools are sending more kids to the hospital. Three times a week, on average, a police car pulls up to a school in Wicomico County on Maryland's Eastern Shore. A student is brought out, handcuffed and placed inside for transport to a hospital emergency room for a psychiatric evaluation. Over the past eight years, the process has been used at least 750 times on students. Some are as young as 5 years old. Recent data shows New York City schools call police to take children in emotional distress to the emergency room despite a 2014 legal settlement in which they agreed to stop the practice. A Kentucky school district was found to have used a psychiatric assessment on kids more than 1,000 times in a year. In Florida, thousands of school-aged children have been subjected to the Baker Act, the state's involuntary commitment statute. Because emergency petitions happen outside the standard discipline process, missed school days are not recorded as suspensions. For students with disabilities, that has special consequences – they are not supposed to be removed from class for more than 10 days without an evaluation of whether they are receiving the support they need.

San Francisco schools likely to cut 900 jobs as district faces $400 million deficit. San Francisco schools are facing a massive deficit created by years of overspending as well as recent raises, leaving the district to cut more than 900 already vacant positions, officials said.

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quote from state testing changes story above

> *When school systems have the kinds of results that are showing up as they are, it gives the opportunity to take stock and rethink. We want to make sure that success is defined in a much broader sense than just paper and pencil, or getting a 90.*

New York Education Commissioner Betty Rosa

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>A note of appreciation from the field

"I can't thank you enough for the wealth of information that you have shared via this platform! I not only use it to stay informed but y'all helped me pass the California Preliminary Administrative Credential Examination! Now, I am reviewing documents as I prepare for an administrative position interview tomorrow. I am truly grateful for the knowledge and wisdom you share!"

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**

*The school called and said
you missed school yesterday.*
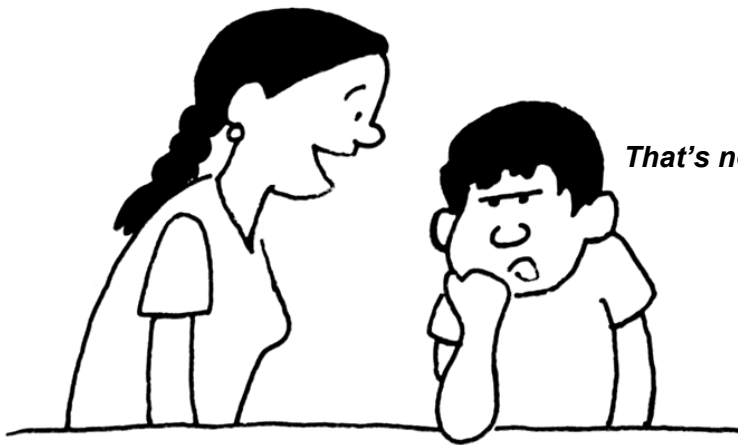
That's not true! I didn't miss it at all.