

(4/8/26) This continuing education resource is from the national
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA

Featured

(1) Social media and the young: What should we do?

(2) Social Media as a Behavioral Activation Tool

(3) Students falling through the cracks: What's the data?

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:

>Social media and the young: What should we do?

In many places, social media is a pervasive part of kids' daily existence and development. Its rapid expansion brings both meaningful opportunities and significant risks.

It's imperative that parents, educators, administrators, pediatricians, and policymakers work together to encourage and supervise appropriate use, intentionally support opportunities for positive development, and actively guard against potential harms.

The pressing question that needs answering is not whether social media should be part of young people's lives, but how to guide its use in ways that promote well being, safety, and healthy development.

Pros & Cons of Social Media for Kids (summary from AI)

PROS

Connection: Helps kids stay in touch with friends and family.

Self expression: Encourages creativity through posts, art, music, and videos.

Learning & interests: Exposure to educational content/shared interests (hobbies, causes).

Social skills: Can support communication and collaboration, especially for shy kids.

CONS

Mental health risks: Can contribute to anxiety, low self esteem, or comparison pressure.

Distraction: Takes time away from homework, sleep, and offline activities.

Cyberbullying: Increased risk of harassment or negative interactions.

Privacy & safety: Exposure to inappropriate content or misuse of personal information.

SOME GUIDANCE

Guidance has come from various sources. The following guidelines synthesize recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, and the U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health.

Healthy Social Media & Screen Use Guidelines by Age Group

Infants & Toddlers (0–2 years)

The goal at this stage is to support brain development through real world interaction. Early screen exposure displaces critical caregiver interaction essential for cognitive and language development.

Guidance:

- Avoid social media and most screen use (except video chatting with loved ones).
- Prioritize face to face interaction, language exposure, and play.
- Adults should avoid using phones during caregiving routines.

Preschoolers (3–5 years)

At this stage, fostering social-emotional development and self regulation require guided participation and discussion.

Guidance:

- No independent social media use
- Use screens sparingly and only with adult co-viewing.
- Choose high quality, age appropriate, educational content.
- Begin conversations about kindness, emotions, and safe behavior online.

Elementary School–Age (6–10 years)

At this stage, kids levels of judgment and impulse control call for building digital literacy (the skills and understanding needed to use digital and social media thoughtfully, safely, and responsibly) and balance (keeping social media use in healthy proportion to other essential aspects of life).

Guidance:

- Social media use should be very limited and supervised.
- Emphasize balance: homework, sleep, physical activity, and offline friendships come first.
- Use parental controls and shared passwords.
- Begin teaching privacy, respectful communication, and how to handle mean behavior online.

Tweens (11–12 years)

At this stage, the goal is to lay a foundation for independent decision making (e.g., helping tweens become less susceptible to peer influence and social approval.)

Guidance:

- Carefully assess readiness before allowing social media accounts.
- Create a family media plan with clear rules and check ins.
- Limit night time use; devices should be off before bedtime.
- Actively discuss comparison, peer pressure, and unrealistic online portrayals.

Teenagers (13–18 years)

At this stage, the goal is to support autonomy while protecting mental health.

Guidance emphasizes trust, skill building, and self reflection:

- Encourage mindful, purposeful use rather than constant scrolling.
- Discuss how algorithms, likes, and influencers affect emotions and behavior.
- Monitor for warning signs (sleep problems, anxiety, withdrawal, academic decline).
- Encourage “media breaks” and offline coping strategies for stress.
- Keep communication open—avoid punitive monitoring that discourages honesty.

Across All Ages: Core Principles

- Quality over quantity matters most.
- Ongoing communication is more protective than rigid time limits.
- Adult modeling of healthy media habits strongly shapes children’s behavior.

References

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2025). *Screen time guidelines*.

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2026). *A child friendly digital world: AAP releases new media recommendations*.

American Academy of Pediatrics. (n.d.). *Kids & screen time: How to use the 5 C’s of media guidance*

American Psychological Association. (2023). *Health advisory on social media use in adolescence*.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2025). *Social media and youth mental health: Surgeon General’s advisory*

For more on this see our Center resources

>[*Social networking and peer relationships*](#)

>[*The Good and Bad of Social Networking use by Children and Adolescents*](#)

>[*About Supporting Those Who Seem Depressed*](#)

Also see:

>Abrams, Z. (2023). *Why young brains are especially vulnerable to social media*. American Psychological Association.

For further discussion and interchange:

>[*Social Media as a Behavioral Activation Tool, Conferring Possible Protection Against Suicidal Thoughts Among Adolescents*](#) (by Dreier & colleagues)

“...One rewarding activity that is both highly accessible and particularly rewarding for adolescents is social media use. Adolescents highly value social feedback and reward, which is a core element of social media... Social media also capitalizes on other important aspects of adolescent development, including facilitating social support, identity exploration, and independent learning/exploration...”

