Featured

What can schools do to minimize student dropouts and maximize graduation rates?

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What can schools do to minimize student dropouts and maximize graduation rates?

"... many school districts ... saw higher graduation rates for the class of 2022 than before the pandemic. But the dropout rate also increased to its highest level in four years — a sign that schools are still struggling to engage students and still dealing with the fallout from pandemic-era schooling.... The majority of students who struggled to graduate were missing credits after failing classes.... District officials need to look closely at their data because patterns are changing, such as how the graduation rate and dropout rate are going up at the same time..."   From **Chalkbeat,** Jan 10, 2023

The challenges of the past couple of years will impact the number of students meeting graduation requirements. For some, the challenges have led to leaving school altogether. What can schools do to minimize student dropouts and maximize graduation rates? Time is running out for catching up; decisions are being made about who passes and who fails.

> *"Most late high school dropouts (83%) listed a school-related (versus a family or employment related) reason for leaving. These reasons included missing too many school days, thinking it would be easier to get a GED, getting poor grades, and not liking school."*
> **National Center for Education Statistics, Late High Schools Dropouts**

As the true dropout figures emerge across the nation, the crisis nature of the problem is apparent. Recent reports indicate that more than half a million young people dropout of high school each year. As with so many problems in our society, increasing high school and postsecondary graduate rates could be aided tremendously by reducing generational poverty. However, as a societal institution, schools only play an indirect role in this. Their direct role is to ensure they do the best they can to promote positive development and address barriers to learning and teaching – especially school-related experiences that push students out.

Second Semester Focus on Enhancing Student and Learning Supports

At this critical juncture, teachers need to team with student and learning support staff to help students who must "catch-up." The emphasis is on reaching out to kids who are falling further and further behind and being flexible and encouraging in order to turn things around. The work entails dialoguing with them, making them feel connected, and providing them with a plan to get back on their feet. They generally need personalized instruction, homework help, tutoring, peer-to-peer support, make-up assignments, and make-up tests.

Initial dialogues usually require in depth conferences with the student and family to establish a process of shared problem solving.

>The *content* focus of the conferences is on clarifying specifics related to the problem and formulating flexible steps to solve it.

>The *process* focus is on establishing and continuously enhancing a positive working relationship and monitoring the intervention steps closely to make immediate changes as necessary. Special attention needs to be paid to addressing any underlying factors interfering with school learning and performance.

Reducing Dropouts/Increasing Graduation Rates: What else should schools do?

School factors can account for approximately two-thirds of the differences in mean school dropout rates. Available research suggests that being held back is the single strongest predictor of dropping out for both early and late dropouts. Data indicate that being held back one grade increases the risk of dropping out later by 40 to 50 percent, two grades by 90 percent. There is general agreement that schools must become more proactive in preventing problems. In particular, school staff need to rethink classroom and schoolwide approaches in ways that (a) enhance engaged, personalized learning and (b) provide students the supports they need to succeed.

For prevention to be effective, schools must enhance teachers' capability to engage students in learning and reengage those who have been disconnected from classroom instruction. This involves increasing teacher practices that are based on intrinsic motivation (e.g., practices that enhance feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness with significant others) and that use classroom assessments that inform personalized intervention (e.g., response to intervention). As students at-risk are identified, providing special assistance in the classroom is essential (e.g., one-on-one support for a while). Specialized supports usually are necessary for those who have disengaged from classroom learning.

> *The reality is that teachers can't do it all alone. Schools need to rework support staff job descriptions so that they spend part of each day teaming with teachers in the classroom to help with student engagement, personalized intervention, and special assistance.*

Other facets of school efforts to counter dropouts include:

>*Providing out-of-school opportunities*. Efforts using out-of-school opportunities to retain middle and high school students include peer tutoring, mentoring, service learning, career advising, and more. For example, when older students (including potential dropouts) work with younger ones, both can improve their literacy skills. When schoolwork is linked to real needs and situations, students' motivation to learn increases. When teachers partner with young people to design and carry out service-learning projects that are tied to curricular objectives and standards, there are academic, intellectual, civic, ethical, social, and personal benefits.

>*Offering multiple pathways*. Students need alternative career and vocational pathways. The concept of multiple pathways focuses on ensuring choice among a variety of high school programs that prepare all students for both college and careers. The emphasis is on providing both academic and career foundations for advanced learning, training, and effective and responsible participation in society. Available choices reflect student interests and community strengths and opportunities. They include programs that provide real world training in areas where graduates can apply for living-wage jobs.

