

(10/15/25) This continuing education resource is from the national  
**Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

### Featured

**(1) Why are Schools Talking About Kindness?**

**(2) About Embedding Mental Health in Schools**

**(3)** Comments from a colleague responding to  
news *About the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant*

And, as always, you will find

**(4) Links to more resources**

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

**For discussion and interchange:**

**>Why are Schools Talking About Kindness?**

As schools navigate rising stress among students and staff, some educators are  
turning to a simple yet powerful solution: kindness. *Greater Good Magazine*

**T**here is a growing body of research indicating that kindness is worth greater attention in every  
school (do a Google Scholar search). Extrapolating from the literature, kindness is seen as  
fitting school goals to

- 1) enhance the daily smooth functioning of schools and the emergence of a safe, caring,  
and supportive school climate and feelings of belonging
- 2) facilitate students' holistic development
- 3) enable student motivation and capability for academic learning
- 4) optimize life beyond schooling.

Out of curiosity, we asked AI for some brief statements about **Kindness and  
transforming schools**. Here's what we got back:

#### *Inspirational*

"Kindness isn't just a virtue — it's a catalyst for change in school culture."

"When kindness becomes the norm, transformation follows."

#### *Research-Informed*

"Studies show that kindness boosts academic performance, reduces bullying, and  
fosters emotional resilience."

"Kindness creates the conditions for learning, belonging, and growth."

#### *Practical*

"A kind word, a listening ear, a helping hand — small acts that reshape school  
communities."

"Kindness is the foundation of safe, supportive learning environments."

#### *Provocative*

"What if the most powerful school reform tool isn't policy — but kindness?"

"Imagine a school where kindness is as important as curriculum."

Here are excerpts from two recent articles on the topic:

>From: *Teachers' Role in Explaining Middle School Students' Sense of Belonging and Kindness on Campus*

"Early adolescence is a time of transition; examining what contributes to positive developmental outcomes is crucial for educators, school districts, and academics alike.... Underneath the umbrella of prosocial behaviors, kindness can be incorporated within the school context as a common language for behaviors performed to benefit others that are underscored by positive intent.

Kindness on campus may manifest in students' helpful behaviors, friendliness toward others, and providing encouragement. Empirical studies suggest that performing kind gestures benefits not only the recipient, but the enactor as well, including increasing one's sense of subjective happiness.

Researchers have demonstrated a positive relationship between students' sense of kindness on campus and their feelings of belonging. School belonging is conceptualized as feelings of connection, autonomy, and respect shared between students, classmates, and teachers. Students' sense of belonging at school also promotes an array of positive developmental outcomes including academic effort, school enjoyment, and achievement...

High quality student programming is essential to support students' positive developmental outcomes. In a sample of 389 early adolescents, the current study examined the association between middle school students' exposure to one kindness-focused school-wide program and their self-reported intent to perform kind behaviors and their sense of belonging on campus.

We also examined the often-overlooked role teachers play by querying the association between teachers' support and positive student outcomes.

The results provide support for both research aims; kindness focused, school-based programming does have a small and reliable positive relation to students' sense of belonging at school and their intent to perform kind behaviors, and students' perceptions of teachers' support mediated both associations....

The current study is novel by investigating the links between bottom-up, school-wide kindness programming and students' sense of belonging and intent to perform kind behaviors. The findings provide support for the implementation of low-stakes, grassroots intervention programming as a useful tool to promote students' positive developmental outcomes. The findings also suggest that not only are teachers' important figures in students' lives, but teachers also explain at least in part, the positive impact the program has on student outcomes. This centers schools, teachers, and students at the forefront of programming as equal stakeholders.

The takeaway message from the current study is that kindness programming works to promote a positive school climate. Although the current study investigated how students' exposure to kindness programming impacted their sense of belonging and intent to perform kind behaviors, the results suggested that teachers are quintessential to explaining this positive pathway...."

From: *The Who, What, and Where of School Kindness: Exploring Students' Perspectives*

"...This study sought to identify children's and adolescents' conceptualizations of kindness; that is, their definition of kindness, examples of kindness enacted at school, and the identification of adult agents of kindness and kindness locations within schools...

Three primary themes emerged from the kindness definitions and examples: helping, being respectful, and being encouraging/advocating. The emergence of the same top three themes for definitions and examples of kindness demonstrates consistency in how children conceptualize kindness and how they bring kindness to life within their school setting. That is, that the ways in which they describe being kind are consistent with their definition of kindness....

In addition to providing insights into how students think about and enact kindness at school, findings of this study revealed insights into who students see as the main adult agents of kindness within the school context. Given the amount of time that children spend with teachers compared with other adults during the school week, it was perhaps, not surprising that over half the participants listed teachers as the main adult agents of kindness...

Investigating topics such as kindness in school is important. It not only captures and identifies

the perspective and voice of students, it also continues building on the understanding of students within a positivistic framework whereby students are seen for their strengths (what they are doing to contribute positively to their school experience) versus their deficits (what they are lacking or is in need of fixing).

