

(4/22/26) **This continuing education resource is from the national  
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

## Featured

**(1) More about mentoring:**

***Is near-peer college/career advising a promising practice?***

**(2) About Social Anxiety, Social Participation and Identity Formation**

***(3) Addressing Social Anxiety, Social Participation, and Identity Formation***

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:**

**>More about mentoring:**

***Is near-peer college/career advising a promising practice?***

In recent years, schools and districts have expanded their use of mentoring and advising programs as part of broader efforts to strengthen student/learning support systems. These initiatives are increasingly viewed not as add-ons, but as potential facets of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and promoting academic, social-emotional, and postsecondary success. Many mentoring programs focus on students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation college aspirants, and youth identified as academically vulnerable – groups often underserved by traditional guidance and counseling structures.

Across schools and communities, a wide range of individuals now contribute to mentoring and other student support efforts, including college students, recent graduates, professionals, members of affinity groups, local business employees, and retirees. These individuals provide academic guidance, social-emotional support, and college and career transition assistance. However, as commonly occurs, such programs vary widely in how they are designed and how well they are integrated into existing student support infrastructures. Some are loosely connected to school operations, while others are carefully embedded into student/learning support frameworks and designed to align with differing levels of student need.

From a student support systems perspective, mentoring and advising programs are seen as helpful across a full continuum of interventions. Some are provided for all students (e.g., “universal” interventions – Tier 1 – to promote college/career awareness and aspirations). Others function as targeted interventions (e.g., a focus on students needing additional guidance or encouragement – Tier 2). Still others serve as more intensive supports (e.g., interventions for students experiencing significant transitional challenges – Tier 3).

Within this context, near-peer college/career advising – in which current college students or recent graduates support younger students who are close to them in age or lived experience – has gained increased attention. Near-peers are seen as uniquely positioned to build trust, normalize challenges, and demystify college/career pathways because they are perceived as relatable and credible. At the same time, questions persist about how near-peer advising can be effectively aligned with existing student support roles, coordinated with educators and counselors, and implemented with sufficient training and supervision.

Below is an excerpt from an article entitled:

***Credible Messengers and Cultural Guides: How Near-Peers Expand Access to College Advising in Urban High Schools***

“...A vast body of research demonstrates that racially and economically marginalized students face multifaceted and intersecting barriers to attaining the information and support necessary to successfully navigate applying to college....

A promising intervention that seeks to expand the capacity of school counselors involves positioning “near-peer advisors” to support students. Near-peers share the demographic and educational background of the students they serve, and have successfully navigated the college enrollment process themselves. Some of the nation’s largest urban school districts are now employing near-peer advisors to support college-going for historically marginalized students, and seeing gains in college enrollment....

By acting as holistic cultural guides through unfamiliar territory, we find near-peers provide three distinctive resources for historically marginalized students in urban schools:

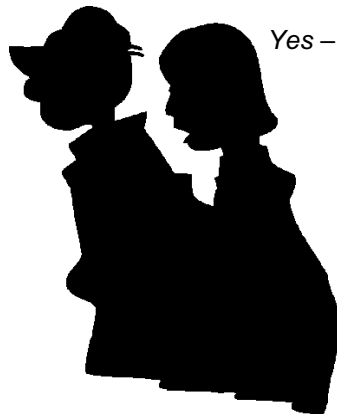
- > they expand the capacity of the counseling office to individually walk students through the bureaucratic maze of the college application process;
- > they offer emotional support that school staff are often unable to, normalizing the complexity that historically marginalized students encounter when they apply to college; and,
- > near-peers serve as consistent and credible role models of postsecondary success. ...”

Here are some recent resources on this topic:

- >***Combining MTSS and Community-Based Mentoring Programs***
- >***Integrated School-Based Mentoring.***
- >***Starting a School-Based Mentoring Program: An Evidence-Based Implementation Guide.***
- >***Effective Strategies for Scaling Near-Peer Mentoring Programs.***
- >***Supports for College Access of Underrepresented Students: Mentor–Mentee Relationship Quality***
- >***How a Community Engagement Model of Near-Peer Counseling Impacts Student***
- >***Mentors’ College Outcomes.***
- >***A Three-Tiered Mentorship Approach for Supporting High School Students Interested in STEM Careers.***
- >***College Mentors for High School Students***

For more on this, see our Center Quick Find on ***Transition to College***

*So you say that my peer-mentor has been through what will be happening to me?*



*Yes – and lived long enough to be able to warn you!*

## **For discussion and interchange:**

### **>About Social Anxiety, Social Participation and Identity Formation**

Occasional anxiety is a normal and expected part of development. However, anxiety becomes a significant mental health concern when it is persistent, intense, and interferes with a student's learning, social relationships, and everyday functioning. As with all mental health concerns that affect learning and development, schools must be prepared to play an active role in preventing, identifying, and addressing anxiety-related problems.

