Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(March, 2024 Vol. 28 #6) – *38 Years & Counting*

Featured

Will the Spring Slump Add to the Student Engagement Problems?

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Will the Spring Slump Add to the Student Engagement Problems?

> *I noticed ... lately a sleepy, tired and sad trend. We're growing, slowly but surely, more impatient and grumpy as the year progresses. I'm calling this phenomenon the "Spring Semester Slump."* Amanda Gray's reflection on the slump

Teachers have long experienced a "Spring Slump" among students. It happens in the weeks before and after a school's spring break. Productivity slows, and drops in attendance are common. Some students feel worn out; some are bored by the routines at school; some are having academic and personal problems. Approaching summer, the thought of being free of school fills the heads of others. "Senioritis" kicks in for many as high school graduation nears. ("Four years of high school is half a year too long," says one senior. "I'm already accepted for college," says another. So they hope to coast through and survive the last few months.)

Weather also seems to play a role. Depending on place and time, it's either too cold, or as Amanda Maksymiw notes, "The sun is shining, flowers are blooming and the warm temperatures are making everyone want to venture outdoors. Suddenly, work seems a bit less interesting than the possibilities that lie on the other side of the glass."

And as **Miriam Plotinsky notes**, it's not just the students: Around this time of year, teachers are particularly prone to burnout, more so than in May or June. When Presidents' Day hits in the frigid darkness of February, teachers are looking at about a six-week stretch of school until spring break, which doesn't sound too horrible until we think about some of the other factors. For starters, testing often takes over in the spring months, and that alone adds pressure to the already fast-paced world of instruction. With up-and-down weather patterns, viruses tend to run rampant, and now that we face this year's addition of Covid-19 worries, anxiety is at a premium.

> **This is a good time for school staff to discuss how they understand the reduced engagement (energy/motivation/effort) and then plan ways to counter the "slump" through strategies that enhance motivation.**

Addressing "spring slump" is part of the ongoing discussion of motivation, and especially intrinsic motivation, as critical to all facets of school engagement. To enhance engagement, it is essential to pay particular attention to countering negative feelings and thoughts about school by increasing interactions that exude warmth and empathy. At the same time, it is important to remember that participants need to feel in control of their lives, competent in what they are doing, and positively related to significant others at school. Any threats to these feelings need to be countered.

And to recapture interest and attention, a dose of novelty usually helps. Especially important are efforts to increase opportunities for discovery, inquiry, and serendipity. The richer the learning environment, the more likely students will engage in learning and discover a variety of new interests, information, and skills. To these ends, practices such as project based learning, cooperative learning, and enrichment activities* can be invaluable not only in developing a range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, but as potent ways to engage students and enhance feelings of connection.

> *We note that, too often, enrichment activities are viewed as a frill. We find, however, that for many students such activities are key to their involvement at school. From a motivational perspective, enrichment options are not designed to teach specific information and skills, rather they are intended to encourage independent exploration, experimentation, and learning that has beneficial outcomes. Enrichment activities are not designed to operate as if everything a student learns is taught by the teacher. As a general strategy, enrichment opportunities can be established by offering an attractive set of discovery and inquiry centers and facilitating students exploration.

Engagement and reengagement are more likely to occur when instruction is personalized (i.e., matched to not only to each student's capabilities but also to their motivation), and special assistance is added whenever necessary.

Immediate matters for discussion are:

How are schools anticipating a drop in effort/energy/motivation, and what do you think must be done to counter such a slump?

The following are a few resources to use as a stimulus in discussions about engaging and reengaging students.

>*About Motivation*

>*Improving School Improvement (Part I)*

>*Concerns = Opportunities: Addressing Student Disengagement, Acting Out, and Dropouts by Moving in New Directions*

>*School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate*

>*Project Based Learning and Student Engagement*
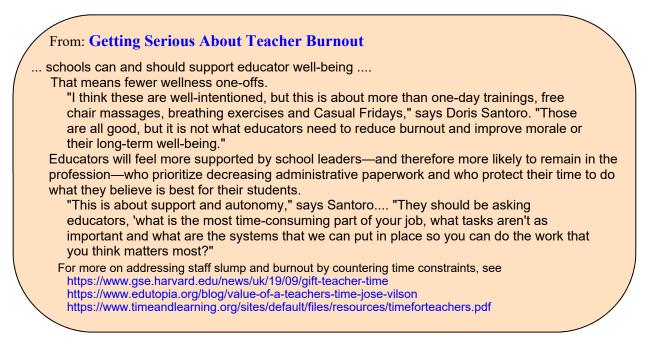
Also see the Center's Quick Find on

>*Motivation, Engagement, Re-engagement*

And from Attendance Works, see *Spring Attendance Slump*

From: **Tips as you plan for a new semester of teaching and learning**

">Connect with students early and often. ... use their names and build community with and amongst them. Move around the physical classroom, and check-in with your students before, during or after class. If you notice engagement waning, help refocus students on their learning.

