

(11/20/24) **This continuing education resource is from the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

### Featured

#### Some ongoing issues for schools

**(1) Preventing truancy**

**(2) About Addressing Poverty: What's a School's Role?**

**(3) Thanksgiving includes thanks for public schools**

And, as always:

**>Links to a few other resources relevant to continuing education**

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

### For discussion and interchange

#### **>Preventing truancy**

**Request from a colleague** – *We're working on a project to identify and provide support to high-risk youth in middle and high school - who have multiple unexcused absences. Do you have ideas or strategies to implement this intervention. A main goal is to intervene before they become truant. And we know we need to reach out to families of these youth also.*

**Center Comments** – From the broad perspective of addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students, truancy and all school attendance problems provide another indication of the need to move forward in new directions for providing student and learning supports. Ideas for developing more sophisticated approaches can be adapted from current efforts to address truancy. But, policy and practice must now evolve so schools, families, and communities are working together to develop approaches that reflect the complexity of truancy and other attendance problems. The complexity demands moving to more comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated solutions.

We have compiled resources from our center and other sources into an [\*Attendance Quick Find\*](#). Among the Center resources you can link to from the Quick Find are:

**>[\*About Policy and Practice Trends for Reducing Truancy\*](#)**

**>[\*Supports for Students Deemed At-Risk\*](#)**

**>[\*Absenteeism: Beyond Reporting and Beyond Another Special Initiative\*](#)**

**>[\*Trying to address absenteeism? Transform student/learning supports!\*](#)**

**Comments from the Field** – Here is a sample of responses elicited from colleagues:

1. "Chronic absenteeism includes both excused and unexcused absences. The first step for school communities is to create positive conditions for learning by fostering a climate and culture that welcomes students, making them feel wanted and like they belong. This also involves building intentional and authentic relationships with secondary students. Additionally, for middle and high school students, consider creating focus groups and/or surveys to understand the reasons behind attendance concerns and what they need to attend school every day on time. You might also create student-led attendance teams that work with school leadership to develop strategies and activities that promote awareness and the importance of attendance. Students can be effective in holding their

peers accountable and providing adults with valuable insights. Furthermore, there should be a focus on Tier 2 students who are trending towards chronic absenteeism, bringing them back into the school through student and parent engagement.”

2. “Having worked with this population for many years - years filled with both frustrations and success - and as I continue to consult for school districts, the most important lesson that now seems so obvious is that the strategies must be multi-faceted. By combining several strategies, schools can address both the underlying causes of absenteeism and create a supportive environment. It’s been called the ‘Constellation Concept,’ because it’s a group of strategies that form a pattern of support, resources, and expectations.

> *Mentorship Programs*: Pairing at-risk students with caring adults or peers (Success Mentors) helps build relationships that motivate students to attend regularly. Programs like Check & Connect have shown success in reducing absenteeism, especially with high-risk students. Some schools do surveys of the students to find out if the students can identify any adult in the school they trust or can relate to and try to connect them as individuals or groups. For example, recently we did a survey of students who were struggling with attendance and other issues. Three of the students identified the basketball coach as a person they admire even though none of them played basketball, but they attended games periodically. The coach was surprised and gladly set up time before school and after school to spend time with them just talking.

> *Identify Health Barriers*: Many of the high-risk students have health issues that have not been addressed or have not been addressed sufficiently, for example, vision, hearing, dental, nutrition, and language screening. To illustrate, we found that a disproportionate number of high-risk students need glasses, primarily because of the 85% increase in the number of teens with myopia. Regarding language - language screening is not meant for ELL per se; it’s to measuring receptive, expressive, and pragmatic language, which are all necessary for learning, executive functioning, and socialization. It has nothing to do with cognitive skills; too often, students are not exposed to a language rich environment and don’t develop language skills. A good resource for educators and parents is the Language as a Missing Link Resources — Deal Center ([galiteracycenter.org](http://galiteracycenter.org)) We should realize that for students with underdeveloped language skills, their behavior becomes their language.

> *Family Engagement*: Regular communication with parents and involving families in attendance plans increases shared accountability on the parents and the school. Home visits and parent workshops can address barriers to attendance, such as transportation and health issues. Some schools develop Community Health and Education Centers (CHEC) that are open after school for parents and students. Parents can take technical college-sponsored courses; learn how to use a computer; apply for assistance programs online, etc. while their children receive tutoring and/or participate in activities such as sports, chess, art, etc. All for the purpose of engaging families in the school, which can greatly influence students.

