

# Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(August, 2024 Vol. 28 #11) – 38 Years & Counting

## Featured

### What's the Plan for Welcoming *Everyone* Back?

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### What's the Plan for Welcoming *Everyone* Back?

**Staff** – See the discussion in the 7/24/24 community of practice *Practitioner* about *Welcoming school staff and forming working alliances as the school year begins*.

**Students and families** – We know that starting a new school year can be scary. Changing grades and schools are among the many transition demands with which students and families regularly cope. As with almost every transition, schools can proactively plan ways to minimize problems and use the event as a natural opportunity to promote positive attitudes and enhance personal and social functioning. The focus is on welcoming, orienting, and connecting, with special attention providing supports to students and families who are having difficulty making the transition. The aim is to provide all students and families a chance to get to know school staff and for staff to facilitate positive connections between family and school such as helping the student and parents connect with the staff, resources, and activities.

Here are few examples of ways some schools try to help students and families feel welcome, supported, and a part of the school community:

- the Office Staff is trained and has the necessary resources for creating a welcoming and supportive climate for everyone who enters the school
- teachers are provided workshops and assistance to help them establish welcoming and supportive procedures and materials
- teachers invite each student and family to a Welcoming Conference that helps clarify student and family interests, concerns, and answers their questions
- student support staff are prepared to help with anyone who is having difficulty adjusting to the new school year

Note: Because the emphasis is on *Welcoming*, any material given out at this time specifically states WELCOME and is limited to uncomplicated orientation

information. To the degree feasible, such material is made available in (a) the various languages of those likely to enroll at the school and (b) multi-media formats.

Examples of basic information provided includes:

- (a) how the school runs each day,
- (b) special activities for parents and students,
- (c) community services they may find helpful,
- (d) how to connect with parents who have volunteered to be peer buddies,
- (e) how the student will be connected with a peer buddy,
- (f) how the family can help the child learn and do well at school,
- (g) what the family can do if the student is having problems at school.

Also, *whenever* a family comes to register, they are met by a staff member or a volunteer\* who welcomes and provides the basic information. If the family doesn't have required documents (e.g., residence, immunizations), they are informed in a facilitative way about how to access missing documentation.

\*Volunteers in the front office provide extra hands and ensure a short wait time for assistance. Volunteers also can be a resource in conducting orientations and tours.

**Like any other school interventions, efforts to welcome and involve new students and families require institutional commitment, organization, and ongoing involvement. That is, the process must be school-owned, and there must be a mechanism dedicated to effective intervention planning, implementation, and continuous improvement and evolution.**

For more on the beginning of the school year kick off, see the following Center resources:

- > [\*What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families\*](#)
- > [\*Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families\*](#)

Also see the Quick Find on

- > [\*Support for Transitions\*](#)

From other sources:

- > [\*5 Tips to Ease Back-to-School Anxiety\*](#)
- > [\*Schools find many ways to say 'welcome back'\*](#)

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*Is it just me, or does my mom seem a little too excited about tomorrow being the first day of school?*

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## >Quick Links to Online Resources

- > **Online Health and Safety for Children and Youth**
- > **Adolescents' loneliness and problematic smartphone use: The mediating role of upward social comparison and the moderating role of self-identity**
- > **The Principal Recovery Network Guide to Recovery from a school shooting**
- > **Strengthening the Science and Practice of Implementation Support: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Training and Technical Assistance Centers**
- > **How school leaders can be special education ambassadors**
- > **Dismantling Racism in the Field of Psychology and Beyond**
- > **A Sample of What Teachers/Researchers Say about Teacher Burnout**

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*At the end of the day, kids are kids, and they need teachers and they need guidance and they need people who are gonna put in the time and the effort for them And it's worth it. Like you can see it in the classroom when you make those breakthroughs. It's worth it.*

Sarah Cardoza

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**Here's what was discussed in the *Community of Practice* during July**  
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

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

- >Can there be too much talk about mental health?
- >Artificial Intelligence in the classroom
- >What's being done about youth who have disconnected from school?
- >About "at-risk" youth
- >Showing and Receiving Kindness: Example of a Natural Opportunity for SEL
- >Addressing the transition challenges in moving to middle or high school
- >Schools need to consider "fit" in adopting interventions
- >A related concern about fitting evidence-based treatment to the person, not the diagnosis
- >Welcoming School Staff and Forming Working Alliances
- >Enhancing Ongoing Alliances Between Teachers and Student/Learning Support Staff
- >Who's Really Interested in TRANSFORMING Student and Learning Supports?

