

(3/11/26) **This continuing education resource is from the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

Featured

(1) Improving student behavior: It's about promoting pro-social development

(2) Natural Opportunities for Promoting Pro-Social Development at School

(3) Reduction in day-to-day victimization at schools

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:

>Improving student behavior: It's about promoting pro-social development

From: ***Positive Youth Development and Prosocial Behavior***

“Voluntary behaviors aimed at helping others, also known as pro-social behaviors (e.g., sharing, comforting, cooperating) can benefit both individual and society. Specifically, it can increase individual happiness, physical health, and stronger relationships while also benefitting the receiver.... Pro-social behaviors tend to emerge in childhood and continue to develop through adolescence and early adulthood which are life stages during which our social functioning is shaped...

While much developmental research has focused on risk and problem behaviors (e.g., substance abuse, risk-taking); this approach has been criticized for neglecting youth strengths, Alternatives such as Positive Youth Development emphasize resilience, strengths, and the potential for positive transitions in young people. It asserts that, when aligned with suitable opportunities and resources, all individuals have strengths that will enable them to thrive...

The Social Emotional Learning framework focuses primarily on psycho-social competencies of individuals described as “the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life”, and includes several skills that are important for social-emotional functioning....

The Collaborative for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning identified five key domains in which skills were conceptualized which are considered important to Positive Youth Development

- > Self-awareness, which involves the awareness and impact of one's own emotions, thoughts, and beliefs (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy).
- > Self-management refers to one's ability to manage their emotions, thoughts, and beliefs, to ultimately achieve their goals (e.g., stress management, self-control).
- > Social awareness relates to the skill to empathize, understand, and show awareness for others emotions.
- >Relationship skills refers to the skill to interact with others and to form as well as maintain positive and healthy relationships (e.g., clear communication, active listening).
- > Responsible decision-making relates to the ability to make appropriate choices, while taking into account ethical and societal standards (e.g., evaluation, analysis and anticipation of possible choices and consequences)....

This review highlights the potential importance of stimulating the skills self-efficacy, self-management, self-control, self-confidence, and emotion identification in youth (with or at-risk

of antisocial tendencies) as a way to encourage pro-social behavior. For example, growth mindset programs have been shown to increase these skills and incorporating such elements into school curricula, after-school activities, or youth programs may support pro-social development as well. Interventions specifically aimed at stimulating pro-social behavior often use behavioral strategies (e.g., modeling), while some also focus on specific skills (e.g., self-management). Based on this review, intervention-makers are encouraged to design or revise programs with an integrated approach, addressing both skills and other relevant factors proven effective, to increase their effectiveness in stimulating pro-social behaviors....”

Center Comments

Discussions of managing student misbehavior need to include a major focus on promoting pro social development. This goes well beyond implementing a social emotional curriculum. While SEL lessons can be helpful, they are only one facet of a broader, ongoing process through which schools cultivate the social, emotional, and moral competencies students need to function well individually and collectively.

1. *Pro social development must be embedded into the entire school climate* – Effective schools deliberately weave opportunities for cooperation, empathy, problem solving, and responsible behavior into everyday activities – not just set aside time for a scripted program. Hallway transitions, group work, advisory periods, extracurricular activities, and resolution of conflicts all become “practice fields” for building pro social habits.
2. *Students need active, authentic engagement in positive social roles* – Instead of focusing mainly on reducing misbehavior, schools can provide students with meaningful ways to contribute to the community – classroom responsibilities, peer mentoring, collaborative projects, service learning, leadership roles. These experiences strengthen self regulation, empathy, and a sense of belonging more effectively than punishment or isolated lessons.
3. *Adults can model and encourage pro social norms throughout the day* – Every adult in the building is part of the developmental environment. When teachers and other personnel consistently model respectful communication, problem solving, and emotional regulation – and encourage these behaviors – they help shape a culture where positive behavior is the norm, not the exception.
4. *Pro social development is inseparable from addressing barriers to learning* – Students who struggle emotionally, academically, or socially often exhibit misbehavior as a symptom of unmet needs. Promoting pro social growth requires a system of student/learning supports that assists students who are experiencing stress, trauma, or disengagement. These are not add ons – they are central to enabling learning and positive conduct.
5. *Pro social skills grow through sustained practice, not periodic instruction* – Just as academic skills develop through continuous application, pro social capacities strengthen when students have repeated opportunities to negotiate differences, collaborate, cope with setbacks, and repair harm.

Some of the most authentic “teachable moments” for promoting youth development and minimizing transactions that interfere with positive growth are the many natural opportunities that arise everyday in classrooms and school-wide. And the emphasis is not just on building skills – pro-social development involves promoting knowledge, skills, and *attitudes*. See the following discussion of natural opportunities for promoting pro-social development at school.