> *Restorative Practices*: Schools using restorative justice approaches instead of punitive measures (e.g., suspensions for truancy) see improvements in attendance. These practices focus on conflict resolution and keeping students engaged in school. If schools cannot commit resources to RP, they can develop counseling support groups so the high-risk students have a safe place to discuss the problems they are having and to hear from others with the same concerns.

> *Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Positive School Climate*: Programs that address students’ emotional well-being and coping skills help reduce anxiety and mental health barriers to attendance. Some schools have struggled finding and keeping therapists in schools, so many are shifting to telemental health (I can provide research on the effectiveness of telemental health if needed), which has proven to be effective. Also, we need to remember that research shows that a positive school climate is a significant protective factor - PBIS is the SAMHSA-approved framework for improving school climate. As a companion to the school climate strategies is the use of periodic ‘school climate’ surveys - not the end-of-the-year in-depth school climate surveys, but short surveys of no more than five questions that are given periodically to student focus groups. Patterns in response might emerge that can be addressed quickly.

> *Incentive-Based Programs*: Offering rewards for improved or perfect attendance (certificates, gift cards, public recognition) can boost short-term attendance. These are most effective when combined with other support systems. I think incentive-based strategies work best when students identify what the incentives should be.

>*Targeted Interventions for Chronic Absenteeism*: Data-driven early warning systems identify students with attendance issues, allowing schools to intervene early with tailored support, such as counseling, tutoring, or alternative learning models (e.g., online courses for flexible scheduling). The early warning system concept can be used for students already at-risk. It's a misnomer that it's only to identify 'potential' attendance-risk students, because the purpose should be to take a population-based, epidemiological model concept to look for patterns and sometimes patterns that generate more questions than answers, but we're only effective as our ability and willingness to ask more questions.

>*Community Partnerships*: Collaborating with local businesses, health providers, and nonprofits can offer students resources like health care services, mental health services, and mentorship opportunities, apprenticeship programs, volunteer opportunities, etc.

*I hope I don't give the impression or conjure an illusion that any of this is easy, but I can offer from experience that a fragmented approach, even when well intended is not likely to be effective."*

3. "I think you might consider doing something along the lines of the LEAP Home visits that were used in Connecticut. <https://portal.ct.gov/sde/chronic-absence/learner-engagement-and-attendance-program-leap> The key is building a relationship so you can find out what is happening/why they are missing school and doing this over time to build trust and support. And, in this case, it is a visit with the family too. "

4. "The number one strategy for supporting high-risk youth is to build relationships between students and staff. Circumstances for individual high-risk students can be varied and complex, so trying to find appropriate evidence-based programs to meet their diverse needs is nearly impossible. On the other hand, a positive relationship between a student and an adult at school has been shown to impact multiple problems and potentially double academic performance....

A possible first step could be as simple as passing around a student roster and asking staff (including support staff) to cross off any student's name that they feel is 'OK' at school. You can define 'OK' however you see fit, but in this case the task could be narrowly defined such as: Cross off all student names who appear to be connected personally to someone at school. After ALL staff have crossed off names, those student names that remain are your starting point. Those names should be circulated again asking staff to put their name next to one or two of the students with whom they feel comfortable developing a personal relationship. Give the staff ideas on how to begin, what to talk about, how to reach out to their families, etc. Some staff will instinctively know what to do but others may need some coaching. For example, what might your staff do when their "charge" isn't at school? How should they positively reach out and what can they do to encourage students to come back? Are there barriers to attendance? What are they? What will staff do with that information? Again, individual circumstances will be varied so staff will need on-going support and information to deal with these issues.

Follow up with staff regularly to collect information on how the outreach is going (frequently at first!). What are their challenges? Successes? What more does staff need to do a better job building this relationship? Those data will give you a much better idea of the specific needs of these high-risk students and what the district should do next in terms of program and policy implementation as well as the need for enhancing community partnerships.

This work can be messy, slow, and frustrating - so ongoing support for staff is important. However, over time positive changes can be measured - the research supports that outcome. Sharing successes can encourage staff to continue this difficult work. Find small improvements and strategies and share them widely. This type of work can transform the culture of a school and make a positive difference for all students."

5. "In short, schools need to focus on school wide attendance and not wait until it becomes a problem. One thing a notable school did in our state was to invite all the parents of chronically absent students to a BBQ at the start of the school year, and ask them to partner on how to solve the problem. It helped about half the students...."

