

(7/8/26) This continuing education resource is from the national
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA

Featured

(1) Implementing school improvements

(2) Does recess play an important role in child/youth development?

And, as always, you will find

(3) Links to more resources

**This community of practice Practitioner is designed
for a screen bigger than an phone.**

For discussion and interchange:

>Implementing school improvements

We are receiving an increasing number of requests for help related to the challenges of implementing new practices and sustaining school improvement efforts. Here is a recent one:

"I recently found your publication, **Implementation Science and School Improvement**. It's wonderful! I learned a lot about large system implementation. I am a retired middle school principal and "found" implementation science a few years ago (unfortunately, after I retired). I certainly wish I knew this before I retired If you know of other resources..., I would appreciate receiving them. Thank you for doing this work!"

Center Comments: One of the Center's Quick Finds is devoted to

**>Systemic Change, and the Diffusion of Innovation in Schools
(the Implementation Problem)**

Another focuses on:

>Change Agents/Organizational Facilitators

(Note: the **Quick Find menu** has other related topics that have links to relevant resources.)

Every day there are calls for improving schooling and sustaining effective innovations. Such calls coincide with efforts to translate research into practice and policy. Most of the advocacy involves implementing major interventions, and some advocates stress the need for fundamental systemic changes.

In this context, decades ago the wise and eminent Seymour Sarason cautioned:

*Good ideas and missionary zeal are sometimes enough to change the thinking
of individuals; they are rarely, if ever, effective in changing complicated
organizations (like the school) with traditions, dynamics, and goals of their own.*

The complexities of making school improvements and implementing systemic changes are well documented. Schools are institutions; schools have a culture. Implications of these realities for change have been widely discussed.

Currently, the rapidly growing fields of improvement science and implementation science are generating a wealth of literature relevant to school improvement. Although these fields have developed largely separate literatures, increasing attention is being paid to their complementary and intertwined nature. And it is time to recognize the roots they share in intervention theory and research.

In the 1980s and 1990s, we made our first efforts to capture facets of work designed to improve interventions in psychology and education. In the years following, our R&D efforts have focused on specific aspects of school improvement and implementation, and we have come to appreciate just how intertwined interventions for improvement and implementation efforts are. And we have shared this in a variety of documents.

In addition to *Implementation Science and School Improvement*, we recently prepared:

> *Transforming Student/Learning Supports & Enhancing Equity of Opportunity:
A Journey of Lessons Learned*

This brief monograph aims to stimulate transformative thinking about addressing barriers to learning and teaching and enhancing equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school and beyond. It summarizes our journey as we have struggled to find better ways in classrooms and schoolwide for schools to ameliorate learning, behavior, and emotional problems. It presents research analyses and prototypes for transforming student and learning supports, as well as lessons learned from trailblazing efforts at local, district, regional, and state levels. It also emphasizes the necessity of understanding the intervention complexities involved not only in improving practices but in implementing transformative systemic changes.

Other Center documents on this topic include:

- > *Implementation Science and Complex School Changes*
- > *Bringing New Prototypes into Practice: Dissemination, Implementation, and Facilitating Transformation*
- > *Systemic Change and Empirically-Supported Practices: The Implementation Problem*
- > *Implementation Science and Innovative Transformation of Schools and Communities*
- > *New Initiatives: Considerations Related to Planning, Implementing, Sustaining, and Going-to-Scale*

As all this work underscores, implementation scholars increasingly emphasize that successful scale-up is not merely a matter of faithful replication; it requires continual adaptation to local contexts while preserving the core features that make an innovation effective.

We, of course, try to keep up with events in the field. Here are a few recent resources we have noted.

- > *What can Implementation Science tell us about scaling interventions in school settings?*
- > *A School's Guide to Implementation*
- > *Framework for Implementing Improvement Science in a School District to Support Institutionalized Improvement*
- > *Implementation Science in School Mental Health: A 10-Year Progress Update and Development of a New Research Agenda*

We hope readers will share with us not only new publications, but also examples of successful school, district, and state initiatives that have addressed the challenges of implementation, sustainability, and scale-up. In turn, we will share the information with others on our listservs. Send to Ltaylor.ucla.edu.

Pooh's dilemma. Everyone agrees that this is a critical time for improving schools. Unfortunately, everyone seems so busy meeting each day's demands that too little thought is given to finding better ways. One is reminded of Christopher Robin taking Winnie-the-Pooh down the stairs with Pooh's head – **bump, bump, bumping on every step**. Pooh has come to think it is the only way to go down stairs. Still, he sometimes thinks there might be a better way if only he could stop bumping long enough to figure it out.

For discussion and interchange:

>Does recess play an important role in child/youth development?

From: *The Crucial Role of Recess in School: Policy Statement*
American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), May 11, 2026

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognized childhood as “a special, protected time, in which children must be allowed to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity.” Article 31 states, “Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities.... Children also need leisure, defined as time and space without obligations, entertainment, or stimulus, which they can choose to fill as actively or inactively as they wish.”...

Recess represents a temporary suspension of cognitive effort, which helps to maintain efficiency and concentration while managing stress, a benefit for adolescents and children. The importance of regular restorative breaks during an adult’s workday is unquestioned. For students and teachers, however, such breaks need to be codified within a highly structured curriculum. Time allotted for recess depends on several factors: state laws, district policies, and importantly, principal and teacher discretion. Recess positively impacts teaching and learning, benefitting student achievement. However, not all students experience daily recess. Schools with lower socioeconomic status and/or with a higher proportion of marginalized or minoritized students tend to offer less recess and are more likely to withhold it for academic or punitive reasons.

