

(11/19/25) This continuing education resource is from the national
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA

Featured

(1) Can the season of giving and outreach start in the classroom?

(2) Do Public Schools Matter?

(3) Call for Nominations: National Award for Work on Transforming Student/Learning Supports

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:

>Can the season of giving and outreach start in the classroom?

As Thanksgiving and December celebrations approach, it is a good time to consider:

How can schools use the season as a natural opportunity for students to develop empathy and learn ways to help others?

And while the focus usually is on supports for those in need within the community, it's a good time to work on ways to enhance interpersonal connections in classrooms and around the school.

To spark discussion about this, we sent the following request to several colleagues and also to university students who have worked in our Center.

In addition to involving students in community giving campaigns, what are some ideas about student outreach to enhance interpersonal connections at school. In particular, what would you suggest students do to make genuine and lasting friendships with students who are "loners"?

From University Students:

(1) "I used to be considered a "loner" myself. To me, the first thing is to think about how we define "loners" and what the underlying reasons are for their loneliness. The reasons can be very different. Sometimes it's because they did something wrong and upset their peers. Sometimes they are connected with someone who already has a negative reputation, and so they share that same rejection. Sometimes they just struggle socially or are more introverted. For different situations, we need different ways to help.

So, what can students actually do to build genuine and lasting friendships with "loners"? A few things come to mind:

>Start small: Invite them to sit at lunch, include them in a group activity, or ask about their interests.

>Be consistent: One-time gestures are nice, but regular kindness builds trust.

>Show curiosity and respect: Listen to their story instead of labeling them.

>Try to imagine what it feels like to be excluded, and act in ways that make them feel seen and valued.

Over time, these small but steady actions can break down walls and turn into authentic, lasting friendships."

(2) "I believe one of the most powerful ways to reach out to students who feel on the margins is not just by inviting them in, but by showing genuine curiosity about the stories, interests, and strengths that are specific to them as individuals. Simple things like asking for their opinion in class, intentionally saving them a seat at a table, or encouraging them to help lead a project can show that they are truly valued by their peers beyond just a surface level. When students see that their contributions do hold weight, friendships form naturally and are much more likely to last".

- (3) "For students who are "loners" I would suggest peer support groups. I think if someone self identifies as a loner, or someone who isn't part of any particular group in lower education, it is very hard for them to join clubs, sports, etc. I think that, from my own experience as well, such children would be much more excited about a structured peer group that is facilitated by a counselor. This creates a low pressure environment where the individuals can all bond over their shared "lack of fitting in," potentially, and thus come together and become better friends in the long term. I think that this creates a safe space, as well, due to the facilitator who has training in the area of psychology. Coaches and teachers sometimes lack the empathy and understanding necessary to facilitate friendships from those who may be excluded, and can even make certain situations worse."
- (4) "I think we are naturally social creatures and many of these so called loners aren't truly so. They often find their community and connection online which may or may not feel satisfactory for them but certainly makes them isolated in the everyday social circumstances of the world. I think bridging the gap back to a personal connection is really what students can strive for. Making that leap back to the world may be most digestible for "loners" through an interaction which initially does its growing online. Asking to join gaming servers, community forums, and interacting with digital media I think would be a great place for students to start reaching out to those peers that may feel are distant. Those can easily include preexisting passions and don't require either student to do much out of their comfort zone. This allows the finding of common ground online that they can then bring back to their classrooms and further develop a relationship from a path that feels comfortable for anyone and everyone."