***Before any school can address the challenge of reducing chronic absenteeism, development of a solutions-based approach must be strategic and include input and engagement from educators, school support staff, parents, and students.***

Comprehensive Center Network Region 12 [\*How to Address Chronic Absenteeism\*](#)

From a recent research article:

***Complicating the Role of Relationships in Reducing Student Absenteeism***

“...For improving attendance, relationships have traditionally been seen as useful for boosting motivation, engagement, and self-determination within families. Yet, in contexts like Detroit, with extremely high levels of chronic absenteeism and structural barriers to attendance, addressing those psychological factors are not enough. Relationships likely matter for a subsection of families, but relationships alone cannot put gas in the car, improve social and environmental conditions related to health, or increase neighborhood or school safety. A focus on relationships in these contexts might be better conceptualized as a tool to identify barriers and connect families and students to the resources and support structures they need to improve attendance....”

**For discussion and interchange**

**>About Addressing Poverty: What's a School's Role?**

The potential barriers to learning and teaching encountered by students living in poverty have been well documented. There have been concerns about a culture of poverty and a culture of class; concerns about stereotyping, bias, prejudice, low standard setting, and self-fulfilling prophecies related to students and their families. Given that schools have an important role to play in reducing poverty, that role must involve more than the fragmented and marginalized approaches generally advocated for schools. Dealing with multiple, interrelated concerns, such as poverty, child development, education, violence, crime, safety, housing, and employment requires multiple and interrelated solutions. Just adding a few additional services and programs to schools is not a solution. Indeed, what is generally advocated is just a recipe for perpetuating the current marginalized and fragmented set of efforts that have been demonstrated to have only a limited impact. Interrelated solutions require wide based collaboration. In particular, schools, homes, and communities need to work together strategically in pursuing shared goals related to the general well-being of the young and society. <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/poverty.pdf>

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From: ***Socioeconomic Status and Student Learning***

“... implications for policies aimed at improving low-SES students’ learning outcomes. Specifically, four principles can be distilled from these findings to inform the development of these policies.

- >First, the ecological perspective of SES in student learning implies that such policies need to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, policy design, implementation, and evaluation should comprehensively address multiple factors (family school, community) influencing student learning, recognize the interactions among SES, race/ethnicity, immigration status, and neighborhood characteristics, and cater to different domains of student wellbeing (academic learning, health, safety, socioemotional development). Policymakers also need to collaborate with different levels of government and multiple stakeholders (non-government organizations, civil society, families, school leaders and teachers and communities). For example, parents and communities can be involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies. They should also enhance the social capital of disadvantaged students, such as increasing their access to educational information, guidance, and resources and to social networks (e.g., peer groups, faculty mentors, and learning communities).
- >The second principle stems from the finding that low-SES students’ learning outcomes can benefit from educational policies and interventions, so policies should enhance

disadvantaged students' access to educational opportunities and resources. For example, the policies can involve the expansion of early childhood education, provision of scholarship and financial aid, promotion of school choice and diversity, improvement of student–teacher ratio, de-tracking, provision of resources to school districts serving these students, and greater access to advanced courses and college education; The enhanced access to educational opportunities and resources has to be matched by a leveling up of schools' quality. For example, schools serving disadvantaged students need to be led by effective leaders and staffed by certified teachers who undergo continuous professional development, have high expectations for student learning, and implement effective curriculum and pedagogy.

The two principles discussed above address the disadvantages that students face due to their economic deprivation (e.g., low-SES families, poor neighborhoods). However, effective policies must also address sociocultural aspects of disadvantage compromising student learning (e.g., related to racial/ethnic minority, immigrant status).

>The third principle is that policies should affirm the strengths (e.g., agency, resilience, creativity, cultural knowledge, community involvement) that disadvantaged students bring to their learning. This principle is informed by the call for an asset-based perspective of SES and intersectional findings on the influence of SES with other variables on student learning. Policymakers should acknowledge that disadvantaged students are not homogenous and address the latter's specific needs. Policies should include developing a culture of respect and dialogue among school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. Schools can cultivate safe spaces for sharing stories, promote multicultural programs and teaching social justice, implement anti-bullying programs, support students at risk of dropping out, and enhance school-family collaboration. Teachers need to have diverse backgrounds, appreciate diverse cultures, serve as role models for students, and be trained to engage with diversity issues in classrooms

>Lastly, in view of the findings indicating the persistent influence of SES on student learning, policies should address structural and systemic inequalities related to poverty, class, and segregation by cultivating equitable and inclusive assessment and accountability education systems; this is the fourth principle. These systems are exemplified by the use of multiple measures of student learning, culturally responsive pedagogies and curriculum, parental involvement, school desegregation, and contextualized school admissions

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For more on this concern, see our Center Quick Find on [Children and poverty](#)



Source: Ed Gamble

**How are these matters being discussed in your locale?**

Please let us know so we can share the info widely. Send to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)

## **Thanksgiving includes thanks for public schools**

From: *Reasons Why We Should Be Thankful for Public Schools*

"It's been my experience that people are quick to criticize public schools. Critics contend that classrooms are over-crowded and poorly funded. They believe students are undisciplined and unprepared for the future. However, in the spirit of Thanksgiving, I would instead like us to acknowledge all that is good within our public schools.