Generally, there are 2 competing perspectives.

>In the first, the school’s mission is to prepare the student for work in a complex, shifting, technological society and break times compete with academic time.

>In the second, a school’s responsibility is to help develop the whole child, preparing them for the intellectual rigors of adulthood and for the social, emotional, and complex societal challenges of 21st century life. Recess promotes this goal.

Recess affords a unique time for peer-to-peer engagement. Through give-and-take play, students master social integration. In this way, students collaboratively create an inclusive, positive school culture, extending from the playground to the learning environment.

In navigating peer activities at recess as well as the school environment, children and adolescents hone skills that augment academic learning, such as emotional self-control, perseverance, cooperation, communication, conflict resolution, and leadership. Such skills provide a counterbalance to stress, especially for those who have been exposed to serious adverse events. Educational settings, including recess, that promote social competence and a sense of connectedness help protect against victimization, substance use, and poor mental health outcomes...

School and district policies should emphasize the crucial role of recess breaks for the whole child and protect the time allocated for recess to ensure all students’ right to a safe, quality recess experience every day.

Center Comments: The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) provides a compelling case that recess is not a luxury but an important facet in pursuing healthy development and effective learning. The policy statement highlights the reality that students are developing human beings whose social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth are deeply interconnected.

However, from the Center’s perspective, the discussion should not be framed solely about whether recess is essential. We agree that recess helps enhance learning, development, engagement, and well-being. But the more fundamental question for discussion is:

How can schools design the entire school day to promote learning, development, well-being, and engagement?

Recess as a Natural Opportunity for Student/Learning Support

The benefits highlighted in the policy statement – stress reduction, social skill development, relationship building, emotional regulation, improved attention, and enhanced readiness for learning – are all central objectives of a school’s efforts to provide comprehensive student and learning supports.

From this perspective, recess can be viewed as contributing to:

- a universal prevention strategy,
- a protective factor that buffers stress,
- a contributor to school connectedness,
- an opportunity for social-emotional learning in real-world situations,
- a support for classroom engagement and academic success.

Unfortunately, schools often address these matters through separate initiatives and programs. Furthermore, the AAP policy notes that students attending lower-income schools and schools serving marginalized populations are less likely to have adequate recess and more likely to lose recess for disciplinary or academic reasons. As a result, students facing the greatest barriers to success at school often have the least access to a wide range of supports that could help address such adversities.

Recognizing recess as *one* of the school's natural and multifaceted opportunities that support student well-being and learning can help embed the practice into the daily fabric of school life and make better use of existing resources.

Beyond Just Protecting Recess Time

The AAP policy appropriately argues that recess should not be withheld for punishment or academic remediation. We want to add that schools must also ensure:

- the recess environment is welcoming and inclusive,
- students who are socially isolated are supported,
- bullying is addressed proactively,
- students with disabilities are fully included,
- adults are prepared to facilitate positive peer interactions without over-controlling play.

The point is that, as with all activity at school, the quality of recess is as important as its availability.

Embedding Recess into a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System of Student/Learning Supports

From our perspective, isolated initiatives tend to interfere with efforts to develop a cohesive and comprehensive approach to supporting students' well-being, engagement, connectedness, and social-emotional development. Therefore, policy for recess should be embedded in a school's overall component for providing student and learning supports. Framing recess in this way encourages schools to weave it into a unified system of supports rather than treating it as a separate activity, thereby leveraging a natural opportunity to enhance development, prevent problems, and improve learning outcomes.

Here are some Center resources that provide more on our perspective:

- > [*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*](#)
- > [*The School's Role in Ensuring Young People Are Appropriately Physically Active*](#)
- > [*About Promoting Social Emotional Development at School*](#)

The school just told me that you're demanding a new recess policy.



>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

- >>Recess Took a Break in Some Schools. A Push is On to Bring It Back
- >>Conditions of Education 2026
- >>Forms of Bystander Interventions in High School Students: The Role of Empathy, Personal Attitudes, and Peer Attitudes
- >>Does a Social and Emotional Learning Program Have the Same Effect for all Students Regardless of Their Bullying Roles?
- >>Evaluation of a Positive Psychology Intervention
- >>APA guide to navigating AI-generated advice thoughtfully and safely
- >>The Cycle of Disinvestment in Public Schools: How Public-School Criticism Drives Policy and Disinvestment
- >>Suicide Prevention in K-12 Schools: Introduction to the Special Issue

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>

- 7/8 Equity centered leadership
- 7/9 Supporting new teachers
- 7/9 How Rural Districts Are Using AI to Meet Real Needs
- 7/13 The Mindset That Unlocks Innovation in Education
- 7/14 Real world prevention that drives behavior change
- 7/15 Why change efforts stall
- 7/20 Host a Family Engagement Event on Digital Literacy and Well-Being
- 7/21 Collaborating across systems
- 7/22 Understanding Anxiety
- 7/22 Engaging youth voices to improve prevention
- 7/30 Connecting systems for effective prevention
- 7/30 Shifting environmental conditions to enhance prevention
- 8/11 Reducing Chronic Absenteeism/Improving Continued Attendance-Start of the Year
- 8/12 Strategies for Supporting New Teacher Happiness and Success
- 9/16 Rethink Classroom Management
- 9/29 Leading Teams: Building Capacity for Teacher Leaders

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*.

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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**

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**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

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.