

Featured

(1) What K-12 Trends to watch for in 2026

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And, as always, you will find

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**This community of practice Practitioner is designed
for a screen bigger than an Iphone.**

For discussion and interchange:

>What K-12 Trends to watch for in 2026

Dedicated education professionals face challenges each day in the classrooms, in supporting struggling students, in providing school and district leadership, and in strengthening policies and regulations. While the following trends (outlined by *k12dive*) aren't new, they might provide a focus for stakeholder discussions about preparing for some of the challenges ahead.

From: [**Trends to watch for K-12 in 2026**](#)

"Declining birthrates and growing competition from school choice threaten public school enrollment counts — and therefore school district budgets. Student data privacy concerns are on the rise and only complicated by the explosive rise in artificial intelligence tools and usage. And administrators are continuing to adjust to new policy priorities for curriculum, staffing and more These are but a few of the challenges facing public schools in 2026.

As we head into a new calendar year — and the second half of the 2025-26 school year — here are six trends for K-12 leaders to watch.

1. Education funding faces pressure from multiple directions

Education funding will face pressures on several fronts in 2026, including strained state coffers, unpredictability in federal funding and competition for local dollars.... State and local education systems are bracing for more uncertainty when it comes to federal funding cycles, according to education researchers and professionals....

And since Congress did not finalize a fiscal year 2026 budget for the U.S. Education Department in 2025, all eyes will be on actions to be taken before the next appropriations deadline on Jan. 30.

At the state level, a fall 2025 fiscal survey from the National Association of State Budget Officers found that 23 states projected general fund spending to decline or remain flat in FY 2026 budgets compared to FY 2025 levels. This has school systems jockeying for state dollars against other state-supported programs like healthcare and public safety.....

At the local level, shifting public school enrollment will influence allocations for per-pupil spending, leading to less funding for districts with declining enrollments. That drop in revenue means school systems will need to make tough decisions on closing or consolidating schools and shrinking their workforce,...

2.Competition for students heats up

Several factors influencing shifts in public school enrollment will continue into the new year, including a shrinking population of young children and a growth in private school choice programs.

The public school versus private school choice debate will intensify as more states launch voucher programs in the 2026-27 school year that use taxpayer dollars to fund private school tuition — and while a nationwide school choice program prepares for a 2027 launch....

The number of students participating in state-led universal private school choice programs has grown from about 64,000 in 2022-23 to 1.3 million in 2024-25, according to EdChoice. Still, most students — about 49.6 million — attend public schools, based on fall 2022 numbers, the most recently available federal data.

The large population of public school students is why federal and state investments are needed for public schools, according to private school choice opponents. Vouchers leave public schools with fewer resources to meet the needs of their students, which contributes to equity gaps, they say....

3. District leaders will navigate more teacher layoffs, retention challenges

Student enrollment in public schools is expected to continue declining, and thereby strain K-12 budgets in 2026... More staff layoffs are likely as dropping enrollment leads to deeper district budget cuts. This will force district leaders to reckon with any “reduction in force” policies...

Some K-12 researchers have said declining enrollment and related budget cuts, alongside mass pandemic-era hiring of teachers supported by federal emergency aid funds, have led to a reversal in widespread teacher shortages....

4. Uncertainty to persist as federal changes continue

Districts in 2025 already felt the pressure to change their diversity, equity, inclusion and LGBTQ+ policies ... Federal policies are also impacting immigration enforcement on or around school grounds, pushing districts to consider virtual learning options and to offer know-your-rights training or legal counsel for families. The aggressive enforcement has affected students' attendance, performance and sense of safety, district leaders have said....

5. States will take reins on achievement and absenteeism

The new year will see schools doubling down on supports to raise achievement and lower chronic absenteeism, according to education researchers, professionals and nonprofit organizations.

The stubbornness of low achievement rates — as indicated by last year's release of 4th and 8th grade math and reading results from the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress — means there will be continued momentum to drive scores up, according to education experts....