>*Introducing non-traditional approaches*. Non-traditional approaches focus on the regular curriculum but employ personalized instruction, special assistance, and, if necessary, specialized interventions. All this is keyed to a student's needs and interests and emphasizes enhancing intrinsic engagement in learning and positive feelings about self and others as essential to reducing disruptive behavior, truancy, and dropouts.

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Some Related Resources on Dropout Prevention

>U.S. Department of Education **practice guide on Dropout Prevention** provides recommendations that focus on reducing high school dropout rates. Strategies presented include identifying and advocating for at-risk students, implementing programs to improve behavior and social skills, and keeping students engaged in the school environment.

For more related to this topic, see the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

>*Dropout Prevention*
>*Barriers to Learning*
>*Accommodations*

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There is a high school dropout crisis far beyond the imagination of most Americans, concentrated in urban schools and relegating many thousands of minority children to a life of failure. ... Only half of our nation' s minority students graduate from high school along with their peers. For many groups – Latino, black, or Native American males-graduation rates are even lower. ...this [is an] educational and civil rights crisis.
Gary Orfield, director of the Civil Rights Project at UCLA

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>Quick Links to Online Resources

Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2019

Are Relationships the Key to Solving America's School Absenteeism Crisis?

Florida district to launch teacher-driven classroom tutoring support

Mental Health Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Teachers and Parents of K-12 Students

Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate by race/ethnicity and selected demographic characteristics 2019–20

Is teachers' mental health and wellbeing associated with students' mental health and wellbeing?

Types of social media use and stress in early adolescence

Mediating role of moral disengagement in the perpetration of cyberbullying by victims and bystanders

Characteristics of 2020–21 Public and Private K–12 Schools in the United States

How to Leverage Ed Tech for Inquiry-Based Learning in K–12 Schools

Myths Schools Live By and are Suffering from Related to Addressing Learning, Behavior, and Emotional Problems

A New Year's Resolution for All Who Want to Improve How Schools Address Learning, Behavior, and Emotional Problems

Walking on Eggshells—Teachers' Responses to Classroom Limitations on Race- or Gender-Related Topics

The Rise and Fall of the Teaching Profession: Prestige, Interest, Preparation, and Satisfaction over the Last Half Century

The state of mental health in America

2022-2023 State of Engagement Report

Links to Many More Resources

If you need resources on a specific topic, you will find the Center's Quick Finds helpful. See the Quick Find menu of over 130 topics relevant to the Center's mission at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm (e.g., anxiety and stress, attendance, barriers to learning, bullying). Each Quick Find has links to online resources developed by the Center and from a variety of other sources.

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"Our vision of true youth justice includes investing in systems of opportunity for young people, including ensuring they have access to positive school environments that put them on a pathway to success, not incarceration. Students deserve to attend schools that honor who they are, push them to do their best, help them when they encounter challenges, and extend grace when they miss the mark. When young people have access to positive school environments, they are better equipped to come to school with enthusiasm for learning, discover their dreams and passions, and learn from mistakes when they arise." National Juvenile Justice Network

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Here's what was discussed in the Community of Practice during January
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm

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

Teaching about MLK: History + SEL
About Developing Kindness and Compassion & Promoting MH
What do schools need from student support staff?
Retaining teachers requires more opportunities for collegial collaboration
Do you know what students are thinking and feeling?
Social capital and adolescent mental health
Is personalized learning a function of technology?
A high school student's concerns about technology in the classroom

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>For more resources in general, see our website
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

>For info on the status of upcoming conferences
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/upconf.htm

>For info on webinars
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm

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

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

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Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way when you criticize them, you are a mile away from them and you have their shoes. Jack Handey

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Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona's call to
"Raise the Bar: Lead the World"

Raise the Bar: Lead the World is how U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona has labeled his vision for his agency's direction in 2023. In laying out the work, he stated the aim is to promote academic excellence, improve learning conditions, and prepare students for a world where global engagement is critical to our nation's standing. He noted that one facet of this is "investing in every student's mental health and well-being." He stressed that the vision is not a list of new priorities, but a call to strengthen our will to transform education for the better, building on approaches that we know work in education.

We certainly resonate to the need to transform education and to the call for strengthening stakeholders' will to do so. And we hope there is a growing awareness that an essential component in transforming education is to ensure every school develops a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of sudent/learning supports.

To these ends, our Center continues to emphasize opportunities to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students. See:

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

Based on input from across the country, it is clear that this is the time for action.

As an aid for moving forward, we have developed a brief guide. See

>*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*

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Please let us know about what ideas are being proposed in your locale for transforming how schools provide student/learning supports.

