

(7/10/24) **This continuing education resource is from the national  
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

## Featured

**>What's being done about youth who have disconnected from school?**

Also for discussion:

**>About "at-risk" youth**

**>Showing and Receiving Kindness: An Example of a Natural Opportunity for SEL**

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:**

**>What's being done about youth who have disconnected from school?**

A member of this listserv reported reading a newspaper article entitled *State Could Lose "Disconnected Kids"* that reported "more than a half million CA youth are 'disconnected', meaning they were not in school, employed, or looking for a job." In reference to this, Ted Lempert, the President of *Children Now*, is quoted as stating that the situation is "literally life or death".

This is a nationwide problem. Our colleague calls for greater attention to finding and engaging young people who are disconnected from school and suggests this would be a good topic for discussion by those who read the Community of Practice *Practitioner*. Such a discussion, for example, could "include strategies to re-engage these youth, what options are there for them in preparing for the world of work, job training, the military, returning to school, and what schools can do offer credit recovery options, or other accommodations to get them back on track."

Here are excerpts from a few articles to inform the discussion:

From: ***Expanding the Evidence Base for Reconnecting Opportunity Youth to Pathways to Thriving***

"...The challenges that opportunity youth face are not singular. They arise from an inequitable access to resources and opportunities, maintained by oppressive factors such as racism, economic injustice, and under-resourced schools. Within this context, many schools and youth-serving organizations lack the funding and resources to provide necessary supports, such as career exploration to young people who are no longer in school or are unemployed. The public school system is often one of the last places where disconnected youth will attempt to reconnect, but even the public school system has eligibility requirements that may exclude some opportunity youth...

We identified the following common and promising strategies that opportunity youth-serving programs currently employ: youth-adult partnerships and mentoring, reengagement, paid opportunities for work-based learning, and the integration wraparound services within programs....

Reengagement involves staff, typically at a school or dropout recovery center, identifying young people who have stopped attending school and then reaching out to those students through letters and phone calls and by visiting students' homes. Staff establish a connection with young people to learn more about their interests and goals and then work to identify an appropriate

placement (e.g., traditional high school, alternative educational setting, or high school equivalency program) to help them complete their high school degree and prepare for postsecondary opportunities or a career....

Providing wraparound services is a common strategy employed by comprehensive programs that serve opportunity youth and is part of a wholistic approach to mitigating the numerous barriers that opportunity youth face. One such program is Job Corps, a nationwide residential career training program... Job Corps provides meals, housing, clothing, a living allowance, medical care, and a childcare allotment to support young people while they are receiving education and job training. These services remove some of the barriers to participation, and the residential nature of the Job Corps program provides the participants with a built-in community to support their growth and success...

Practitioners, policy makers, and communities must grapple with how to serve the large number of opportunity youth who face a multitude of barriers to reconnecting and staying connected. Future evaluations must therefore draw on the expertise of practitioners and opportunity youth themselves to help identify more nuanced program models designed to meet the needs of opportunity youth facing the greatest number of barriers to participation. This will require research-practitioner partnerships with a focus on equity....”

From: *An Analysis of Programs Serving Young People Not Connected to School or Work*

“...programs seek to serve the diverse group of young people who are disconnected from school and work by providing a wide range of services to support the diverse needs of the young people who come through their doors.....

Many of the practices identified as essential to working with these young people by experts interviewed for this project were common. These include youth development approaches that focus on positive adult-youth relationships, career pathways approaches, and providing comprehensive supports.....

The compendium finds that programs seek to serve the diverse group of young people who are disconnected from school and work by providing many services as part of their core practices, but also offering many more services on an as-needed basis. Of course, a program alone cannot address the issues that lead to disconnection or mitigate all disparities in society. Systemic challenges exist beyond the reach of programs, including structural barriers and discrimination in the education system and labor market and social determinants of health. However, the wide scope of these programs suggests that they attempt to be as comprehensive as possible.

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From: *Gang Involvement*

“...When youth feel disconnected from family, school, community, or future work possibilities, they may view gangs as viable opportunities for support, respect, protection, or income. While youth involved in gangs comprise only a small portion of the adolescent population, they are disproportionately involved in violent crime—both as perpetrators and victims. Youth involved in gangs also are more likely to drop out of school, abuse substances, engage in high risk sexual behavior, and experience other long-term problems such as employment instability. The effects go beyond those directly involved, as well. Communities also can be affected in terms of reduced quality of life, increased crime, families moving out of neighborhoods, and economic costs, e.g., losses in property values, local businesses, and tax revenue...”

### **A Note on Working with a Community Wide Collaborative to Address such Problems**

Schools can do their job better when they are an integral and positive part of the community. Formal efforts to create school-community collaboration involve building formal relationships to connect school and community resources. Connecting school-home-community is essential to reengaging with disconnected youth and their families and addressing many other barriers to learning and teaching. In the long run, the aims are to strengthen students, schools, families, and neighborhoods.

The range of community entities whose missions overlap that of the local schools include county and municipal agencies, mutual support/self-help groups, service clubs and philanthropic organizations, youth organizations, community based organizations, faith institutions, legal assistance groups, ethnic associations, artists and cultural institutions, businesses/corporations, unions, media, family members, local residents, senior citizens groups, and more. Districts/schools need to consider outreach to the full range of resources that exist, especially in neighborhoods where poverty reigns.