To help raise achievement and drive up student engagement, schools and districts will home in on strategies to combat chronic absenteeism by expanding real-world educational experiences and opportunities like career and technical education courses, internships and STEAM offerings, according to education experts.

District and school leaders also will monitor whether 2025's shift in prohibiting student cell phone use during the school day will move the needle on achievement.

Additionally, education experts are watching out for how federal influence will impact academics under the Trump administration. That includes, for example, how the U.S. Department of Education will react to states' requests for waivers for accountability measures under the Every Student Succeeds Act, according to education professionals and stakeholders....

6. Work remains for AI literacy, guidance and online protections

In 2025, Congress increasingly debated and explored federal policy solutions for protecting children and teens online, especially as newer artificial intelligence tools rapidly became available.... There will be a greater focus on prioritizing teachers input when implementing

AI tools in classrooms. That means more lessons on AI literacy for educators will roll out to help instructors critically and appropriately use AI tools....

With at least 32 states having already released their own AI guidance for schools, even more states will continue to put out K-12 recommendations on these tools. Some states will update and revise their initial AI education guidance to be more comprehensive and useful for districts and schools, especially involving their responsible technology use policies...."

Please share:

- ***What are additional challenges folks should be planning to address?***
- ***How are state/district/school addressing these challenges?***
- ***Given the inevitable need for more funding, what other ways can schools implement to cope and improve?***

Send responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

For discussion and interchange:

>A Bit About Resilience and Student/Learning Supports

There is no magical resilience gene. When we think that kids just need willpower to overcome adversity, we miss opportunities to provide the relationships and build the skills that can actually strengthen resilience. Jack Shonkoff

Resilience refers to an individual's ability to cope with challenges and recover from adversity. There is growing realization that schools need to embed a focus on fostering resilience into efforts to facilitate social and emotional development and to begin this at the onset of schooling. Learning to cope effectively with challenges and being able to recover from adversity are as important as learning arithmetic. Failure to cope effectively contributes to a variety of mental health concerns and overwhelms the ability of efforts to support students (and staff).

Protective factors are conditions that buffer against the impact of barriers (risk factors). Such conditions may prevent or counter risk producing conditions by promoting development of neighborhood, family, school, peer, and individual strengths, assets, corrective interventions, coping mechanisms, and special assistance and accommodations.

The term resilience often is used to refer to an individual's ability to cope in ways that buffer. While efforts to reduce risks and enhance protection can help minimize problems and promote resilience, a focus on promoting healthy development goes a step further by focusing on establishing systems that foster full development, well-being, and a value-based life. Safe, stable schools and neighborhoods that provide enriched opportunities to promote student development, learning, and a sense of community go well beyond just strengthening resilience.

Many protective buffers are outcomes of efforts to engender full development. Promoting healthy development is the other side of the coin to addressing barriers to learning and development. Done well, such interventions engender resilient behavior, individual assets, and healthy behavior in children and adolescents.

For a brief resource about enhancing resilience at school, see

>[About Resilience and Schools](#)

For more resources on this topic, see our Center's Quick Find

>[Resilience/Protective Factors](#)

Protective Factors and Children's Subjective Well-being

From: ***The Association Between Protective Factors and Children's Subjective Well-being***

“...The quality of students' relationships with classmates and peers is an important contributor to their subjective well-being... using cognitive and affective measures... showing it to be the second most important predictor after school satisfaction. Friendships provide opportunities to learn through play and social interaction, reduce stress, and provide fun, social support, acceptance, and someone to turn to outside of the family when needed ...

Supportive adults (other than parents) can have a critical role in children's lives. Adults, such as a coach, teacher, or relative, can compensate for negative outcomes and provide an additional source of information about the world and an alternate role model...