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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We're doing bits and pieces of the same work, but calling them different things. We create these arbitrary structures defining what we do — this is SEL, PBIS, MTSS, etc. We get locked into language that we, unfortunately, as an educational system, have put in place. Social and emotional learning (SEL) director at a County Office of Education

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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)

\*For an example of a transformative approach, see  
>[Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions](#)

What did you learn on the first day of school?



I guess not enough;  
they said I have to go back tomorrow!

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

**America's biggest education experiment is happening in Houston.** Could it change U.S. schools? The seismic changes seen by the 180,000-plus students throughout HISD this school year are the result of the most dramatic state takeover of a school district in American history, a grand experiment that could reshape public education across Texas and the nation. In stunningly swift fashion, HISD's state-appointed superintendent and school board have redesigned teaching and learning across the district, sought to tie teacher pay more closely to student test scores, boosted some teacher salaries by tens of thousands of dollars and slashed spending on many non-classroom expenses. Over 1,000 HISD teachers at over two dozen campuses were required to reapply for their jobs, ultimately replacing about half of them. The superintendent rearranged how educators teach students, requiring them to use an approach that mandates students must participate in class roughly every four minutes. And he rolled out new lesson plans for about a third of the district's schools that included short, daily quizzes in nearly all subjects. As of early June, four weeks before educators' deadline to resign without penalty, roughly one-quarter of HISD's 11,000-plus teachers had left their positions ahead of the upcoming school year. Historically, HISD's teacher turnover rate has hovered around 15% to 20%.

**After shootings in their schools principals meet with federal leaders for reforms.** The National Association of Secondary School Principals Principal Recovery Network, a national network of school leaders who have experienced gun violence in their schools and led in the aftermath, met with members of Congress and the Administration to ask for policies to prevent and heal from shootings. The Principal Recovery Network seeks to assist the next principal who endures a shooting by reaching out directly to their colleagues to provide much-needed support, share the combined wisdom of their experience with the larger principal community through various outlets, assist schools during recovery and advocate for national school safety enhancements and violence prevention programs.

**Annual Back to School Fair presented by Hillsborough County Public Schools.** The 15th Annual Back to School Fair presented by Hillsborough County Public Schools will gather the best Tampa Bay has to offer to make the upcoming school year the best one yet. In addition to live entertainment, hands on activities, workshops, and speaker sessions, local exhibitors will be providing all sort of back to school related information including health & wellness, safety, private and public schools, resources, childcare, after school programs, school supplies, tutors, children's retailers, finances and much more.

**Unified basketball more than a game for these students.** In unified co-ed basketball, there are five players on the court — three athletes and two Special Olympics partners. Teams play against other squads of the same ability in two eight-minute halves. Supported by Special Olympics and the Utah High School Activities Association, unified sports has both a competitive and a player development level, the latter of which provides more of a cooperative environment with partners being teammates and mentors.

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quote from "Unified basketball" story

*Inclusion is working... I love seeing students who are typical functioning individuals put their selves aside and make sure that individuals with disabilities are succeeding. It helps my students with disabilities learn life skills, social skills, it's preparing them for adult life. More so it helps my peer tutors see how to be compassionate and how to be accommodating and understanding when they grow up. And it's genuine. They truly want to be their friend. They truly care for them and want to be there for them. It's creating lasting friendships that I want them to have.* Special Education Teacher Jacqueline Sheppick

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## >Comments and sharing from the field

Response to 7/10/24 *Practitioner* *What's being done about youth who have disconnected from school?* “Thank you for picking up on my suggestion of starting a discussion on the issue of disconnected youth. I offer the following as a contribution to the ongoing discussion.

