

# Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(May, 2023 Vol. 27 #8) – 37 Years & Counting

## Featured

***How do schools culminate the year  
on a hopeful and celebratory note for all?***

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***How do schools culminate the year  
on a hopeful and celebratory note for all?***

At every level, the end of the school year is a special time. How it is experienced depends on a multitude of factors. In planning year end activity, the challenge is to make sure that (a) *all* participants are accounted for positively and (b) activities promote hope for the future.

For most students (and staff), the end of the school year comes with a sense of relief. For some, it is a time of congratulations for accomplishments. For some, it is a temporary reprieve from problems experienced at school.

A clear challenge with respect to students who have had problems is to convey to them and their families some of the worthwhile things they have gained over the year (e.g., identifying whatever a student has done positively and how these can be built on in the coming school year).

In general, the end of the school year is a time for focusing on accomplishments and emphasizing hope for the future. And it is a time for celebrations – *safe celebrations!*

Special end of the year activities provide natural opportunities to foster hope and promote social emotional learning (e.g., enhance understanding of self and others, increase sense of responsibility for self and others, expand social problem solving skills).

Planning celebrations also is a natural opportunity to engage students and families; such engagement can enhance feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness to significant others at school, and can help counter previous negative experiences.

Engaging students and families is especially worthwhile with respect to planning ways to minimize all too common negative consequences related to teen proms and end of school parties.

“Celebrating during your final days together will leave students with stronger feelings of self-esteem, self-worth, connections, and happiness. Activities that bring everyone together to share memories and have some fun will create these important memorable moments ....”

<https://www.studiesweekly.com/end-year-celebration-ideas/>

[A range of year end celebration ideas are provided in this article.]

## Some Compilations of End of the School Year Activity Ideas

There are many compilations of end of the school year ideas on the internet. Here's a sample:

- >End-of-the-Year Activities & Keepsakes
- >End of School Year Ideas
- >End of the Year Activities for Middle & High School
- >Video on End of School Year Ideas
- >26 Fun and Memorable End of the School Year Celebration Ideas
- >25 Fun Ways to Celebrate the End of the School Year
- >10 Great Ways To Celebrate the End of the School Year
- >Grad Night Manual
- >59 Graduation Party Ideas

And end of the year plans, of course, encompasses staff appreciation. Here's an example:

"... the staff gathered together in the high school gym to celebrate their accomplishments this year. The morning began with the Superintendent opening by recognizing the board. He continued the celebration by taking some time to speak to all staff, emphasizing their amazing efforts throughout this challenging year. He also made sure to mention that all staff should take this summer to rest and take care of themselves, and get a bit of respite. All employees wore their new staff t-shirts that say "Together We Can Do Virtually Anything." Employees that have worked in the district for anywhere from five to forty years were recognized, earning a pin with their number of years, with forty years also receiving a gift. ..."

<https://www.mvsc.k12.in.us/search-results?q=staff+appreciation>

### A few comments from articles about ending the school year.

From *Surviving the end of the school year*

"The end of the school year can be challenging, even for experienced teachers... Your students have grown attached to you over the last nine or ten months of school.

The thought of not seeing you every day or you not being their teacher next year can be sad, scary, or unsettling.... Help them get excited about what is to come next year and all that they will learn. If you are able to, have a few of the teachers from the next grade level pop in to say hello and introduce themselves....

At the end of the school year, it's important to set aside time for students to talk about and reflect on their school year. They can write about their experiences, draw a picture, or simply talk about it with their friends and teachers....

Even though you may be stressed out, worn out, and are on the verge of checking out, it's important to keep a positive attitude.... Take time to enjoy the last days of school. Have students make a welcome banner for your class next year. Write letters of advice to next year's class. ... Whether you do an end of the year countdown or just have a few special days or activities planned, give your students something to look forward to....

There's so much to do at the end of the year, so let your students help whenever possible. They love helping and feel accomplished when they get to help ..."

From *Finishing the end of the school year strong*

"...Whether you're watching your seniors go off to college, or your little 3rd graders become 4th graders, the end of the year means preparing students for their next steps. It's time to start guiding students for what they can expect in the next grade or in the next phase of life. One idea is to have students and teachers from the next grade up come visit next year's incoming students. Another idea is to have students make introduction videos to send to their next teacher. Students can also write about what they're most looking forward to, any questions they have, or things they're nervous about..."

