

Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(October, 2025 Vol. 30 #1) – 39 Years & Counting

Featured

Teachers Want Students Who are Motivated to Engage in Instruction

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Teachers Want Students Who are Motivated to Engage in Instruction

Ask teachers:

*Most days, how many of your students come to class
motivationally ready and able to learn
what you have planned to teach them?"*

You may find the responses from many surprising and discouraging.

Even for students who have made a reasonably good adjustment to a new school and a new classroom, a month or two into a school year may see positive motivation subside. Behavior, learning, and emotional problems can follow. The key to minimizing such problems is to focus on motivation and enhancing and maintaining student engagement.

Many instructional approaches are effective when a student is motivated to learn what is being taught. And, for students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems, motivation for classroom learning often is the primary concern.

Fundamental implications for classrooms include ensuring there are a broad range of *options* with respect to:

- >content
- >outcomes
- >processes (including a personalized structure to facilitate learning)

With real options comes opportunities for involving learners in *decision making*. And all forms of positive **student participation** can enhance engagement.

The point is to enhance stable, positive, intrinsic attitudes that mobilize ongoing pursuit of desired ends, throughout the school, and away from school. Developing intrinsic attitudes is basic to increasing the type of motivated practice (reading for pleasure for example) that is essential for mastering and assimilating what has just been learned.

Some Key Motivational Considerations for Schools

School staff not only need to try to increase motivation – especially intrinsic motivation – but also to avoid practices that decrease it. Although students may learn a specific lesson at school (e.g., some basic skills), they may have little or no interest in using the new knowledge and skills outside of the classroom. Increasing such interest requires procedures that can reduce negative and increase positive feelings, thoughts, and coping strategies.

In transforming classrooms, the following points about motivation warrant particular attention:

- *Motivational Readiness* – Optimal performance and learning require motivational readiness. Motivation is a key antecedent condition in any learning situation. Readiness is understood in terms of offering stimulating and supportive environments where learning can be perceived as vivid, valued, and attainable. It is a prerequisite to student attention, involvement, and performance. Poor motivational readiness may be a cause of poor learning and a factor maintaining learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Thus, the need for strategies that can produce a high level of motivational readiness (and reduce avoidance motivation and reactance) so students are mobilized to participate.
- *Motivation as both a process and an outcome concern* – Individuals may value learning something, but may not be motivated to pursue the processes used. Many students are motivated to learn when they first encounter a topic but do not maintain that motivation. Processes must elicit, enhance, and maintain motivation so that students stay mobilized. Programs must be designed to maintain, enhance, and expand intrinsic motivation so that what is learned is not limited to immediate lessons and is applied in the world beyond the schoolhouse door.
- *Countering negative motivation* – Negative motivation and avoidance reactions and any conditions likely to generate them must be avoided or at least minimized. Of particular concern are activities students perceive as unchallenging, uninteresting, over-demanding, or overwhelming. Most people react against structures that seriously limit their range of options or that are over-controlling and coercive. Examples of conditions that can have a negative impact on a person's motivation are sparse resources, excessive rules, and a restrictive day-in, day-out emphasis on drill and remediation.

About Students who Exhibit Negative Motivation at School

Students experiencing problems at school usually have extremely negative perceptions of and avoidance tendencies toward activities that look like "the same old thing." Major changes in approach must be made if such students are to change these perceptions. Ultimately, success may depend on the degree to which the students view the adults at school and in the classroom as supportive and the program as personally valuable and obtainable.

With behavior, learning, and emotional problems, it is especially important to identify and minimize experiences that maintain or may increase avoidance motivation. Of particular concern is the need to avoid over-reliance on extrinsics to entice and reward since such strategies can decrease intrinsic motivation.