>Design class sessions to maximize student engagement. Plan for active learning by creating shorter and more engaging presentations. Incorporate opportunities for discussion both inside and outside the classroom, creating more space for students to meaningfully engage with course content and each other.

>Involve students in their learning. Consider opportunities for students to collaborate with their peers whether engaging in collaborative in-class activities...."

With specific respect to staff, ongoing pressures can be expected to cause more than the usual number to "slump" and even to "burnout." It certainly is time to heed the NEA's call for "getting serious about teacher burnout."

From: **Getting Serious About Teacher Burnout**

... schools can and should support educator well-being ....
 That means fewer wellness one-offs.
  "I think these are well-intentioned, but this is about more than one-day trainings, free chair massages, breathing exercises and Casual Fridays," says Doris Santoro. "Those are all good, but it is not what educators need to reduce burnout and improve morale or their long-term well-being."
Educators will feel more supported by school leaders—and therefore more likely to remain in the profession—who prioritize decreasing administrative paperwork and who protect their time to do what they believe is best for their students.
  "This is about support and autonomy," says Santoro.... "They should be asking educators, 'what is the most time-consuming part of your job, what tasks aren't as important and what are the systems that we can put in place so you can do the work that you think matters most?'"
 For more on addressing staff slump and burnout by countering time constraints, see
  https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/19/09/gift-teacher-time
  https://www.edutopia.org/blog/value-of-a-teachers-time-jose-vilson
  https://www.timeandlearning.org/sites/default/files/resources/timeforteachers.pdf

For a general discussion about burnout, see *Understanding and Minimizing Staff Burnout*

For more resources, see the Center's Quick Finds on:
  >*Motivation, Engagement, Reengagement*
  >*Burnout Prevention*

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*Blaming teachers for the problems in education is like
blaming doctors for people being sick.*

Anonymous

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Are you experiencing spring slump?

Only during the school day!

>Quick Links to Online Resources

  >Out-of-School Time as a Tool for Social Justice

  >The Signaling Power of Unexcused Absence from School

  >Drug Abuse Educational Materials

  >Bystander intervention style and motivational factors influencing behavior in bullying situations

  >From Institutions to Inclusion: How Children with Disabilities Gained Educational Rights in the U.S

  >Implementing School-Based Mental Health Services: A Scoping Review of the Literature Summarizing the Factors That Affect Implementation

  >Spark & Sustain: How all of the world's school systems can improve learning at scale

  >Gun Violence: The Impact on Society

  >Siblings Under Stress

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> *We're living in a new reality, in which taking advantage of non-school hours to extend learning will become increasingly critical.* Jacqueline Kronk

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Here's what was discussed in the *Community of Practice* during February
https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm
Note: *All community of practice editions contain Links to relevant shared resources*.

>*Students' concerns about seeking mental health help*
>*After school programs are essential transition supports*
>*Valentine's day: a great opportunity to give to others*
>*Addressing the Student Mental Health Crisis: Some Major Concerns*
>*How are schools reengaging disconnected students (and families)?*
>*Changing the Learning Environment to Enhance Student Engagement*
>*How should schools address gun violence?*

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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Ultimately, we all must hold fast to the promise of a future in which everyone can live in equality—with human dignity and human rights, with the freedoms and responsibilities of pluralist democracy. History teaches this will not come easily, or on its own. But together we can and must help to build a just and lasting peace, worthy of our shared humanity. Darren Walker

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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

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We need children of every race and ethnicity to grow up ready to provide the talent, intellect and hard work that will make our country strong and prosperous. This country of great abundance, creativity and possibility can- and must- make better policy choices to eliminate the barriers kids face. Leslie Boissiere

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

California agrees to target the most struggling students to settle learning-loss lawsuit. In an agreement ending a 3-year-old lawsuit brought by families of 15 Oakland and Los Angeles students, the state will target billions of dollars of remaining learning-loss money to low-income students and others with the widest learning disparities. Districts are receiving the state block grant based on the proportion of low-income students, foster children, and English learners enrolled. The settlement would limit funding to the lowest performing student groups and chronically absent students.