From *Activities at the end of the school year*

“...Even if your students are staying in the same school, moving grades can be scary. Your students will have new teachers, different classrooms, and might even learn in a different wing of the school. You can use the last day to prepare students for the fall.

Walk your students down to where the next grade learns. Let them visit the different classrooms to see where they might have their homeroom periods next year. You can even introduce your students to different teachers who they might learn from. Even these small actions and interactions can make the changes that come with a new school year seem less intimidating. ...”

From *High school seniors visit elementary schools ahead of graduation*

“...Dozens of high school seniors returned to their elementary schools for Senior Memory Walks, a program that began at the high school last year. During the visits, which lasted about half an hour, the seniors wore their graduation caps and gowns and high-fived the elementary school students, many of whom lined up and cheered for the teenagers and held up signs of encouragement...”

### **Of special concern are safe proms and teen parties.**

From *Dangerous Season for Teens: Prom and Graduation Time Increase Alcohol Fatalities*

More than one-third of youth under the age of 21 killed in alcohol related fatalities died during the months prior to graduation season, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

From *Prom Playbook: How Schools Can Keep Kids Safe*

For decades teachers, administrators and parents have worked to curb the dangerous activities that too often accompany prom. EducationWorld has put together a playbook addressing common pitfalls as well as proven strategies.

*Here's what a couple of recent grads told us about their safe end of the year student celebrations.*

- 1) “... at my school grad night was held on campus. The parents worked it and there were different activities like fake gambling, craps tables, dancing, a smoothie bar, food, and "crash room" to sleep since it went until 5am, rock climbing, a palm reader, inflatable jumper obstacle course, face painting, karaoke and much more. When I tell friends from other high schools/friends I made at college, the majority give me positive feedback saying that it sounds like a lot more fun than what they did. I think this is because instead of having the whole [entertainment center] where groups can get separated and remain in cliques ..., it was in our gym .... making it easier to spend time with a lot of different students and not get lost in a large area. Also, because parents worked the booths, students did not show up intoxicated. There was no re-entry allowed and because it was on campus, even if a few students did decide to drink before the event, it lessened the danger of driving on a freeway to get there because it is possible that they could simply walk over to the school. ... It was a night that I will never forget and one of my greatest memories and ... a good way to have safe fun.”
- 2) “I remember one of my teachers speaking in class two weeks before prom, trying to give us some perspective. She wanted us to have a good time, but also acknowledged the enormous stress that it caused for some. She encouraged us to view it as just another dance and to focus on graduating instead. She had chaperoned so many proms over the years and shared with us some of the negative things she saw when students weren't using their best judgment. While trying to downplay the event may seem like being a killjoy to some, many of my friends and I found it reassuring to hear from an adult that life indeed does go on past high school celebrations .... I think teachers and/or counselors should engage students in conversations like these months before prom to temper the frenzy that can accompany the event and possibly prevent the unwise decisions students make at prom and post-prom parties. It is of course perfectly acceptable to be happy and excited about prom, but I think there is much potential for danger when students blow it into epic proportions.

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**Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened.** —Dr. Seuss

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### >Quick Links to Online Resources

**Ostracism and Peer Victimization in Adolescents With and Without Mental Health Diagnoses in a Public Middle School Setting**

**Associations of media use and early childhood development:**

**School System Challenges that SEL Must Address**

**Reclaiming the System: Group Counseling Landscape in Schools**

**Macro-Level Social Work Interventions in Schools**

**Pathways From Prosocial Behavior to Emotional Health and Academic Achievement in Early Adolescence**

**About Heritage Language Loss**

**The State of Children's Health in the United States**

**How Ohio plans to boost its special education graduation rate**

**About How Schools can Best Play their role in Addressing Mental Health Concerns**

**Teens and Sleep: The Cost of Sleep Deprivation**

**ADHD medication abuse in schools is a 'wake-up call'**

**Addressing Grief through Death Education**

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*I was hired to improve education in the country. I'm not a politician. I'm an educator. I'm a dad, and I want to talk about raising the bar in education,... I won't sit idly when some try to attack our schools or privatize education. If we're not standing up for our students, who will?* Miguel Cardona