We obtained a list of 200 students who the district had listed as having dropped out or completely disappeared from the schools, and a similar control group of 200 youth with very poor attendance patterns. The team of case managers went out into the community to find these youth and, of interest, we were able to find the great majority of them. Most were unemployed and had no idea what options there were for them to continue their education or job preparation. They were offered two years of continuous case management services. At the end of the program, the evaluation found a significantly greater percentage of the service group were in an educational or job training program than the control group who did not receive services.

I believe this result speaks to the benefit of intensive case management services with a population of disconnected youth....outreach, engagement, assessment, developing and implementing a package of services over a period of time. Districts, local, state and federal funding sources may want to replicate such efforts for the potential benefits that may be achieved.”

Response to 7/24/24 *Practitioner* *Who's Really Interested in TRANSFORMING Student and Learning Supports?*

“Our state is really interested, and we are not doing it well yet, but here is what we have learned.

1) We have identified competencies that educational systems (people in those systems) need to have to achieve transformative systemic improvement and these competencies are not necessarily part of the pre-service most educators and providers get. For example, data-based decision making, teaming for collective impact, progress monitoring of interventions, aligning evidence-based interventions to the student, school, community, district need etc—I am sure I am preaching to the choir.

2) One system—multiple practices for the academic, behavioral/health, and logistic sides of the educational system.

3) Choice—systems need to build in, allow, and promote student, family, and community choices in educational system.

4) Lesson from the pandemic we should NOT forget—our system should be resilient and bring out the BEST in people.

We are always looking for people and partners who will help us learn how to create better systems so there is always room at our table for conversations like these.”

And here's a sample of the general comments we receive:

>“I wanted to reach out and say thanks for the many emails of resources over the past few years. I always read them carefully and the associated links, and they have influenced my thinking and work as Superintendent. I'm using the most recent information around truancy and chronic absenteeism as I prepare for my administrative retreat with our team. I look forward to your future information as well.”

>“ I've recently read the article you authored *Embedding Mental Health Into School Improvement Policy and Practice* when completing a literature review for my narrative as a school-based social worker. My work centers around the importance of schools adopting a comprehensive mental and behavioral health program to meet the needs of today's youth. My passion for this lies in the fact that in my 20-plus career as a school social worker, I have often found myself frustrated by the lack of programs and resources available to meet the needs of every child, not just the ones assigned to my caseload. Mental health statistics on today's children and adolescents support the notion that more needs to be done.

One of the key points that you made in your article that I completely aligned with is the fact that mental health in schools is looked at from a 'mental illness' lens and not as a spectrum. Therefore, advocacy efforts are geared towards interventions vs. policy-making. Throughout my tenure, I have educated many teachers, staff, administrators, and families that mental health needs to be looked at comprehensively as there are many complex parts. I appreciate the UCLA researcher's proposal of a three-component framework of instruction, management, and learning supports. From my experience, schools focus mainly on instruction and management and have missed the opportunity to incorporate “learning

supports” into their educational philosophy. The construct of ‘learning supports’ provides a foundation for schools to recognize and create a way to close the gaps that currently exist. Additionally, looking at the latest tiers of support, MTSS, I appreciate your lens of looking at it from a subsystem approach. As noted, this allows for interconnection and collaboration on a greater scale. Lastly, your recognition that addressing this concern will not only impact schools but our society as well is a key point that current players and systems have yet to acknowledge. Instead, as you stated, the focus has been on a piecemeal approach that only provides support for a small number of students which means our education system is failing the majority of our youth.

As a consumer of academic literature, I am pleased that I was able to come upon your research and scholarly contributions to improving mental health in schools. I am eager to continue to explore your work and try to incorporate that knowledge into my DSW program and my professional career. Thank you for your insights and your time vested in this much-needed work.”

>“I read the article [Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions](#) and was very intrigued. I was wondering if you knew of any school or district that has begun this transformational work and if they might be open to some observation/collaboration? Thanks so much for all the wonderful work you continue to do on behalf of children, staff, and families.”

### 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)

### 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)**