After a twelve year career as a public school teacher, and now as a parent of a child attending a public school, there really are many reasons to be thankful.

- >**Teachers.** Most teachers are there because they genuinely care. They believe in children. They are excited about learning and want to instill that same excitement in their students. They didn't choose this profession for the paychecks (or summer vacation). Most teachers became teachers because they felt a calling and a desire to make a difference in a child's life.
- >**School staff.** It takes a team effort to make a school run efficiently and effectively. Everyone plays a part in your child's academic experience. Every adult on campus has the number one job duty of keeping each child safe. Don't overlook supervision assistants, office technicians, library aides, the school nurse, custodial staff, and support personnel.
- >**Exposure to diversity.** Many schools have extremely diverse populations (both student and staff) thus providing our children with lessons in acceptance. Our children are learning that not everyone speaks the same language, wears the same types of clothes, or eats the same types of foods at lunches.
- >**Life lessons.** Schools don't just teach our children academic curriculum. Schools are also helping our children develop into respectful world citizens. It is at school that our children are presented with life lessons they may not have learned at home. ...
- >**Community.** Whether or not you're fortunate enough to attend your neighborhood school, public schools do their best to foster a sense of community. Within a school setting, a child quickly learns the importance of teamwork and cooperation. A school requires a joint effort to be safe and clean. That's when our children learn first-hand that everyone can make a difference and everyone's efforts are important.
- >**Belief in a well-rounded education.** Despite decreased budgets, public schools continue to acknowledge the need for an education that extends beyond the traditional 3 'R's.' Public schools will tirelessly fundraise to try and provide our children access to computers, a school library, physical education programs, and the arts. Schools realize that these additional programs are 'essential extras.'"

### **>Links to a few other relevant shared resources**

- >>[Examining student perceptions of school climate, school personnel, & school discipline](#)
- >>[National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders](#)
- >>[Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#)
- >>[Parental involvement and education outcomes of their children](#)
- >>[School-Level Bureaucrats: How High School Counselors Inhabit the Conflicting Logics of Their Work](#)
- >>[New AI Tools Are Promoted as Study Aids for Students. Are They Doing More Harm Than Good?](#)
- >>[Gangs by State 2024](#)



### Few Upcoming Webinars

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

- 11/20 De-escalation strategies
- 11/20 Creating an evaluation plan for your child with mental health needs
- 11/20 Coordinated care for eating disorders
- 11/22 Building engagement through skilled listening
- 11/26 Family involvement
- 11/26 Managing stress
- 12/3 Managing holiday stress
- 12/3 Empowering student voices
- 12/4 Handling holiday stress
- 12/4 Shaping AI for human centered education /
- 12/10 Coping with loneliness: building social relationships
- 12/10 Foundations of equity
- 12/11 Resolutions and goal setting
- 12/18 Understanding anxiety
- 1/13 Wraparound fidelity
- 1/14 How to have a successful and equitable student program
- 1/23 Leveraging evaluation for transformative growth
- 4/22 Student led initiatives

***How Learning Happens*** (Edutopia's updated series of videos explores how educators can guide all students, regardless of their developmental starting points, to become productive and engaged learners.

Webinar recording: ***Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth***

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

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## Guides to Transforming Student and Learning Supports

Through the *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.

***If you are aware of efforts underway to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching, please share with us.***

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 have many resources to help in moving forward.

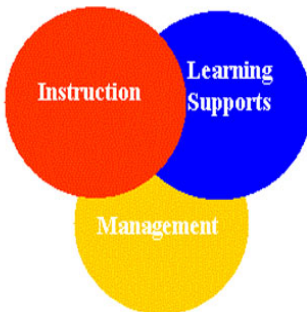
For example, see our recent guides that provide a roadmap for moving in new directions:

- (1) *Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*
- (2) *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Starting the Process*

These provide prototypes for new directions and first steps for moving forward on a monthly, schedule. The first steps outlined involve

- (a) mapping existing student support activities and operational infrastructure,
- (b) analyzing what has been mapped,
- (c) identifying priorities for and clarifying the benefits of system changes,
- (d) developing recommendations for system changes,
- (e) building a critical mass of support

Links to resources are provided to aid in carrying out each task.



**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.**

**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.**

**We post a broad range of issues and responses to the Net Exchange on our website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm> and on Facebook (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>)**