Understanding how students define and perceive acts of kindness holds the potential to inform students themselves, parents, educators and administrators, and researchers about the nuances of how kindness is understood and perceived within the school context. This is especially important for the potential it holds in informing programs or interventions aimed at increasing the frequency of kindness, or enhancing the nature of kind acts, performed within the school context....”

***For us, kindness at schools isn’t a matter of yet another initiative, another curriculum agenda item. It is a value staff teach and convey through natural opportunities that provide teachable moments.***

For more resources related to all this, see the Center’s Quick Find on

***>Classroom and School Climate/Culture and Environments that Support Learning***

***For discussion and interchange:***

***>About Embedding Mental Health in Schools***

Schools can make a major contribution to mental health. However, for this to happen, the work must be framed as doing much more than enhancing access to mental health services, enhancing coordination and integration of services, increasing the focus on social emotional learning, adopting MTSS, and other such initiatives.

It is essential to remember that schools are in the education business – not in the mental health business. Given that, our Center’s policy and practice analyses stress that all endeavors concerned with advancing mental health in schools need to be embedded into a broad concept related to school improvement – such as addressing barriers to learning and teaching. This broad emphasis can be used to counter the continuing marginalization in school improvement policy not only of efforts to address mental health concerns, but of all learning and behavior problems.

For more on understanding how to advance mental health in schools, see

***>Schools and Mental Health: A Position Statement***

***>Time for Straight Talk about Mental Health Services and MH in Schools***

***>Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change***

And here’s a recent related cautionary discussion by Christopher A. Kearney published in *Research on Child and Adolescent Psychopathology*.

From: ***The Perniciousness and Promise of School-Based Mental Health Service Delivery for Youth***

“...Core definitional components of school mental health programs include service delivery conducted within school buildings, supports to prevent and address multiple student mental health needs, and partnerships between schools and various community agencies to facilitate a continuum of children’s mental health services. ...

Publications of school-based interventions regarding children’s mental health typically report at least some improvement in one or more aspects of student well-being. Still, school-based services delivered by school professionals demonstrate minimal to medium effects for ameliorating mental health problems....

A serious concern surrounds the potential iatrogenic effects of school-based interventions for mental health challenges. One concern in this area involves the provision of universal interventions where all students in a given district, school, or classroom are exposed to the same

procedures, which can include intervention strategies that are incomplete, unhelpful, irrelevant, or harmful. Universal interventions for anxiety and depression, for example, have been linked to symptom worsening in about 12% of students, particularly if students become more aware of existing symptoms but receive inadequate skills or support to address the symptoms...

A key premise of outsourcing mental health service provision to schools is that students receiving the services want to be in school and are actually at school. For many students, however, this is not the case. School climate refers to the character and quality of a learning environment across relationship, facilities, safety/discipline, and academic domains.... Aspects of a negative school climate intersect more directly with student reticence to access school-based mental health services....

Schools are a double-edged sword with respect to mental health service provision for youth, holding great potential for perniciousness and promise at the same time.... Several natural tensions will need to be fully resolved for school-based mental health systems to achieve maximum effectiveness and equity.

- > One natural tension surrounds the core mission of schools, education, vis-à-vis additional and burdensome and unclear legislative and other mandates such as mental health service provision that can lead to role confusion, disarray, abandonment, and even iatrogenesis. This tension is significantly exacerbated in areas where the core mission is under-resourced, let alone the additional mandates. The ones that suffer most in this tension are students with disabilities and severe behavioral/mental health challenges and their families, and particularly minoritized groups, who frequently end up receiving less quality service from both sets of endeavors.
- > Another natural tension surrounds expectations for schools to improve positive educational and mental health outcomes for students, again typically with limited resources, vis-à-vis what communities must do to address structural disparities that continuously and actively threaten these outcomes. This tension can be significantly exacerbated by declining public school enrollment (for multiple reasons), mechanisms that block community-based care from most families, trauma prevalence, and historically unequal distributions of power, resources, and opportunity, among other factors.

*Primum non nocere*; first, do no harm; applies in this instance not only to those engaging in specific school-based mental health delivery systems, with a focus on students and their families, but also to professionals from applied disciplines and other stakeholders who must address the intense need for these systems in the first place that is often generated by macrosystem processes."

Just adding a few more services is not the answer.

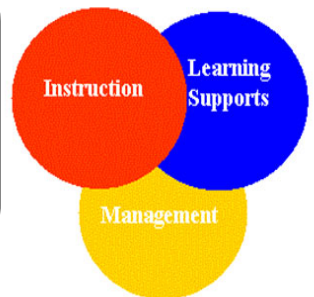
Adopting MTSS is not sufficient.

Asking teachers to do more is just not realistic.