From colleagues:

- (1) "One big challenge to creating lasting friendships is communication. Students may be shy or nervous about approaching others and not know how to start up a conversation with someone they don't really know. Asking questions is an excellent way to get started. If students are prepared with two or three ideas for how they can begin talking with other students (or even adults), they are more likely to be successful. Adults can help students get started by modeling or practicing with their student/child. Perhaps the adult could even be present the first time a student tries to initiate a conversation. Once the conversation begins, students can explore their likes and dislikes to find out what they have in common. Parents and teachers can support this type of communication by asking students to engage with another student about an assignment, a book they're reading, or a current event. Younger students need ideas of how to begin a conversation while older students need ideas for approaching someone they don't know well. Younger students are more likely to be open to approaching another when they know what they should do and/or say. Older students, however, may need more encouragement to overcome "social stigma" that may be connected to a "loner" In addition to knowing what to talk about, older students may need ideas for how they might approach another person. Social settings, such as asking someone to sit together at lunch or on the bus, could provide such opportunities. Overall, challenging students to initiate a conversation is a good first step. Once a student becomes a confident communicator, friendship may follow."
- (2) "Over the years, working as a school psychologist, I would talk to teachers about how to help a new student (or students) to become part of the school and gain friends in their class or how to get the quiet student to join a group and how to facilitate that through other students. I found that embedding new students or those who are "loners" become a part of the class and have relationships with other students was best achieved by embedding the "intervention" into the class/subject they taught. A student may be new, or a loner, because the family moved across town, from another state, or arrived from another country. Sometimes it is the student who does not ride the same bus or is just too shy to start a conversation. I suggested to teachers that they form groups of three student.. The third student would be the newcomer or just a student who did not make friends in earlier years...the loner, regardless of the reason... Some ideas that I shared with teachers which worked were:
1. Geography and/or history
Asking the class how many are from the state they are living in now. If they are not from this state, where are they from? Put students together who are from other states or cities with people from the state making sure that the "new" student(s) or loner is included in a group. They are to generate information about their state, city, town, and themselves...what did they like about that town, city, and how is this different from the students born in other places, etc. Have

- them use a map to locate where they are from. What types of things did students do after school where they came from and are they different from here?
2. Language Arts
This allows for a lot of possibilities about how to get to know others and make a friend. The teacher can point out students who live in the same neighborhood, or have attended the school for many years, who are new students, etc., then ask each child to say a few things about themselves they would like other students in the class to know about them....
 3. Art
This is an excellent place to make things based on what they have learned about each other in their classes.... Throughout all of these is the focus on differences, sameness, awareness... A lot depends on the attitude of teachers to make the activities work..."

For more on this, here are a few resources from our Center:

>[*About "Loners"*](#)

>[*Schools as Caring, Learning Communities*](#)

>[*Social and Interpersonal Problems Related to School Aged Youth*](#)

>[*Making Collaborative/Cooperative Learning Effective in Classrooms*](#)

>[*Peer Relationships, Peer Support*](#)

For discussion and interchange:

> Do Public Schools Matter?

What the best and wisest parent wants for his [or her] own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.

John Dewey in *The School and Society*

From: [*Why Public Schools Matter*](#)

"Public education is the cornerstone of our democracy.... For our society to function and for citizens to engage in the democratic process, basic educational needs must be met, including, but not limited to, literacy and critical thinking.

An educated workforce offers advantages to employers and furthers innovation and societal benefits for all. But schools are not merely places for workforce preparation. Schools are sites for exploration of ideas across a range of subject areas — math, science and technology, literature, social sciences, physical education and more — in the quest to facilitate individuals becoming the best they can and living fulfilling lives. And beyond individual self-actualization and upward mobility, education offers collective growth and progress for entire communities. ...

Public schools are free at the point of delivery and accept all children. Public schools, as a public good, are available to all students regardless of families' ability to pay or any demographic factor. They serve all children zoned for enrollment regardless of a child's academic performance, ability or disability, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs or immigration status. Further, because curricula for public schools are set at the state level and overseen at the district level, questions about textbooks, activities and other pedagogical approaches always have public input during school board meetings... Public schools embody democracy in action....

Public schools fit within the broader conception of a "public good" or a "common good," which refers to institutions and systems provided to all members of a society to meet obligations to care for the common interests of the whole....

Schools can serve as community centers. Schools often host events and activities, some of which cover academic topics related to the school, while others provide services such as adult literacy programs, voting centers, family programs, and student health and well-being services.