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

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

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

- >Request from a district about revamping its approach to mental health
- >About strengthening positive mental health
- >Engaging and reengaging students -- featuring an effort by Pinellas County to "get middle schools right"
- >Youth mental health: Sharing decision making
- >About Youth-Initiated Mentoring
- >Using lessons learned from the MH crisis to strengthen prevention
- >School enjoyment contributes to positive learning and behavior

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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Following a school lock down due to the report of a gun on campus:

*While we were so relieved that the event ended without incident, once again, our community was terrorized by the threat of gun violence. We must continue to work toward a time when we can live free from the threat of gun violence. Those who can, need to take action now, so that our students can go to school without fear of random gun violence. Wherever and whenever they occur, every lockdown, every drill takes a toll on our children and our communities.* Highland Park (IL) Mayor Nancy Rotering

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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](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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

**Does the increase in homeless students indicate a worsening trend?** As the number of unhoused students in California’s public schools continues to rise to pre-pandemic levels, experts and educators fear that today’s economy paired with the state’s unrelenting housing crisis will lead to unprecedented rates of homeless youth. According to updated data released today by the California Department of Education, there are about 5.9 million students enrolled in public schools this school year, close to 40,000 fewer students than last year or a .7% drop. But the number of students experiencing homelessness increased by 9%, about 16,000, to a total of approximately 187,000 kids. The overarching cause of homelessness among all Californians is the perennial shortage of affordable housing in the state

**Helena Public Schools lays out 2-phase plan to balance budget.** Around 125 non-tenured teachers and administrators received an email from the district on Feb. 17 notifying them that their contract may not be renewed. As of the March 24, the district officially gave 34 teachers non-renewal notices. Larger class sizes are forecasted for the 2023-24 school year. The district started to offer retirement incentives to help address the upcoming projected shortfall. In June 2022, 10 teachers retired, and this June, 29 teachers are set to retire. ESSER funds are up at the end of this school year, and so are many of the additional positions that were brought in during the pandemic. Inflation has also affected the district.

For the 2023-24 school year, electricity is up 17%, natural gas is up 46%, custodial supplies are up 30%, property and liability insurance is up 15% and water, sewer and garbage is up 5%.

**Students' Innovative Farming Feeds Fairfax County School's Food Pantry.** Students at Luther Jackson Middle School are using live fish in a tank — but no dirt — to grow produce for the school's food pantry. A group of eighth-grade students at Fairfax County's Luther Jackson Middle School created a project that grows produce through vertical farming. That produce supplies the middle school's food pantry, which serves around 70 families. Produce is grown on vertical plastic towers via a process called hydroponics. Aquaponics is the combination of hydroponics (growing plants without soil) and aquaculture (growing fish and other aquatic organisms). That means the waste produced from fish fertilizes the plants. The plants, in turn, clean the water that goes back to the fish.

**Federal grant to help area schools with mental health.** Graduate students in the occupational therapy program in the local college will provide support to students and faculty to assist in filling unmet needs. The \$3.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education will be used over five years to increase mental health support for K-12 students. Graduate students will be placed starting this fall in area schools, where they will practice as mental health providers. The graduate students will work alongside the school’s counselors, social workers and teachers to help students learn mental health coping skills and early interventions to use in everyday life.

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(quote from federal grant story above)

“In this partnership, it's really showcasing what we can do as part of our profession in this school-based setting and it's really also showing how we can be part of that team. Our goal is not to take away what the social workers are doing or what the counselors are doing — that's not the intent at all because they're doing something that's totally different related to mental health, and we're able to support those providers in a different way.” Kaisa Syvaaja

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## >Comments and sharing from the field

**Request to readers:** Our university is recovering from a graduate student strike. While the strike is over, the residual effects are not. This led us to look for resources on how to establish positive working/personal relationships following a strike. Since many school districts experience this, we want to share what we have found and ask what your experiences are. See <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/afterstrike.pdf>

In addition, our latest research on school strikes turned up the following:

- >7 Things to Keep in Mind After a Teacher Strike
- >Lessons From A “Successful” Teacher Strike
- >How often do teacher strikes happen?
- >Strong principal-staff relationships help schools move on after teachers strike

### 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](mailto: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](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)



“Have a great summer and please do not throw your books in the air or run through the halls – wait until the students have left the building.”

### **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](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu) or [adelman@psych.ucla.edu](mailto:adelman@psych.ucla.edu)**

**Send info to share with others or ask for specific resources by email to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**