In emphasizing engagement as critical to a school being effective, our Center resources stress the need for a greater focus in educator's education on motivation and especially *intrinsic* motivation. Below are a few examples of resources freely downloadable from our website:

- > [*About Motivation*](#) (a two page introduction to the topic)
- > [*Intrinsic Motivation: Engaging and Re-engaging Students, Families, & Staff*](#) (a brief powerpoint introduction that can be adapted for continuing education)
- > [*Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School*](#) (a cont. educ. reading that can stand alone or accompany the powerpoint)

For a discussion of motivation and engagement in the broader context of school improvement, see "Part I: Good Schools and Classrooms" in [*Improving School Improvement*](#)

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As researchers and practitioners struggle to determine what works to support high school social and emotional learning, we might find that high school students already know the answer. We just need to ask them. Blake A. Colaianne

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>Quick Links to Online Resources

- >>Youth Participation: Making It Real
- >>Now and Then: Examining Students' Concerns About the Primary-Secondary School Transition
- >>Consensus statement on developmentally appropriate policy and practice for adolescents in foster care
- >>Professional development of school principals – how do experienced school leaders make sense of their professional learning?
- >>Impacts of teacher-driven professional development on teacher leadership identity
- >>Predictors of help-seeking intention among young people
- >>A Whole-School Approach to Address Youth Radicalization

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As an educator, it's an amazing feeling to know your district's officials, board, and administrators fully uphold the fundamentals of public education and have the dignity to proudly support them. I really feel at home knowing we are truly all on the same team ... and that's a team that is rooting for all of our students. Sarah Inama

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

Addressing Burnout Prevention in Pre- and In-Service Education
Improving Student/Learning Supports: Leading the Way
Toward Improving Parent Involvement
Parents and Decisions about the Curriculum
Designing a School Open House to Build Bridges with Families and Communities
More About MTSS
About PBIS and MTSS
What the U.S. Secretaries of Education and of Health and Human Services are saying about mental health in schools
Whole school approaches – essential to enhancing learning and promoting positive mental health

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>

>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>

>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.

JUST RELEASED for 2025-2026

**An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports:
A Month-by-Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing
Resources**

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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The knowledge and tools are at our disposal to potentially prevent many young people from becoming school shooters by widely scaling programs proven to reduce sources of trauma and foster caring and supportive environments in our schools and communities.

Anthony Biglan, Diana Fishbein, and Michael B. Greene

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

After days in class, Tampa Bay schools already seeing enrollment drop – School district leaders across the Tampa Bay region are reassessing their short- and long-term plans as they watch student enrollment fall. Hillsborough County, which in recent years shuttered six under-capacity schools, had nearly 10,000 fewer students after two weeks of classes than it had at the same time last year. The trend is one that's playing out across Florida as growing numbers of families take advantage of the state's expanding scholarship and voucher program that allows them to use state money for private and home schooling. It has touched large districts such as Miami-Dade County, which has reported a decline of about 13,000 students, and small ones including Bay County, which has seen its enrollment dip by about 500.

School Board reject \$804,000 state grant for mental health services – The Murrieta (CA) school board has turned down an approximately \$800,000 state grant, which would have laid the groundwork for additional mental health services for students. Trustees — in a 3-2 vote — rejected the grant money, when a board majority said accepting the money raised red flags. One was a concern that parents may not be told what services their children would be seeking. The District was offered \$804,029 from the Riverside County Office of Education through the Department of Health Care Services' School-Linked Partnerships and Capacity Grants, a part of the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative. Those voting against said the grant used "blind billing" and would charge parents' insurance without letting them know what services their child received,

An AI divide is growing in schools – Research has shown there's a digital divide when it comes to schools teaching about new technologies. For example, affluent suburban schools are more likely to have computer science classes than districts in poorer urban and rural areas. A recent Gallup survey found that students in low-income and rural areas are the least likely to say their schools let them use AI or have rules about it. Public K-12 teachers see both benefits and risks in AI, according to the survey from Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation. The survey found that teachers who use AI regularly are more optimistic about its impact on education than those who don't.