Stackable Credentials: Making College Work for More Students. Colleges across the United States have invested tens of millions of dollars to develop credential-stacking programs. Their target students often don't have the time or the money to get a college degree. Instead, these programs allow them to earn a series of credentials over time that can get them to the same place. Schools offer them as a way for students to build their education and their careers in steps in high-demand occupations like nursing or information technology. Several states have guaranteed funding for them in an effort to help more disadvantaged students move beyond a high school diploma.

School kicks off new workforce initiative. High school academies' focus on industrial certifications and career and technical education programs provides collaboration to find future job shadowing, interning and networking opportunities. The 12 academies include Business and Banking, Computer Science Agriscience, Construction Management, Fitness and Coaching, Graphic Arts, Health Sciences, Advanced Studies, Culinary Arts, Digital Media Design, Engineering and Fine Arts. The industry certifications help students become better qualified for jobs right out of high school. At the annual Career and College Expo, hundreds of booths are available with universities, businesses and recruiters coming to the school to recruit students, employees and servicemen.

Schools are trying to get more students therapy. Not all parents are on board. As schools across the country respond to a youth mental health crisis accelerated by the pandemic, many are confronting the thorny legal, ethical, and practical challenges of getting parents on board with treatment. Research suggests that having to obtain parental permission can be a significant barrier to teens accessing treatment. The question of when young people can consent to mental health treatment is getting increasing attention from policymakers. States like California and Colorado have recently lowered the age of consent for treatment to 12. Statistics show a racial divide. In 2021, 14% of white children reported seeing a therapist at some point during that year, compared to 9% of Black children, 8% of Hispanic kids, and only 3% of Asian American children, according to a survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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From the above story on teen mental health:
> *It's this disconnect. The kids are all on TikTok or the internet and understand therapy speak and that this is something that could be helpful for their mental health and are interested in, but don't have the explicit buy-in from their parents.*" Chelsea Trout

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>Comments and sharing from the field

>Response to 1/18 Commentary *Student/Learning Supports at the Edge of the Fiscal Cliff*
"Districts are going to get what they pay for when hiring mental health 'coaches' who have only a 2 year Associates Degree. That is the new push in education is offering this certification. If you want to check a box and say you are offering supports and get no true results- hire coaches who aren't on campus living with the students and getting to know them. If you want someone building relationships daily with students and families and you want results- keep your School Counselors. School Counselors have a unique holistic view of looking at a student. It offers us a chance to take a look at all the barriers in a student's life and not just see things through one lense. For example, I can take a look at my computer system and often see where the issue is. They might be starting their homework in class and not completing it. They might have complete disorganization going on. They might not be taking advantage of redoing an assignment. Our Guided Studies support classes have been a wonderful addition to our support. We pick the strongest teachers to teach it. The class is built into the latter portion of the day. Part of this class is teaching all of the executive functioning along with receiving homework help. There is a lot of parent communication involved as well. It builds a little family of support. This also helps me target which students I need to keep a closer eye on and streamline my systems of support. No coaches!!"

>"I recently left the classroom to join the Department of Education and am enjoying reading and learning from the emails you send out. Although I don't usually comment on articles, I felt like one important voice was missing in the Hot Topic publication entitled, *About the Student Mental Health Crisis: What do you recommend beyond hiring more personnel?* What are teachers doing to address these concerns? In the absence or delays with administrative guidance or the inability of social workers being able to adapt their approach to the mental health crisis, I would be interested in knowing how boots on the ground classroom teachers are finding successful ways to address student needs in the classroom without appropriate staffing levels. Is information of that nature included in one of the three books that were listed at the bottom of the email? If so, could you please direct me to which one? – Thanks for your help and for all of the great work that the UCLA Psychology Department is doing to further investigate these important issues."

>" I am the Health and Wellness Coordinator for our County Office of Education. The purpose of my email is to reach out and request to be added to your email distribution list. My director has informed me that the information sent through your email distribution is extremely valuable and would help our teachers and staff in supporting students."

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