Engaging with social media is a primarily cognitive task, as opposed to walking downtown to meet a friend, which involves a much heavier load of physical effort (in addition to the cognitive effort of planning this event in advance). Using social media may, in other words, be low-hanging fruit in treating depression – helping to reverse the social withdrawal feedback loop as a first step to engaging in more effortful rewarding activities. Since social media is now ubiquitous among adolescents it is also a tool that could be implemented for nearly all adolescents, not just the small percentage who can access formal therapy....

It is possible that using social media in ways that elicit positive mood decreases risk for suicidal thoughts. It is also possible that when adolescents are not experiencing suicidal thoughts, they are more likely to experience positive mood on social media...

Framing social media use as a positive tool for mental health may not be appropriate for all adolescents. Other important considerations may be what adolescents are doing while using social

media and the need for guidance around how to most appropriately use social media so that adolescents derive benefit. For example, an adolescent who has lost motivation to see their friends may be more willing to comment on their social media post as a first step. Such a first step may be a helpful stepping stone for this adolescent to reestablish their “real-life” social connections, which are strong protective factors against depression and suicide...”

Beyond the Likes - Social Media, Mental Health, and You

The AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health is presenting its second annual *Beyond the Likes Virtual Youth Forum*! Beyond the Likes is a free interactive event designed for young people (ages 14-19) across the country. Beyond the Likes is designed to empower young people to navigate the digital world with confidence, engage in meaningful conversations with peers and experts, and gain practical tools for their digital lives.

For discussion and interchange:

>Students falling through the cracks: What's the data?

On 2/5/26 we sent and posted a commentary entitled *Facing and Addressing Realities Before More Students Fall Through the Cracks*

It begins as follows:

National indicators make it painfully clear: a substantial proportion of students are not doing well academically, developmentally, or in terms of engagement. While the prevailing response pursues this as primarily an instructional problem, the reality is broader and deeper. What we are witnessing is a systemic failure, not an instructional one.

Schools cannot continue relying on the same marginalized and fragmented approaches to student and learning supports. The data point toward an urgent need for fundamental, systemic changes in how schools (and the communities that work with them) address barriers to learning and teaching. This means building on existing strengths while also de-implementing practices that impede progress toward a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports....

Response from a Colleague

W. Edwards Deming is famously quoted as saying – *In God we trust. All others bring data.* So it is well within that tradition that we received the following:

“This is not meant to be hostile scrutiny, but I think I would really like to learn more of the details behind some of the claims you made! Could you tell me more about your citations/sources for these statements:

- >a substantial proportion of students are not doing well academically, developmentally, or in terms of engagement
- >Many students whose learning was disrupted during the pandemic have advanced in grade level without recovering lost opportunities
- >Schools need a schoolwide learning supports component that...is fully integrated—not marginalized—in school improvement policy and practice.

In addition, did these research projects ever include students/students' voices in their analysis? Thank you very much for your time, and as always it was good to read this update even in spite of the reality it summarizes.”

Center Reply

Thanks for your email. Here is a quick response to your questions. Hope it helps.

1. “A substantial proportion of students are not doing well academically, developmentally, or in terms of engagement.”

Evidence: Large-scale national data from the Nation’s Report Card (NAEP) shows declines across multiple subjects, especially for lower-performing students. In 2024 NAEP science, 38% of 8th graders scored below Basic, the highest percentage since 2009; only 31% scored Proficient.

Widespread stagnation or decline in achievement is documented in analyses of national NAEP trends, with long-term stagnation in reading (about 30–31% proficiency) and recent declines in math.

The State of the American Student 2024 report found students experienced profound academic, social, emotional, and mental health effects, with many not progressing developmentally or emotionally at expected levels.

2. “Many students whose learning was disrupted during the pandemic have advanced in grade level without recovering lost opportunities.”

Evidence: The Education Recovery Scorecard (Harvard–Stanford–Dartmouth) shows that as of 2024–2025, students remain nearly half a grade level behind in both math and reading, with many falling further behind since 2022 – yet they have been promoted to the next grades.

The State of Student Learning 2025 report (Curriculum Associates) finds that five years after the pandemic, most students have not returned to pre pandemic achievement levels, and those who were already behind have fallen further behind – despite progressing through grade levels.

Brookings (2025) documents that while some math recovery has begun, reading recovery has largely stalled, and achievement gaps have widened – again suggesting that grade promotion is occurring without commensurate academic recovery.

3. “Schools need a schoolwide learning supports component that is fully integrated – not marginalized – in school improvement policy and practice.”

Evidence extrapolated from our work over the years – see Adelman & Taylor and related scholarship.

