Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(January, 2025 Vol. 29 #4) – *39 Years & Counting*

Featured

How are Schools Working on Improving Attendance as the Year Moves On?
Let's be sure there is a focus on reengaging disconnected students
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How are Schools Working on Improving Attendance as the Year Moves On?
Let's be sure there is a focus on reengaging disconnected students

By this point in the school year, school staff (and parents and students) know that for some students "*it just isn't working*." We hear teachers lament:

- *They could do it if they only wanted to!!!*

- *These are smart kids, but they just won't do the work!*

- *If he survives childhood and adolescence, he'll probably be a very successful adult!*

Some students are passively disengaged and seem bored or burned out; others are actively disconnected – often to the point of acting out at school or not attending. Disengaged students reflect low or negative intrinsic motivation. They are hard to work with and too often engage in disruptive behavior. But giving up on these students is not an option, so the focus needs to be on reengaging them.

January is the time for mid-course corrections in working with disconnected students (and their families). It is a time to introduce new strategies and improve student/learning supports. It is time for teachers and student/learning support staff to work together to enhance understanding of why students are disengaged and develop some personalized reengagement approaches based on that understanding.

Start by asking: ***WHY?***

> ***Why are some students not engaged in classroom learning? Why are they misbehaving?***

A few of common *school-related* reasons include:

- not experiencing sufficient success in learning, so they give up;

- not having a good relationship with the teacher, so they react/resist;

- not having connected with a supportive group of friends, so they feel isolated/alienated.

Some students may be experiencing a lack of success related to all three matters and more.

Whatever the reason(s), they tend to set into motion a cycle of negative psychological reactions.

Some Steps in Pursuing a Personalized Approach to Reengagement

1. *Individual Conferences:* 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, joining to provide ideas on how they might support the student, and arranging covering the teacher's class while the teacher holds the conferences.

   The discussions aim at
   > (a) clarifying why there has been a problem (without getting into a "blame-game"),
   > (b) exploring some new ways that the student thinks could make things better for all concerned,
   > (c) arriving at some mutual agreements (not one-way "contracts").

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

3. *Add Some Extra Caring Support:* Use volunteers, aids, and/or other students to provide additional support to these students. Make certain the tone is one of caring not censure and that the support provides real opportunities to discover the value of learning and not another monitoring device.

4. *Do more to account for individual differences:* Focus on differences in both motivation as well as capability in designing learning opportunities and then implementing them in ways than enhance intrinsic motivation for ongoing learning at school. Accommodations may be needed with respect to the physical arrangement of the classroom, presentation of material, workload and nature of feedback, and more

5. *Positive Activities When Not in School:* Focus on connecting the student with intrinsically motivating activities and projects. These can build on new classroom activities that have been designed to reengage the student. Such activities can consolidate something that has been learned recently or lay a foundation for future learning

6. *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 reengage in positive activities and learning. Again, use volunteers, aids, and/or other students to provide extra support.

> Making a positive, caring connection with disengaged students creates protective bonds. Of course, building a strong, positive relationship with difficult students is a challenge. Looking for the strengths, building on the student's competence, and re-establishing relationships of mutual respect is best achieved when support staff and teachers work as a team. 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 school staff.

**Click on the following for a Few General Classroom Approaches
to Enhance and Maintain Engagement**

- **cooperative learning and team play**
- **students as leaders at school**
- **project learning**
- **service learning in the community**
- **same-age and cross-age peer contact**

The Center's Quick Find on *Engagement and Reengagement* has links to many online resources developed by the Center and from other sources.

And Chapter 5 in
>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide* discusses
- Engagement in Learning
- Engagement is About Motivation
- Valuing and Expectations: Key Components of Motivation
- Overreliance on Rewards
- Don't Lose Sight of Intrinsic Motivation
- Re-engaging Disconnected Students
- Addressing Underlying Motivation
- Some General Strategies
- A Bit More About Options and Decision Making

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"We have a long way to go to get attendance back to its pre-pandemic levels... As much as we might want an answer that will work for everyone, everywhere, all at once, across-the-board problems may not respond to across-the-board solutions... The reasons for the crisis may be too multifaceted and complex for a single solution. It's up to schools to look for their own solutions, which begins with understanding the problem." Teresa Preston

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>Quick Links to Online Resources
>>**Clues students can look out for to help prevent school violence**

>>**No one-size-fits-all solution to chronic absenteeism**

>>**Positive Parenting Improves Multiple Aspects of Health and Well-Being in Young Adulthood**

>>**Violence Prevention Technical Assistance Center**

>>**Strengthening Youth Mental Health: A Governor's Playbook**

>>**Mental Health and Foster Care**

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

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"Every student - no matter where they live, how much their family earns, or the color of their skin - deserves the opportunity, resources, and support they need to grow into their full brilliance. In every community across this country parents and educators are partners in this effort." Becky Pringle