Schools provide an unparalleled opportunity for students to interact with peers from diverse backgrounds (e.g., racial, cultural, socioeconomic, ability, political and more). In addition to the individual benefits students experience by being exposed to diversity, experiences in such

environments prepare future adults to live and work in a diverse and multicultural society.

Public funding of public schools means the cost associated with educating children is spread across society rather than shouldered by the individual family. Societies and communities, in turn, benefit financially through a stronger workforce stemming from students receiving lifelong skills. Public schools often provide economic benefits for communities, including employment, economic opportunities and encouragement for families to move to or remain in a community. Public schools, especially community schools, can promote stronger communities by building relationships among families and educators and partnerships with community organizations and businesses....

In addition to academic learning, in many cases, public schools are the only place where some students are able to get a hot and healthy meal once or twice a day. For others, it represents a place of consistency, stability and safety. Public schools provide students from all walks of life and backgrounds an opportunity to socialize, engage with rigorous curricula, participate in extracurricular activities, participate in field trips to cultural centers like museums, engage in the arts and more, much of which would otherwise be out of reach for some students. ...

Public schools remain an ideal mechanism to eventually achieve democracy's aims, which include equal and equitable education for all children...."

Center Comments and Resources

Public schools were established and compulsory education mandated to fulfill fundamental societal needs. As debates intensify over the proper agenda, standards, and strategies for achieving desired outcomes, those charged with improving schools face a persistent dilemma: *how to realize society's core aims in ways that ensure equitable opportunities—not just in some schools, but in all.* This challenge is compounded by the reality of limited and often shrinking personnel and resources. What remains non-negotiable is the imperative to preserve and strengthen a robust system of public education.

For more on this concern, see

> [*Public Education at a Crossroads*](#)

> [*Public Education is Under Attack*](#)



Call for Nominations:

National Award for Work on Transforming Student/Learning Supports

The National Center for Mental Health in Schools & Student/Learning Supports is pleased to call for nominations for its award to a school making significant strides in rethinking and restructuring student/learning supports to better address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

Award Details:

- Recognition: National acknowledgment of your school's accomplishments
- Award Amount: \$1,000 to support your efforts to share your trailblazing efforts with others

Nomination Deadline: December 1, 2025

How to Submit:

We welcome both nominations and self-nominations. Please include a brief description of the work accomplished to date and send submissions to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

More Information:

Visit the Center's website for details about transforming student/learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>.

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

- >>[The power of public schools](#)
- >>[The importance of public education](#)
- >>[The Social and Economic Benefits of Public Education](#)
- >>[Reciprocal Associations Between Social Withdrawal Motivations and Peer Difficulties During Early Adolescence](#)
- >>[Self-reported delinquency and reputational orientations of high school and incarcerated adolescent loners and nonloners](#)
- >>[Truly Prioritizing Child Health — The Missed Opportunities of the MAHA Commission](#)
- >>[Exploring How Family Resource Centers Work With Young Parents](#)
- >>*Hot Topic:* [The Promise and Peril of AI in Mental Health](#)
- >>[Why shifting special ed oversight could be ‘a public education crisis’](#)

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>

11/20 Resolving differences in the classroom
12/1 Bullying and the impact on children
12/1 Moving to community and policy prevention strategies
12/2 Social media and AI technology
12/2 Reducing risk for youth substance misuse
12/2 Preparing students for college and career
12/3 Authentic partnerships with families and communities
12/3 Proactive AI safety in schools
12/3 Understanding anxiety
12/8 Supporting those who experience bullying
12/9 Conflict management and problem solving
12/9 Title I dollars to support homelessness
12/9 Evolving high school to engage learners
12/10 Strategic planning for education leaders
12/11 Shifts in federal education funding
1/2 Building belonging in schools
1/13 Positive classroom interactions
1/15/26 Elevating school staff talent and recruiting
2/10 Strengthening school community partnerships
2/10 Prevention core competencies
2/24 Whole school approach
3/3 Strong leaders make strong schools
3/24 Student voice and advocacy

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)

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

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

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

For new sign-ups – email 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.