

(2/18/26) **This continuing education resource is from the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

## Featured

**(1) *Prevention and more***

**(2) *Pursuing “open mic” activities in ways that avoid doing harm***

**(3) *Why transform K–12 student/learning supports?***

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:***

#### ***>Prevention and more***

From: ***New models of care, education, and prevention prioritize MH across the life span***

“Children and adolescents are growing up in a whirlwind of digital overload, climate anxiety, economic uncertainty, and social instability. In response, psychologists are leading a paradigm shift toward a preventive, whole-child approach that can better support the mental well-being of today’s youth....

Increasingly, psychologists are also advancing the notion that mental health starts at birth and requires a relational approach that includes both children and caregivers. Beyond reducing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), the field is exploring how to bolster the positive aspects of childhood, which are now known to help buffer the risks....

**An early childhood relational focus** – ... Care approaches are increasingly relational in nature, based on clear evidence that safe, stable, and nurturing relationships can counteract childhood adversity....

**Building on positive experiences** – Psychologists are advancing the idea that lifelong health is shaped just as much by early positive experiences as it is by adversity. Decades of research on ACEs have revealed how domestic violence, parental substance misuse, and other factors can harm a child’s long-term physical and mental health. But that research left one important question unanswered: Why do many people with ACEs have largely positive health outcomes?

‘Today’s science points to positive childhood experiences as the answer, which are grounded in safe, stable, nurturing relationships,’ said Christina Bethell... The positive childhood experiences (PCEs) that make the greatest impact are relational, Bethell said. The PCE index she helped shape and disseminate asks questions such as: How often did you talk to your family about your feelings when you were a child? Did you feel that you belonged in high school? Did an adult in your household make you feel safe and protected?

Even a child in very tough circumstances likely has positive experiences to draw on. The benevolent childhood experiences (BCEs) scale, developed by Angela Narayan,...is another tool that assesses early sources of safety, support, and connection. Using the scale, Narayan found that around 95% of young adults surveyed reported having at least one caregiver who made them feel safe growing up. Most people also said they had a teacher who was their champion, at least one close friend, and opportunities to have fun....”

## Center Comments on Prevention

We appreciate the emphasis on prevention in the above article. There is an urgent need for greater action to prevent educational, psychosocial, physical, and mental health problems – and to do so at scale. This requires sustained attention to school, home, and neighborhood factors that contribute to the development and persistence of such problems.

Our approach frames prevention as one subsystem on a continuum of interventions designed to

- promote healthy development
- prevent problems
- respond quickly after a problem arises
- care for severe and chronic problems

These interventions occur across schools and communities. In schools, this continuum is commonly organized as a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS).

Using a full continuum of interventions efficiently and effectively requires that schools and communities collaborate in new ways and weave resources together into a unified system. Moreover, it calls for rethinking student/learning supports and how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

Naturally, this involves substantial changes in policy, planning, implementation, and accountability.

For a discussion of these matters, see

>[\*Building on MTSS to Enhance How Schools Address Barriers to Learning\*](#)

>[\*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions\*](#)

And see our Center Quick Find for more on [\*Prevention\*](#)  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/prevention.html>

### **For discussion and interchange:**

>[\*\*\*Pursuing “open mic” activities in ways that avoid doing harm\*\*\*](#)

While open mic activities offer opportunities to enhance student engagement and promote social and emotional growth, they must be implemented with care. Ensuring a supportive environment is essential, particularly for students who are shy, anxious, or hesitant to participate.

Here are excerpts from two articles on the topic:

From: [\*How ‘open mic’ activities can improve writing, social skills\*](#)

“Open mic classroom activities or school events can improve students’ engagement with their writing and help shy students open up, but they also require careful preparation, experts say.

When planning a poetry slam or open mic reading night, educators need to think intentionally about the environment they want to create, building up to the event in a way to ensure that all students — even those least-inclined to step up to the mic — feel included, and that audience members are supportive.

Creating the space to take risks and for students to be in “discovery play mode” means building norms of trust for how they respond to each other... For students who seem “super-reticent” about getting on stage, work with them one-on-one. Pair students up with one another to provide feedback, perhaps looking for their favorite lines and talk about which parts of the poem or story “popped off the page.”

Students who feel confident from the get-go should be assigned as “captains” for the event and paired up with more nervous kids... Time permitting, invite a visiting writer to a workshop in which students have the opportunity to share their work with the guest and garner feedback.

Once the open mic activity or event itself approaches, prepare the audience to show appreciation

by clapping before and after the performance and snapping when they hear those “striking lines,” as a way to create a call-and-response dynamic without disrupting the speaker’s flow. ....

When planning the event, it’s better to involve students as much as possible to give them a sense of ownership “in terms of how we greet people as they’re entering, what we call it, how the seating works, the lineup...”

From: ***Open mic events***

“Organize open mic events where students, teachers, and staff have the opportunity to share their thoughts, experiences, and talents. Encourage participants to express themselves through spoken word, poetry, storytelling, or music, fostering a supportive environment where everyone’s voice is valued. Here are some tips for organizing your own Open Mic event.

>Set the Tone

- Emphasize the theme “Every Voice Matters” and the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment where all participants feel valued and respected.
- Encourage school leaders, teachers, and staff to lead by example by actively participating and demonstrating openness and vulnerability in sharing their own experiences.

>Provide Guidelines

- Communicate clear guidelines for participation, emphasizing the importance of respectful and appropriate expression.
- Encourage participants to share personal stories, thoughts, or talents related to the theme of inclusivity, diversity, and acceptance.
- Remind participants to be mindful of language and content to ensure everyone feels comfortable and included.