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

>Parent wants to know what to do about daughter's disengagement with school and peers
>Let's face it: MTSS is not a unified, comprehensive, and equitable student support system
>SEL, Winter holidays, and food & toy drives
>About socioeconomic factors and achievement gaps
>Are schools protecting students' mental health?
>What do those in the field say about what student/learning supports?
>Looking back as the year ends: looking forward to the new year

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

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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>**Calls for grant proposals**
https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/upcall.htm

> *job and training opportunities*
when available
https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/job.htm

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 "This is a pivotal time in education, and I am eager to work alongside my colleagues to ensure every student has access to a high-quality education. Together, we will focus on addressing academic recovery, supporting educators, and modernizing our education systems to meet the needs of today's learners. My motto in Alabama is Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day. I look to extend that philosophy to this important work that serves America's students."

Eric Mackey, Alabama Superintendent & President-elect of CCSSO's Board of Directors

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

Study finds impact of culturally divisive conflict on American public schools. American school districts have spent roughly $3.2 billion toward resolving tensions over how political issues are taught in educational spaces in the 2023-2024 school year, according to the study. The research focused on disputes regarding the LGBTQ+ community, curriculum diversity and the banning of print books. The study found that two-thirds of schools experienced moderate to severe levels of conflict, including the regular appearance of misinformation, violent rhetoric and threat-making surrounding these cultural issues. the $3.2 billion spent is not going toward improving education. Instead, the money is being spent on responding to cultural conflict through lawyer fees, security and replacing teachers who leave their positions, she added. the study found that, while these costs are high, they are avoidable. Conflict will always exist, but if moderate and high-conflict schools could reduce arguments to the level of low-conflict schools, they could save a cumulative $2 billion

Iowa school taps high schoolers to fill paraeducator void. As the need for paraeducators who support teachers in the classroom and work one-on-one with students with disabilities persists nationally and across Iowa, the Linn-Mar school district has found some success in training high schoolers for the position. It began with a statewide grant called the Teacher and Paraeducator Registered Apprenticeship Program. The grant program first was unveiled in 2022 to help students and adults advance in their education and careers while learning and working in the classroom. Since then, the program has supported over 1,000 apprentices and 124 districts in Iowa. positions. School districts are required to provide education and training to the apprentices by partnering with community colleges or four-year colleges and universities. The total paraeducator workforce in the Iowa City district is about 550, the district's second-largest employee group.

When the School Bus Doesn't Come. The school commute is turning into a nightmare for many families, as cities across the US grapple with a severe driver shortage. Nationally, the number of school bus drivers fell by 15% between 2019 and 2023, a loss of some 29,000 drivers, according to the Economic Policy Institute. The severe shortage has thrown many school systems into unprecedented chaos, with 91% of school leaders surveyed reporting significant operational challenges this year.

Schools have had to slash bus service and adjust school start and end times, turning commutes into a nightmare for many families. In Chicago, where the district has suspended bus service for thousands of students, some have had to take public buses and trains at the break of dawn to get to school on time. In Philadelphia, some schools are paying families as much as $300 a month to provide transport for their children. In 2022, for the first time on record, the majority of K-12 students across the US commuted to school by private vehicle.. More than 53% of students traveled by car that year. About a third took the school bus.

Colorado Youth for a Change helps students return to school and earn their diplomas.

Colorado Youth for a Change is a Denver-based nonprofit that targets students who exited school prematurely before receiving their diplomas or GEDs. The first step to getting students back on campus is contacting them and their families. The nonprofit's team sends letters, makes phone calls and visits their homes to gauge their interest. When Colorado Youth for a Change succeeds in reengagement, the nonprofit schedules school tours and explores alternative education options. The organization's reengagement specialists stay with their assigned students through the next school year to ensure barriers don't stand in the way of their education. Colorado Youth for a Change partners with 20 school districts statewide. Over the past decade, the nonprofit has developed intervention programming to prevent dropping out in the first place.

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"Although no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending." Carl Bard

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>Comments and sharing from the field

>Response to our 12/18/24 Practitioner – *"Are schools protecting students' mental health?"*

From a school board director:

"Are schools teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, or distracted by every child being given a mental health designation so attention and money can be redirected away from actual education? Our schools are not mental health facilities! Please stop trying to turn them into anything other than educational facilities."

>Response to the Center's various concerns about MTSS (e.g., *Let's face it: MTSS is not a unified, comprehensive, and equitable student support system*)

"I am attaching the best article I have seen on MTSS. Second best is the work coming out of Boston Public Schools."

A statewide multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) approach to social and emotional learning (SEL) and mental health

https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/social-and-emotional-learning-research-practice-and-policy

Let us hear your comments. Send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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CAUSE | EFFECT

"Let's just stick with this for now. We can talk about unintended consequences later."

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