For discussion and interchange:

>Natural Opportunities for Promoting Pro-Social Development at School

In one form or another, every school articulates goals aimed at enhancing students' personal and social functioning. These goals reflect a recognition that social and emotional development plays a significant role in:

- supporting the smooth, positive daily functioning of schools and fostering a safe, caring, and supportive climate
- nurturing students' holistic development
- strengthening the motivation and capacity needed for academic learning
- preparing young people for successful lives beyond school

While some schools feature well established, curriculum-based approaches to social emotional learning and character education – including programs that address risk factors and prevent problems – others highlight initiatives such as mentoring, peer helping, or participation in service learning.

Yet, some of the most powerful opportunities for promoting social emotional growth occur naturally throughout the school day. These “natural opportunities” arise in classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, and throughout schoolwide activities. When recognized and used well, they strengthen positive development and reduce interactions that undermine growth. This discussion focuses on identifying and leveraging such opportunities.

What Are Natural Opportunities?

The exhibit on the next page outlines examples of natural opportunities for fostering personal and social growth at school. They are grouped into four broad categories:

- daily opportunities
- yearly patterns
- transitions
- early after the onset of student problems.

Taken together, these represent some of the most authentic forms of “teachable moments.”

A brief look at each category helps highlight its value.

Daily Opportunities. Schools are social environments where students interact continuously – with peers and adults, during instruction and in informal settings. Every interaction, whether positive or negative, serves as a potential learning experience. All school staff – especially teachers – can benefit from support in recognizing these moments and using them to minimize counterproductive exchanges while maximizing opportunities for social emotional learning.

Looking at a school day through the lens of personal and social development raises helpful questions:

- *Does instruction support or hinder students' ability to build interpersonal skills and meaningful connections?*
- *Is cooperation encouraged, and is unhealthy competition minimized?*
- *Are conflicts simply suppressed, or used constructively as opportunities for problem solving and social-emotional growth?*
- *Are roles and responsibilities created so that all students can participate as positive contributors within the school and community?*

Exhibit

Examples of *Natural Opportunities at School to Promote Pro-Social Development*

I. *Using Natural Daily Opportunities*

- ▶ In the classroom (e.g., as students relate to each other and to staff during class and group instruction; as essential aspects of cooperative learning and peer sharing and tutoring; as one facet of addressing interpersonal and learning problems)
- ▶ School-wide (e.g., providing roles for all students to be positive helpers and leaders throughout the school and community; engaging students in strategies to enhance a caring, supportive, and safe school climate; as essential aspects of conflict resolution and crisis prevention)

II *In Response to Yearly Patterns* – Schools have a yearly rhythm, changing with the cycle and demands of the school calendar. The following are examples of monthly themes the Center has developed for schools to draw upon and go beyond. The idea is to establish focal points for minimizing potential problems and pursuing natural opportunities to promote social-emotional learning.

- September – *Getting off to a Good Start*
- October – *Enabling School Adjustment*
- November – *Responding to Referrals in Ways That Can "Stem the Tide"*
- December – *Re-engaging Students: Using a student's time off in ways that pay off!*
- January – *New Year's Resolutions — A Time for Renewal; A New Start for Everyone*
- February – *The Mid-Point of a School Year - Report Cards & Conferences: Another Barrier or a Challenging Opportunity*
- March – *Reducing Stress; Preventing Burnout*
- April – *Spring Can Be a High Risk Time for Students*
- May – *Time to Help Students and Families Plan Successful Transitions to a New Grade or School*
- June – *Summer and the Living Aint Easy*
- July – *Using "Down Time" to Plan Better Ways to Work Together in Providing Learning Supports*
- August – *Now is the Time to Develop Ways to Avoid Burnout*

III. *During Transitions*

- A. Daily (e.g., capturing opportunities before school, during breaks, lunch, afterschool)
- B. Newcomers (e.g., as part of welcoming and social support processes; in addressing school adjustment difficulties)
- C. Grade-to-grade (e.g., preparing students for the next year; addressing adjustment difficulties as the year begins)

IV. *At the First Indication that a Student is Experiencing Problems* – Enhancing social and emotional functioning is a natural focus of early-after-onset interventions for learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

Yearly Patterns. The culture and routines of most schools create predictable patterns across the academic year. The beginning of school often brings a sense of hope and fresh starts. As the year unfolds, however, students and staff encounter an array of stressors – homework increasingly experienced as difficult, interpersonal conflicts, pressures related to testing and grading, and the emotional dynamics surrounding holidays, social events, sports, grade promotions, and graduation.

Each month offers opportunities for staff to reduce unnecessary stressors and strengthen students’ coping skills through social emotional learning and shared problem solving. To support this work, the Center has developed examples of monthly themes that schools can adopt and adapt. (See the Center website for guidance on how to develop and implement such themes.) The exhibit highlights one set of examples, and schools can easily generate others. The overarching aim is to create a monthly focus that helps staff intentionally shape school culture in ways that naturally foster social and emotional development.

Transitions. Students constantly experience transitions – entering a new school, moving from one grade to the next, or adjusting to the many minor and major changes embedded in daily school life. Despite their frequency and impact, such transitions often receive little systematic attention. Yet every transition has the potential to exacerbate problems or be used as a natural opportunity to promote positive learning and attitudes and reduce alienation.