Literature summaries in Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide and other Center documents underscore that marginalized support systems prevent schools from effectively addressing learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

Our work across the country stresses that school improvement efforts are incomplete without a third component – a systematic, schoolwide student/learning supports component that is integrated directly alongside instruction and management. Operationalizing the third component involves unifying existing student/learning supports and developing them, over time, into a comprehensive and equitable system and ensuring they are a core part of school operations.

4. “Did these research projects include student voice?”

Short answer: Some did; others did not.

Large-scale assessment reports (NAEP, i Ready, national scorecard studies) are not designed to incorporate student voice directly. (NAEP, Education Recovery Scorecard, Curriculum Associates i Ready datasets, and most national learning loss analyses do not gather student qualitative input; they rely on standardized tests and district-level datasets.)

However, several complementary research projects do include student perspectives.

About Research including student voice:

A 2024–2025 study (Journal of Educational Change) involving 1,751 middle and high school students found strong links between student voice practices and engagement, agency, attendance, and grades.

A 2024 systematic review (Oxford Review of Education) examined 25 years of student voice and teacher voice research, documenting growing empowerment of students as active participants in research—not just data sources.

Penn State’s 2025 study on “amplifying student voices” examined student voice practices in four urban schools, highlighting conditions required for meaningful participation.

Brookings (2025) conducted intergenerational research (students, families, educators) on involving students in policy and school governance decisions.

References we drew from:

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2018). *Improving school improvement*.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2018). *Addressing barriers to learning: In the classroom and schoolwide*.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2024). *Transforming student/learning supports & enhancing equity of opportunity: A journey of lessons learned*.

Conner, J., Mitra, D.L., Holquist, S.E., & Boat, A. (2025). *How teachers’ student voice practices affect student engagement and achievement: Exploring choice, receptivity, and responsiveness to student voice as moderators*. Journal of Educational Change, 26, 89–118.

Curriculum Associates. (2025). *State of student learning 2025*.

Gillett Swan, J., & Baroutsis, A. (2024). *Student voice and teacher voice in educational research: A systematic review of 25 years of literature from 1995–2020*. Oxford Review of Education, 50(4), 533–551.

Harvard Magazine. (2025). *How to overcome pandemic learning losses*.

Kuhfeld, M., & Lewis, K. (2025). *Five years after COVID 19 hit: Test data converge on math gains, stalled reading recovery*. Brookings Institution.

Lake, R., et al. (2024). *The state of the American student: Fall 2024*. Center on Reinventing Public Education.

Mitra, D. (2025). *New study identifies key conditions for amplifying student voices in schools*. Penn State University.

National Assessment Governing Board. (2025). *Nation’s Report Card shows declines in 8th grade science and 12th grade math and reading*.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Report on the condition of education 2024*.

Weber, J. (2025). *The nation’s report card is out: Here’s what the results tell us about America’s schools*. Manhattan Institute.

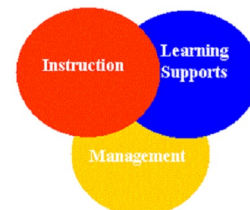
Moving Forward to Fill the Cracks

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.



>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

- >>Relations Between Social Anxiety and Identity Formation Among Adolescents: Social Participation and Self-Esteem as Resilience Resources
- >>The evolution of out of school time
- >>Individual Education Plans in the Age of AI
- >>Improving school safety (podcast)
- >>Resiliency in Disaster Behavioral Health (podcast)
- >>State CCDF Policies and Child Care Access for Families of Children With Disabilities
- >>More Than 1 in 4 Children & Youth in Foster Care Have a Special Health Care Need
- >>Disruptive Behavioral Disorders in Youth: Latest Understanding (2024–2026)
- >>Criteria and Rubric for a Best Practice Approach to Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

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>

- 4/8 Family engagement
- 4/9 Transforming school culture through student voice
- 4/9 Managing AI in schools
- 4/14 Inclusion: what is it and why does it matter?
- 4/15 Multi Tiered System of Support in Action
- 4/15 Communicating with your child's IEP team
- 4/15 Supporting Grief-Sensitive Classrooms
- 4/20 Successful advocacy and collaboration
- 4/20 Strengths based approach for autistic students
- 4/21 Students learn a critical skill-letting others know what you bring to the table
- 4/22 Talking to kids about mental health
- 4/22 How to de-escalate children in distress
- 4/27 Strengthening educator growth
- 4/29 Practical Considerations in the Ethics of AI
- 5/5 Understanding social anxiety
- 5/7 Support to military connected students
- 5/18 Understanding school avoidance
- 5/26 Understanding eating disorders

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)

What's making you so sad?



Since you grounded me from using my phone all I can do is stare at it sadly.

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.