Social anxiety involves much more than shyness or occasional discomfort in social situations. It is characterized by an intense fear of negative evaluation, embarrassment, or rejection, which can lead students to avoid social interactions, classroom participation, and extracurricular activities. When social anxiety is disruptive, students may display negative cognitions (e.g., negative self-talk, fear of judgment), behaviors (e.g., avoidance, withdrawal), and emotions (e.g., distress, low confidence).

Left unaddressed, social anxiety can undermine social participation and contribute to negative self-identity, isolation from peers, and reduced engagement in learning. Good practice calls for providing effective student/learning supports that promote emotional safety, encourage positive peer interactions, build social competence, and strengthen students' sense of self-worth. Supporting students with social anxiety is not only about reducing distress – it is about fostering belonging, confidence, and meaningful participation in school life.

Here's an excerpt from a recent article on the topic:

#### ***Relations Between Social Anxiety and Identity Formation Among Adolescents: Social Participation and Self-Esteem as Resilience Resources***

"...Can adolescents develop a clear and stable identity while experiencing social anxiety? How do external and internal factors moderate these relations? Can social participation and self-esteem act as resilience resources? ...

Adolescents' social participation refers to the nature and extent of engagement in age-appropriate social activities and peer interactions. In fact, social experiences are fundamental to identity formation, giving adolescents explore and refine their self-concept through peer interactions and engagement in diverse social contexts, contributing to the processes of self-discovery and social learning that are integral to the formation of a coherent identity. Social participation can be a buffer against the harmful effects of social anxiety during adolescence, including its detrimental impact on academic achievement....

As expected, social participation was a significant protective factor, moderating youth-reported social anxiety's links to commitment and reconsideration. Adolescents with medium and high levels of social participation better maintained identity commitment despite anxiety. These findings suggest different coping mechanisms play a role in identity formation....

The findings offer practical insights for interventions targeting adolescents.

- >First, promoting social participation through school initiatives, such as study groups, afterschool sports activities, or engaging consistently with peers, might mitigate the negative effect of social anxiety on identity formation.  
However, promoting social participation is especially challenging for adolescents with high social anxiety, as fear and avoidance often interfere with their ability to engage. Therefore, increasing participation may first require therapeutic support, such as exposure-based interventions, social skills training, or structured peer-group interventions, to facilitate social engagement.
- >Second, findings suggest strong self-esteem buffers the negative effects of social anxiety on identity formation, making it crucial to prioritize self-esteem interventions in mental health and educational programs.
- >Third, because adolescents may not always share their internal experiences, while parents may focus on observable behaviors, it is vital to tailor interventions based on reports from both youth and parents to ensure alignment with each family member's perspective. Intake and treatment planning should involve both informants to provide a comprehensive understanding and match the adolescent's unique needs....

Understanding how internal distress interacts with social participation and self-esteem can inform the design of school-based and community programs that promote resilience, autonomy, and a stable sense of self among adolescents facing social and emotional challenges. These findings may guide policy aimed at preventing and addressing youth anxiety, supporting adolescent well-being and societal welfare...."

## **For discussion and interchange:**

### **>Addressing Social Anxiety, Social Participation, and Identity Formation**

As emphasized above, social anxiety, participation difficulties, and identity-related struggles can be significant barriers to both learning and teaching. When unaddressed, they undermine engagement, belonging, and healthy development. These concerns cannot be resolved through instruction alone or relegated to isolated mental health services; they require a comprehensive system of student and learning supports.

Conceptualizing supports along a continuum helps schools organize strategies to prevent problems, respond early to emerging concerns, and provide intensive assistance when needed – while keeping students connected to daily classroom and school experiences. The aim is not merely to reduce symptoms, but to build schools in which every student has a supported pathway to participation, belonging, and positive identity development. Below is a continuum of strategies for addressing these concerns.

## **A Continuum of Student and Learning Supports**

### ***Universal Prevention and Promotion*** (All Students)

Focus is on creating emotionally safe learning environments that promote participation, belonging, and confidence.

Key strategies include:

- Fostering classroom climates that reduce fear of embarrassment and normalize mistakes as part of learning
- Scaffolding social participation schoolwide through flexible formats (e.g., defined roles, scripts or sentence starters, structured turn-taking, small-group and cooperative learning with clear expectations, and gradual opt-in opportunities)
- Integrating identity-affirming curriculum and activities so students see their cultures, experiences, and identities reflected and valued
- Embedding social-emotional learning (SEL) that builds self-awareness, acceptance, self-regulation, and peer respect (e.g., normalizing anxiety as a human experience; teaching coping strategies; promoting empathy and perspective-taking)
- Preventing social exclusion through positive school climate initiatives and bullying prevention efforts

### ***Targeted Early Intervention*** (Students Beginning to Experience Difficulties)

Focus is on reengaging students whose anxiety interferes with participation by interrupting cycles of avoidance and withdrawal before patterns become entrenched.