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. Here's how the Center provides technical assistance and coaching

1. *Upon request to ltaylor@ucla.edu, we offer immediate technical assistance related to mental health in schools and student/learning supports*

2. *For those leaders focusing on transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching, the Center's co-directors offer free distance coaching and technical assistance – see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/coach.pdf*

3. *Two Center field associates are available on a fee for services basis to provide workshops and coaching – see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fieldassoc.pdf*

"Mental health and wellness supports for students are key components to prevention, intervention and response. Addressing student mental health and wellness as well as school safety should include systems of interventions and supports that involve all school employees, public safety and other cross-sector partners such as county behavioral health, students, parents and guardians. Each child is unique and their barriers to learning and life experiences are unique, so there is no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting the mental health and wellness needs of every student. Diversifying our supports allows us to be more flexible and responsive to the specific needs of each child."

Superintendent Lisette Estrella-Henderson

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

California youths help storm clean-up as schools reopen. As some schools re-open across California, the scale of the damage caused by a once-in-a-generation deadly "parade of storms" is becoming clear - as well as the major clean-up effort that will be required for residents of all ages. At the Midland School in Santa Barbara County, pupils pitched in to help save school buildings from being submerged by a creek that almost never normally flows. As the creek through Midland broke its banks and flooded into a road, students and other volunteers began laying down sandbags to help divert the flow of the water.

Philly middle-school students tell their own stories. Conwell Middle School students are bright and passionate, eager to come to school and eager to learn. But the challenges posed by the school's Kensington location are myriad. Lockdowns are common because of neighborhood violence. "Each day, they persevere. Each day, they walk through a million reasons to give up, yet each day, they persist," said Zach Posnan, a science and math teacher. Posnan and fellow teacher Gerald Dungan started a journalism club. They produce videos, write stories, and work on newscasts to broadcast to their classmates.

Seattle public schools sue social media companies for allegedly harming students' mental health. Seattle's public school system filed a lawsuit against several Big Tech companies alleging their platforms have a negative impact on students' mental health and claiming that has impeded the ability of its schools "to fulfill its educational mission." The lawsuit was filed against the parent companies of some of the most popular social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube.

2022 elections and education. Neither education activists on the left nor the right swept the 2022 elections. While conservatives found success in Republican-dominated territory, Democrats held firm in battlegrounds and moderate voters were split on far-right candidates in red states. Candidates who supported having race and sex-related curricula or Covid-19 safety requirements in schools won about 40 percent of the roughly 1,800 local board elections. Candidates with opposing views won about 30 percent of their elections. Nearly one-third of incumbents also lost to their challengers on Nov. 8.

This is one United States of America, and we have an obligation to help kids — regardless of whether they're in South Carolina, Tennessee, New York or California — to learn how to critically think. And we have an obligation to create a safe and welcoming environment. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers

Comments and sharing from the field

Sharing our resources: We receive lots of indications that our resources are being shared at schools. For example, with respect to our ***1/11 practitioner,*** a high school Principal sent it to his teachers noting:
As you know MLK day is Sunday. Here is a link to some ideas to enhance your classroom using MLK as a springboard for mental health and giving back.

Response to December 1 posting: ***About the Daily Supports Teachers Need***

"I agree with much of what you included in these messages and would like to add my two cents.
    Teachers face impossible expectations and deficit mindsets. "Support" often has a negative connotation because teachers "should" be able to implement research-based instruction, differentiate for all students, use data to inform instruction, meet the social, mental, and emotional needs of students, be up-to-date on the latest research (all of it) with regards to PBIS, trauma-informed, restorative, culturally responsive (just to name a few) approaches, somehow be able to mesh the humanist and behaviorist philosophies underpinning these approaches in the classroom (even if you don't know how these philosophies differ), oh... and be able to do all of this within your contract time and with all students.
    Our current structures do not support the many suggestions teachers are given to promote well-being and prevent burnout. In order to successfully actualize the many skills mentioned above, schools need a structure that promotes and supports individual and collaborative work for teachers. Instead, our system supports those who profit by it and doesn't support the structures needed for schools (especially Title I schools) to be successful. Other countries have a better balance of student facetime vs. teacher planning time. Universities in the U.S. have a better balance of student facetime vs. instructor/professor planning time. And yet, somehow we in the U.S. think K-12 teachers should be able to work collaboratively to improve their craft without these same structures in place. Until we change the structures to support quality instruction and change from deficit to asset-based mindsets as it concerns teacher work, we will continue to see teacher burnout and "failing" schools.
    Our educational system separates "winners" from "losers," largely along socio-economic lines. This system is working exactly as it was designed. If we want to change the outcomes--from teacher burnout to student academic and socio-emotional success--we need to support our talk with structural walk.."

THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF ENEWS

Who Are We? Renamed the Center for MH in Schools and Student/Learning Supports in 2017, 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 http://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