>Offer Support

- Provide support and resources for those who may need assistance in preparing their contributions, such as writing workshops or practice sessions.
- Designate staff members or volunteers to offer encouragement and guidance to participants before and during the event.
- Create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere by arranging seating and decor that reflects the theme of Inclusive Schools Week.

>Promote Diversity of Expression

- Encourage participants to express themselves through a variety of mediums, such as spoken word, poetry, storytelling, music, or visual art.
- Highlight the importance of celebrating diverse voices and perspectives, and encourage participants to share aspects of their identities and experiences that may not always be heard.

>Foster Active Listening

- Encourage audience members to listen and engage with the performances or presentations actively.
- Remind attendees to show support and appreciation for each participant, whether through applause, snaps, or other positive gestures.

>Provide Opportunities for Reflection

- Create space for reflection and discussion after the event, where participants can share their thoughts and reactions to the performances.
- Encourage participants to consider how the event has impacted their understanding of inclusivity and the importance of amplifying diverse voices in the school community.

>Follow-Up and Recognition

- Follow up with participants after the event to express appreciation for their contributions and to gather feedback for future events.
- Recognize and celebrate the courage and creativity of all participants, whether through certificates, awards, or public acknowledgments.”

For a student’s related perspective, see

>***In-Class Presentations: A Potential Barrier to Success at School?***

## Why transform K–12 student/learning supports?

**1. Ending the Marginalization of Such Supports** – Currently, student/learning supports are not treated as a primary concern in school improvement policy and practice. Yet, they are essential for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and for reengaging disconnected students.

Marginalization leads to:

- Limited availability and access for many students and teachers
- Ad hoc, fragmented interventions
- Counterproductive competition for scarce resources
- Disproportionate impact on schools in low-income communities

Modern educational frameworks emphasize educating the whole child – academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. Marginalized supports undermine this vision. Ending marginalization and transforming student/learning supports is central to school improvement and promoting equity of opportunity for success at schools and beyond.

**2. Ending the Fragmentation of Current Supports** – Most schools provide a range of supports (e.g., counseling, behavior interventions, tutoring, special education). However, because these efforts are marginalized, implementation often is disconnected and reactive, resulting in inefficiencies and gaps. Transformation enables schools to shift from reactive, crisis-driven actions to a proactive, integrated system. Such a system can build on the type of continuum outlined by MTSS. The intent is to unify and organize supports into a well-defined and delimited set of intervention domains across each tier of the continuum. The ultimate aim is to develop a system that pursues prevention and early intervention in ways that reduce the amount of specialized assistance needed.

**3. Reaching More Students, Families, and Teachers** – Achievement and opportunity gaps persist, particularly for students from low-income families, English learners, and students with special needs. Current supports often fail to meet to the complexity and diversity of student and teacher needs, particularly in underserved communities. Ending the marginalization and fragmentation of student/learning supports helps promote equity of opportunity for success at schools and beyond. Transforming supports is key to address systemic inequities.

Transforming student/learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system enables schools to

- assist more students, families, and teachers
- strategically restructure and build capacity using existing resources (rather than unrealistically hoping to fund additional personnel)
- make systemic change scalable across districts and states.

### Concluding Comments

Frameworks like Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Whole Child approaches call for cohesive, tiered, and comprehensive systems that address barriers to learning and teaching. By addressing marginalization and fragmentation and by promoting equity, schools can better provide supports for many more students to succeed at school and beyond.

Student/learning supports are vital in fostering a positive school climate, student engagement, and social-emotional development. A comprehensive transformation of student/learning supports is not just beneficial – it is essential for improving availability, comprehensiveness, equity, cost-effectiveness, scalability, and sustainability.

### A Couple of Resources

- > *Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*
- > *An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports: A Month by Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing Resources*

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

- >>Black History Month
- >>Ideas for Student-Led Black History Month Celebrations
- >>Black History Month Lessons & Resources
- >>Why do teachers leave? (Podcast)
- >>What Does AI Readiness Mean for Schools? (Podcast)
- >>Kindergarten readiness varies widely by income, new data shows. Cities are stepping in to help
- >>Your Disobedient Child? Maybe It's Going to Be OK
- >>Turning Mistakes into Learning Opportunities
- >>The K-12 outlook for 2026: How new federal priorities and funding challenges will stretch schools
- >>AI – Productive Support or Cognitive Crutch?

**A Few Upcoming Webinars and Podcasts**

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

- 2/19 Support Student Well-Being Through Focused Learning and Meaningful Human Connection
- 2/23 Understanding substance use and misuse
- 2/24 Whole school approach
- 2/25 Risk and protective factors framework
- 2/25 Family therapy in foster care
- 2/25 IEP meetings for your child with mental health needs
- 2/26 Teaching children to care
- 2/26 Transitioning to a new school on an IEP
- 2/26 Engaging youth in prevention
- 3/3 Strong leaders make strong schools
- 3/5 Building belonging in school
- 3/9 Understanding childhood grief and loss
- 3/18 Strengths based resilience
- 3/24 Student voice and advocacy
- 3/31 Improving relationships with staff and students
- 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).  
[Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth](#) (Webinar recording)*

- >>Why do teachers leave? (Podcast)
- >>What Does AI Readiness Mean for Schools? (Podcast)

*There's a roughly 20 percent difference in kids' readiness for school when comparing reports from the poorest families and the wealthiest.*

Why is your report card so bad?



It's allergic to A's and so it breaks out in D's and F's!"

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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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**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](mailto: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.