Our Center has identified four types of activities that school/district need to pursue in enhancing community connections:

- (1) outreaching to a broad range of community entities,
- (2) developing immediate links and connections with community resources that can help fill critical intervention gaps at schools,
- (3) establishing an effective operational infrastructure for a school-community collaborative
- (4) braiding and redeploing school and community resources where feasible to help with system development.

For a guide in undertaking these activities, see

>Chapter 14. “Enhancing School and Community Collaboration” in  
*Improving School Improvement*

**Community of practice colleagues** – For sharing in the *Practitioner*,  
let us know how local schools and communities working to reengage disconnected youth.  
Send to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

### **About Labeling Youth “At-Risk”**

Definitions of “at-risk” students vary. One common denominator is a concern about providing supports for students who are viewed as likely to become school dropouts. The focus is mainly on learning, behavior, and emotional problems not attributable to diagnosable disorders/disabilities. A special concern is with risk-taking and illegal behaviors that can directly interfere with schooling and healthy development and those that pose life-threatening dangers to self and others.

Use of the term “at-risk” is controversial. The intent is to ameliorate problems. However, as with all labels that convey a negative quality, it also can exacerbate problems (e.g., generate self-fulfilling prophecies, stigma). Another major concern is that the term focuses the locus of the problem as being within the student. The reality, of course, is that many problems experienced by students are caused by external factors. (William Ryan famously cautioned against “blaming the victim”.) From a developmental perspective, it is best to understand human problems in terms of a broad range of external as well as internal causal factors and the transactions among factors. From this perspective, the many factors can be grouped as neighborhood, family, school, peer, and individual conditions. For schools, it is useful to think about risk factors as barriers to learning and teaching and to focus on how to address them. See

>*How a Mindset Shift Can Help Solve Special Education Misidentification*

**For discussion and interchange:**

**>Showing and Receiving Kindness: An Example of a Natural Opportunity for SEL**

From: *Measuring early adolescents' prosocial behavior toward diverse others*

"Prosocial behavior refers to voluntary acts aimed to benefit others (e.g., helping, sharing). Prosocial behaviors are not only indicators of positive youth development, moral development, social and psychological well-being, but also important indicators of kindness, compassion, and social harmony...

Fostering intergroup prosocial behavior is important because it not only promotes prosocial behaviors toward dissimilar others, but also promotes receiving more prosocial behaviors from dissimilar others. Thus, intergroup prosocial behaviors can contribute to society through the promotion of harmonious relations across different groups..."

Each day in the classroom and around the school students interact with their peers and various adults in formal and informal ways. Every encounter, positive and negative, represents a potential learning experience. All school staff, and especially teachers, can use the encounters to capitalize on many opportunities to enhance social-emotional learning. For more on this, see

**>Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH**

**>About Promoting Social Emotional Development at School:  
"Kernels" and Natural Opportunities**

**Is this topic 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)

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

**>>Reconnecting Disconnected Youth: Examining the Development of Productive Engagement**

**>>A Path to Inclusiveness – Peer Support Groups as a Resource for Change**

**>>Technology-Based Interventions for Preventing Youth Violence: A Systematic Review of Programs, Tools, and Evidence**

**>>Enhancing School Appeal: How Experiential Marketing Influences Perceived School Attractiveness in the Urban Context**

**>>Career and Technical Education's Unequal Dividends for High School Students: The Stratification of a New Generation**

**>>Practical Strategies for Teaching with AI**

**>>How a Mindset Shift Can Help Solve Special Education Misidentification**

**What's the problem?**



**The teacher gave a D- to the report I used ChatGPT to produce.**

## A Few Upcoming Webinars

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

- 7/11 Managing conflict on interdisciplinary teams
- 7/11 Enhancing School Safety Using Behavioral Threat Assessment (part three)
- 7/16 Leadership in Education: Building Collaborative Teams and Driving Innovation
- 7/17 Principals, Lead Stronger in the New School Year
- 7/18 Culturally informed crisis support
- 7/23 Stress management and resiliency training
- 7/25 Organizational commitment to a culture of care
- 8/13 Administrator Basics for Supporting English Learners with Disabilities
- 8/15 Conversations with youth
- 8/20 Welcoming students through transitions
- 8/22 Compassionate leadership
- 9/19 Empowering grassroots mentoring
- 9/26 Organizational culture
- 10/17 Wellness and resilience

>**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**

For more webinars, go to the our Center's links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

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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!**

**Send to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

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*I'm not arguing; I'm just explaining why I'm right.*



Schools committed to the success of all children must be redesigned so that teachers, student support staff, and others at the school can help students as early as is feasible when they become aware of a behavior, emotional, learning, and/or physical problem. Such a redesign can minimize the impact of such problems and appropriately stem the tide of referrals for out of class specialized assistance (e.g., mental health services) and special education.

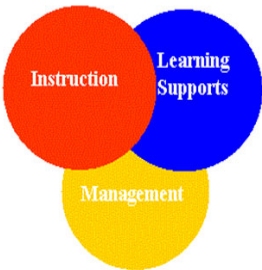
Through the **National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports**, our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

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 guide:

>***Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions***

Send all info and requests to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)



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**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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**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.**

**THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER**

Who Are We? Recently renamed the Center for MH in Schools and Student/Learning Supports, 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.