Key strategies include:

- Classroom accommodations that reduce participation barriers while underlying concerns are addressed
- Small-group supports focused on understanding social anxiety, reshaping unhelpful thinking, and building social confidence, coping skills, and peer interaction
- Mentoring and relational supports, including trusted adult connections, peer mentoring, or buddy systems
- Check-in/check-out processes to monitor progress, reinforce success, and plan next steps
- Structured, low-pressure participation opportunities with coaching and reflection (e.g., gradual and supported exposure, rehearsal of real school situations)
- Supported participation in school life, such as clubs, teams, service roles, and leadership opportunities
- Family-school collaboration to promote consistent encouragement and shared strategies across settings

### ***Intensive, Individualized Support*** (A Few Students)

Focus is on addressing persistent, impairing social anxiety and identity-related distress that significantly interferes with learning, relationships, or daily functioning.

Key strategies include:

- Individualized support plans that systematically reduce barriers and gradually increase participation
- Explicit attention to identity-based stressors, including those related to race, culture, language, gender identity, discrimination, or trauma
- Individual or intensive small-group therapeutic interventions
- Coordinated care among educators, school-based mental health staff, families, and community providers
- Careful transition planning (e.g., new classes, grades, or schools) to prevent regression
- Temporary accommodations linked to longer-term goals for engagement and independence
- Focused work on negative self-concept and emotional distress

### **Key Principles Across the System**

Through a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, schools can prevent social disengagement, strengthen self-esteem, and ensure meaningful social participation for all students.

- Emphasize engagement and participation, not symptom reduction alone
- Address school and classroom conditions that contribute to anxiety and disengagement
- Build competence, confidence, and positive identity development
- Use existing school resources strategically and coherently, rather than relying on fragmented or add-on services

For more about addressing these concerns:

- [\*\*>Addressing barriers to learning: In the classroom and schoolwide\*\*](#)
- [\*\*>School based mental health interventions targeting anxiety\*\*](#)
- [\*\*>Culturally responsive intervention for Black adolescents with social anxiety\*\*](#)
- [\*\*>About Social Anxiety and Schools\*\*](#)
- [\*\*>Students and Anxiety Problems\*\*](#)
- [\*\*>About Anxiety, Resilience, and Schools\*\*](#)

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

- [\*\*>>Increasing Engagement and Retention Among At-Risk Youth in Police-Led Mentorship Programs\*\*](#)
- [\*\*>>Do Teachers Feel Active Shooter Drills Work?\*\*](#)
- [\*\*>>The Relationship Between School Connectedness and Bullying in U.S. High School Students\*\*](#)
- [\*\*>>Characteristics and Turnaround Strategies of Schools Identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement\*\*](#)
- [\*\*>>What can Implementation Science tell us about scaling interventions in school settings?\*\*](#)
- [\*\*>>Academic Stress Interventions in High Schools\*\*](#)
- [\*\*>>Mental Health and Contraceptive Use in Adolescence\*\*](#)

## 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>

- 4/22 Talking to kids about mental health
- 4/22 Maximizing Your Assistant Principals and Instructional Coaches
- 4/22 How to de-escalate children in distress
- 4/23 Homeless youth: scenarios and solutions
- 4/27 Strengthening educator growth
- 4/28 Supporting immigrants students
- 4/29 Practical Considerations in the Ethics of AI
- 4/30 Building powerful prevention partnerships /
- 5/5 Understanding social anxiety
- 5/6 Building resilient students
- 5/6 Designing Instruction That Works: Targeted Scaffolds for Multilingual Learners
- 5/7 Support to military connected students
- 5/14 Engaging Readers, Strengthening Partnerships, and Building Community
- 5/18 Understanding school avoidance
- 5/20 Teaching with Precision: Using Microlearning to Move Students Toward Success
- 5/26 Understanding eating disorders
- 6/17 Strong Teacher-Student Relationships
- 6/17 Coaching for Change: Providing Tier 1 Classroom and Behavior Management Feedback

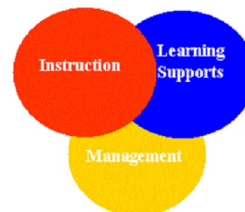
*How Learning Happens* (Edutopia's series of videos explores guiding all students, regardless of their developmental starting points, to become engaged learners).  
*Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth* (Webinar recording)

## The Case for Systemic Redesign of Student/Learning Supports

Fundamental, systemic redesign is urgently needed for how schools address factors interfering with learning and teaching. Immediate action is essential to move beyond crisis driven responses toward a cohesive, proactive, and equitable system of student/learning supports.

For guidance and resources on how to pursue this transformation, see the  
>*National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*.

***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.***



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## To Listserv Participants

We hope you will share this resource with others who may find it helpful.

And 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.)

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

**Send resources, ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

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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)

### **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 and now is named the *Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports*.