Schools can enhance their capacity to address transitions proactively, guided by their goals for improving personal and social functioning. Examples of schoolwide and classroom practices include:

- creating welcoming processes for new students, families, and staff
- providing ongoing social supports as students adjust to new grades, schools, or programs
- using before and after school activities, as well as intersession periods, as times for ensuring generalization and enrichment of such learning.

Early After the Onset of Student Problems. Every student problem signals a need – and an opportunity – for learning. In many cases, the learning required is embedded in the social emotional arena. Whatever the immediate response is when a problem emerges, the next response should intentionally focus on promoting personal and social growth. Doing so not only addresses the specific concern but also strengthens the student’s long-term capacity to navigate challenges.

Making It Happen

Expanding a school’s emphasis on natural opportunities for personal and social growth requires advocacy, intentional planning, and capacity building for staff. In most schools, student support professionals are well positioned to lead this work. As an initial step, these staff can convene a small work group dedicated to advancing the agenda. This group can help organize priorities, guide professional learning, and facilitate the integration of natural opportunities into the daily fabric of school life.

And for more on promoting prosocial behaviors and positive youth development, see our Center documents and Quick Finds, For example, see:

- > [*About Promoting Youth Development in Schools*](#)
- > [*Promoting Youth Development and Addressing Barriers*](#)
- > [*Youth Development*](#)
- > [*Social and Emotional Development and Social Skills*](#)

For discussion and interchange:

>Reduction in day-to-day victimization in schools

Everyone agrees that schools should ensure a positive school climate. Less agreement exists, however, about what this means and how to accomplish it. This is especially so when the call is for developing a safe and supportive environment that also is nurturing and caring.

From: *The facts on school violence: Q&A with UCLA's Ron Avi Astor*

"...Overall, day-to-day school victimization, including physical, verbal and social exclusion — has declined significantly in recent decades across the United States.... These reductions mean that millions of students are no longer experiencing the same levels of victimization reported 20 years ago. This progress is often overlooked, as are the tremendous investments in programs, hiring of social workers, psychologists and counselors, and the expanded district and state safety infrastructure now in place.

Teachers, principals and communities have made bullying and school safety a priority, and their combined efforts appear to have worked. The United States has invested billions of dollars in social-emotional learning, positive school-climate initiatives, anti-bullying programs, trained staff and new safety policies — all likely contributors to the decline. The belief that 'nothing works' to reduce school violence is incorrect, particularly for day-to-day victimization. Educators, parents, communities and students deserve recognition. This is also why separating school shootings from less lethal forms of school violence is so important.

What is the most important thing a school can do to create a positive school climate? After studying thousands of schools around the world, I have found that the most influential factor, across cultures, is the principal's vision, skill and mission. An effective principal who emphasizes both academic excellence and the social role of schools is the key to reducing violence. These exceptional leaders unify staff, students and communities around a shared vision of safety and foster environments that are welcoming, caring and supportive.

They integrate ideas from students, staff and families, while also selecting evidence-based programs adapted to their school's specific needs. One important implication is the need to include school safety content in principal and teacher training programs, as most universities currently offer little or no preparation in this area. Studying talented principals and educators who successfully create caring, safe schools is another area requiring more research. While evidence-based programs matter, there is much to learn from the people who implement them effectively.

Recent studies show that schools are using a wide range of strategies to improve safety. These include evidence-based programs such as social-emotional learning, restorative justice, school-climate initiatives, anti-bullying programs, and systemic efforts like PBIS (positive behavioral interventions and supports) and multi-tiered system of supports. Schools are also increasing capacity by hiring more social workers, psychologists and counselors to support these programs and address mental health needs....

The core of creating a successful school action plan is closely listening to the voices of students, teachers, parents and the community. Without this, most programs and strategies fail. In many schools, only a small number of people openly express concerns, even though school communities hold diverse views about safety.,,,"

For more on reducing school victimization, see the following Center resources

>*Enhancing Classroom Climate for All Students*

>*Safe Schools and Violence Prevention*

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

- >>Navigating Student Protests
- >>Improving Students' Relationships with Teachers to Provide Essential Supports for Learning
- >>Gaps in Access, Retention, and Outcomes of School-based Mental Health Services
- >>How employers can mentor, train and empower young people (podcast)
- >>Building opportunity through education (podcast)
- >>Helping Boys Navigate Harmful Online Influences
- >>Special education has become a flash point in negotiations with teachers
- >>Only 33 percent of schools have recovered in either math or reading 6 years after pandemic

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>

- 3/11 Understanding anxiety
- 3/17 Too many initiatives, not enough alignment
- 3/18 Strengths based resilience
- 3/24 Teamwork That Works: How Strong Teams Communicate, Lead, & Succeed
- 3/24 Letting go of what doesn't work in prevention
- 3/24 Student voice and advocacy
- 3/25 Teens, trends and turning points
- 3/31 Improving relationships with staff and students
- 3/31 Engaging community with a focus on youth involvement
- 4/15 Supporting Grief-Sensitive Classrooms
- 4/28 Supporting immigrants students

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)

*If you didn't make so many rules,
there wouldn't be so many for me to break!*



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.