Schools finds solution to special education teacher shortage through pathway program – The nationwide teacher shortage is a problem the **Cherry Creek School District** (CO) was determined to fix. Now in the second year of its Aspiring Educator Pathway program, apprentices are training specifically in special education. The program is similar to a medical residency model, where aspiring teachers can earn a bachelor's degree from Community College of Aurora for under \$20,000 and are paid a full-time salary while learning from a mentor teacher. Superintendent Christopher Smith said a quarter of the district's students are in special education.

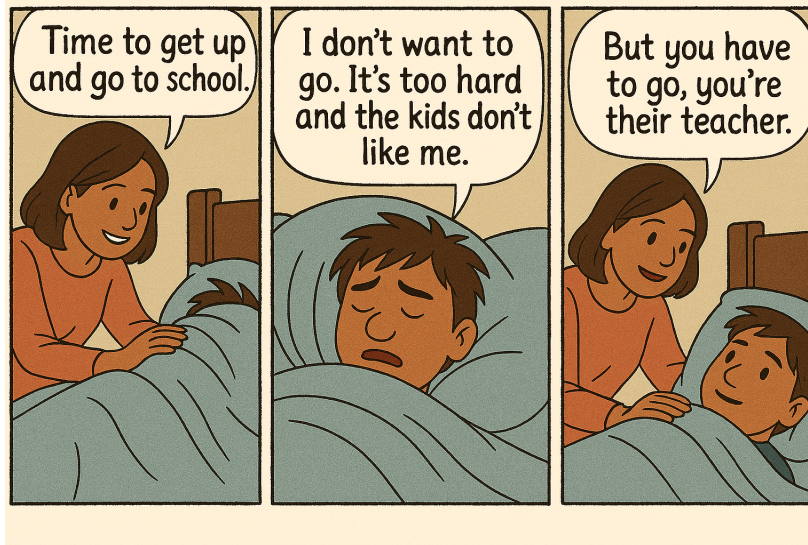
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from news story about pathways to teaching

One of the key components of the Aspiring Educator program is there's multiple entry points. So yes, you can come straight out of high school, but we also have office managers, security guards, paraprofessionals who want to become educators as well.

Superintendent Christopher Smith

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(AI created images)

>Comments and sharing from the field

As requested:

“Could you please help us spread the word about this conference?

Designed By Principals, For Principals Nov 20-21, 2025

... tailored to the needs of both new and seasoned school leaders ... the event offers a unique platform for firsthand knowledge sharing and collaboration. Participants will benefit from dynamic panel discussions, expert-led sessions, and interactive networking opportunities that delve into the latest best practices in educational leadership.”

Responses to the Center’s 8/27/25 email about “Providing Psychological First Aid in the Aftermath of the Tragedy in Minneapolis.”

- (1) “This needs to be shared across socials. Scream it! People need to know that there are supports and that we don’t just have to accept “thoughts and prayers” when our lawmakers and elected officials won’t do anything. Thank you for sharing this.”
- (2) A colleague shared the link to “**Crisis Counseling Resources for School Administrators, School Social Workers and Other School-Based Mental Health Professionals**” on his website.

We also received and greatly appreciated some nice “thank you” comments. Here are two:

- (1) “It is such a pleasure to see your names and read your newsletters, as I have done for no doubt more than 25 years. It was so wonderful to have met with both of you in our Arizona initiative to improve school safety, where you spoke with our Tucson Unified Schools representatives. We also had your assistance in the Phoenix/Tempe area. .. Thanks so much for your decades of support. I have always been so grateful for you and your work.”
- (2) “Thank you so much for continuing to share your research and tools with those of us who, like you, work for the success of the whole child.”

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In a world saturated with external pressures, incentives, and obligations, the concept of intrinsic motivation stands as a beacon of authenticity and self-determination. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity purely for the inherent satisfaction, interest, or joy it brings, rather than for some separable outcome or reward (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This type of motivation is a cornerstone of psychological theories that emphasize personal growth, autonomy, and well-being.

<https://mindfulspark.org/2024/12/16/intrinsic-motivation-the-key-to-sustainable-health-and-lasting-well-being/>

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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