*Teachers and students need a potent support system.*

***It's time to end the marginalization of student/learning supports!***

***It is time to start building a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.***



*I asked for a bit of kindness.*

*The principal said the budget cuts make it unlikely.*



## >Links to a few other relevant shared resources

- >>Youth Conflict Resolution Community Activity Toolkit
- >>Creating a school culture that nurtures young people
- >>Schools as Caring, Learning Communities
- >>Empathy, Compassion, and Addressing Student Misbehavior
- >>Challenges in school-based mental health service utilization
- >>Engagement, Attitudes, and Perceptions of Social Media Use: Associations with Adolescents' Mental Well-Being
- >>A scoping review of state-sponsored mental health training programs for children and youth to support use of evidence-based treatments
- >>Let's stop tinkering and really change how schools address mental health

### A Few Upcoming Webinars

*For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

10/15 Empowering Leaders, Empowering Classrooms  
10/16 Supporting English learners  
10/16 Meeting facilitation skills  
10/16 Strategies for staff wellness  
10/20 Prevention: what we have learned  
10/20 Elevating youth engagement  
10/21 Teaching Students to Use AI Ethically  
10/21 Understanding loneliness and building social connections  
10/22 Addressing challenging behaviors  
10/23 Addressing bullying in the Individual Education Plan  
10/23 How school leaders and teachers learn from each other  
10/28 National Training, Education and Workforce Survey  
10/28 Promoting self-confidence and self-esteem  
10/29 Mental health and mental illness: what's the difference?  
10/30 Cultivating the conditions for learning and well being  
10/30 Understanding social anxiety  
11/5 Evaluation of mental health in IEP  
11/5 AI, inequity and imagination: student centered learning  
11/12 Addressing suspensions and early dismissal for students with disabilities  
11/13 School leaders supporting instruction  
11/13 Support for homeless youth  
11/13 Principals supporting teachers in classroom instruction  
11/13 The power of protective factors in social development  
12/2 Reducing risk for youth substance misuse  
12/10 Strategic planning for education leaders

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

***Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth*** (Webinar recording)

From a colleague responding to news *About the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant*

"Having worked for 15 years as director of psychological services in charge of 150 school psychologists, I saw first hand the mental health services being delivered by my staff and social workers, as well as when working for 9 years as a school psychologist and many years as a consultant to schools.

There are a lot of professionals with various mental health credentials (and variable effectiveness)... kids are pulled out of classes they need to be in rather than working to structure schools to be more effective in teaching and creating whole school positive environments that are welcoming rather than continuing to identify students as the problem.

When I created, with 2 of my staff and 1 speech pathologist, a program for preK, K and 1st, to remediate skills not taught at home that were needed for academic success using 5th, 6th and 7th graders as interventionist delivering the services and teaching teachers how to teach kids to be students, we reduced classroom disruption and referrals to special education.

Of course, after 10 successful years with principals begging for the program, it was trashed. Instead of worrying about who is going to provide all these counseling hours, let's make a real difference. Kids who can do the work don't disrupt classes (on the whole). And the older student interventionists benefitted too and learned how to chart progress and some to help younger siblings at home.

Sometimes the answers are easy. I would go to the last period, lowest math class, to help the kids stay on task and to take them in the hall for testing if they were ADHD or just squiggly and their grades went up. They needed to lay on the floor to be comfortable to take the test. At the end of class each day they had to put their chairs on the desks. It was chaotic and noisy. I suggested one day they all put their chairs back down. I then told them that the student who was the most quiet could lead the class out at the bell. It was silent. I suggested the teacher do this everyday and pick a kid at random so all had a chance to be the leader. It worked the rest of the year.

I remember during my first year in a school in another state many years earlier when I would go to the class with the boy on medication for schizophrenia. He could not put a story together to make it have the correct sequence. I took him to my office and with pictures representing the story to tell, we put them in order, then worked on how to get words on paper to tell the story. I called a meeting a few months later to review the student's progress. The parents had never had an IEP meeting to talk about positives. They were shocked and delighted.

The things I'm outlining are more effective and less disturbing for the students with better results. When you put "special" mental health services in the schools, each specialist has to add kids to the roster to show how they are needed. Teaching staff more effective classroom management skills and teaching students early on how to be students does work. ...

And, importantly, teachers need recognition and consultation throughout the year and not just one teacher of the year per school. I gave a presentation at the principal's request one year on motivating students and started by complementing the teachers on how when I walk the hallways I hear their levels of enthusiasm and motivation in introducing the next lesson and complementing a student who is struggling to give an answer to a question. Afterwards, so many stopped by my office to say how happy they were that they were noticed for that one thing never on the checklist for their review...being upbeat all the time to encourage students to be happy about what they are doing....

I'm glad that several of my staff went on to administration in areas other than school psychology where they can influence what happens at a higher level than in the school building....one now heads the early learning program, several others oversee implementation of the IEPs, and others are heading units related to effective classroom management. We also provided a ton of materials for teachers to access regarding effective classroom management and learning strategies that teachers can access freely."



## ***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.

***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](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

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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 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](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! *Contact:* [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

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

For new sign-ups – email [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

**Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.**

### **THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER**

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.