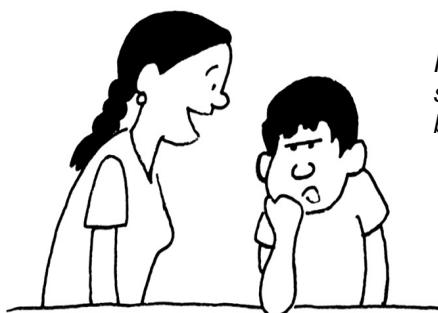
Positive academic experiences—including active learning, engaged teachers, and a quality curriculum—help children learn, improve the future, and surround themselves with a positive environment. School satisfaction, measured in terms of satisfaction with aspects of the school environment (e.g., classmates, grades, and school experiences), was found to be an important predictor of children's subjective well-being....

Extracurricular activities were also found to be protective factors in children's and adolescents' lives.... Adolescents' sports participation has a positive indirect effect on reduced depressive symptoms through self-esteem.... Volunteering activity was associated with a lower likelihood of depression through school engagement and self-esteem....

Relationships with peers and teachers emerged as key contributors, highlighting the broader social networks that support children's quality of life. Additionally, engagement in community and public activities—such as physical activity in outdoor spaces—was also found to be positively associated with subjective well-being....

Policies that enhance school climate, strengthen teacher-student relationships, and promote peer support can indirectly foster well-being. ... Practice-oriented implications include integrating resilience-building strategies into educational and community-based programs, emphasizing holistic, child-centered approaches. Practitioners should consider children's voices in program design, recognizing the value of agency and participation in fostering well-being. From a policy perspective, these findings advocate for multi-sectoral collaboration—across education, health, housing, and social welfare—to develop comprehensive frameworks that support children's everyday quality of life. Emphasizing accessible, equitable, and inclusive environments—at home, in school, and in the community—can contribute significantly to enhancing children's well-being.”

*You shouldn't worry so much –
you're a really resilient kid.*



I appreciate that you think I'm resilient, but I still need someone to protect me from that bully at school!

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

- >>[Concerns about MTSS Initiatives](#)
- >>[Teens and social media](#)
- >>[Families' Engagement and Perception of Social-Emotional/Behavioral Services in Schools](#)
- >>[Valued, Trusted, and Supported: Leadership Influences on Sense of Belonging in New Teachers](#)
- >>[Doubts about your therapist](#)
- >>[Relatives Raising Children: Federal Support Helps, but Challenges Persist](#)
- >>[Child Maltreatment in the United States Declined From 2020-2023](#)

A Few Upcoming Webinars

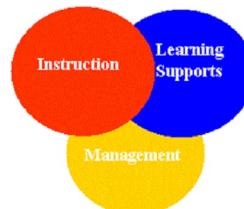
For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's [Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts](#)
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

- 1/21 High-impact mental health practices that can be implemented with minimal resources
- 1/21 Rethinking Intervention in the Elementary Grades for Long-Term Student Success
- 1/21/26 How schools are finding and keeping talent
- 1/22 Partner with families throughout the special education process.
- 1/27 Strengthen the Conditions that Improve Student Behavior Across the District
- 1/28 Consent and confidentiality in adolescent care
- 2/2 School Communications: Building Clarity, Trust, and Community
- 2/3 Building Sustainable Educator Preparation in a Volatile Era
- 2/3 Understanding Loneliness and Building Social Connections
- 2/4 Strategies for Strengthening Title I Supports for Homeless Students
- 2/10 Strengthening school community partnerships
- 2/10 Prevention core competencies
- 2/11 Building Resilient Teams, Coalitions and Communities
- 2/16 ADHD in Youth: Practical Strengths-Based Supports
- 2/24 Whole school approach
- 2/26 Teaching children to care
- 3/3 Strong leaders make strong schools
- 3/5 Building belonging in school
- 3/24 Student voice and advocacy
- 4/15 Supporting Grief-Sensitive Classrooms

[How Learning Happens](#) (Edutopia's series of videos explores guiding all students, regardless of their developmental starting points, to become engaged learners).

[Understanding Racism's Impact on Child Development](#)

Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to promoting whole child development, advancing social justice, and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.



National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

Our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

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**

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 140,000 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! Contact: Ltaylor@ucla.edu

THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER*

**THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND
INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!**

**Send resources ideas, requests, comments,
and experiences for sharing
Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

*Who Are We? 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.