

(8/2/23) This continuing education resource is from the national
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA

Featured

>Enhancing a positive school climate this school year begins with welcoming

>About the Role of School Engagement in Preventing School Dropout

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

For discussion and interchange:

>Enhancing a positive school climate this school year begins with welcoming

Welcoming students, their families, and staff (especially newcomers) and making sure they are adjusting well to the new school year is fundamental to creating an environment where the prevailing norm is for folks to interact positively and identify with the school and its goals.

Now is the time for planners to ensure schools have mechanisms and interventions that are ready to

- >facilitate smooth transitions and positive social interactions
- >provide personalized social support as needed
- >ensure ready access for all to essential information about the coming year
- >identify anyone who needs supports to address barriers to learning and teaching
- >involve stakeholders in decision-making and problem solving.

A welcoming and transition supportive experience begins when folks first enter the school. Here are some things we have seen at schools related to this:

1. **A NICELY IDENTIFIED WELCOMING TABLE AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE SCHOOL:** Trained volunteers meet and greet everyone who comes through the door.
2. **FRONT OFFICE STAFF WELCOME AND HELP:** Office Staff meet and greet folks with a smile and create an inviting atmosphere. They provide those coming to register with welcoming materials and information sheets regarding registration steps (with appropriate translations). Use of volunteers in the office helps ensure there are sufficient resources so that necessary time can be taken to greet and assist new students and families. (A designated registrar and even designated registration times can be helpful.)
3. **WELCOMING MATERIALS:** A booklet labeled WELCOME provides info about who's who at the school, what types of assistance are available to new students and families, and offers tips about how the school runs. (Welcoming materials are *not* used to lay out the rules – doing so can be a rather uninviting first contact.) Other materials focus on assisting students and families in making the transition and connecting with ongoing activities. Welcoming videos increasingly are in use.
4. **STUDENT WELCOMERS:** A Student Welcoming Club provides tours and some orientation (including initial introduction to key staff).
5. **PARENT/VOLUNTEER WELCOMERS:** A General Welcoming Club of parents and/or volunteers provide regular tours and orientations (including initial introduction to key staff).
6. **WELCOMING BULLETIN BOARD:** A bulletin board (somewhere near the entrance to the school) says WELCOME and includes such things as pictures of school staff, a diagram of the school and its facilities, pictures of students who entered the school during the past 1-2 weeks, information on tours and orientations, special meetings for new students, and so forth.

Examples of Some Other Ways Schools Help New Students and Families Feel Welcome and Part of Things

From: *Welcoming Strategies for Newly Arrived Students & Their Families*
(at anytime in the school year)

- >**WELCOMING FOLDERS:** Both the student and family member are presented with Welcoming Folders containing welcoming materials and information, such as a welcome booklet and information about activities at the school. (Some include a welcoming gift such as coupons from local businesses that have adopted the school).
- >**WELCOMING CONFERENCE WITH TEACHERS:** The emphasis is on *Welcoming* and the contact provides a positive step in getting to know the teacher and school and for the teacher to facilitate positive connections between newcomers and the school.
- >**OUTREACH FROM ORGANIZED GROUPS:** Representatives of organized student and parent groups (including the PTSA) make direct contact with new students and families to invite them to learn about activities and assist them in joining in activities that appeal to them. Some parents are willing to be peer buddies – a special friend who introduces the new family to the community and neighbors, connects them with resources and activities, and so forth.
- >**CLASSROOM GREETERS:** Teachers have several students who are willing and able to greet strangers who come to the classroom. Recent arrivals often are interested in welcoming the next set of new enrollees.
- >**CLASSROOM INTRODUCTION:** In addition to the introductory Welcoming Conference, teachers assist new students in making a smooth transition into the class. This includes introducing the student to classmates as soon as the student arrives, connecting the student with a peer buddy, helping the student learn routines, and more. (Some teachers arrange with the office specified times for bringing a new student to the class.)
- >**PEER BUDDIES:** In addition to the classroom greeter, a teacher can have several students who are trained to be a special buddy to a new student for a couple of weeks (and hopefully thereafter). This can provide the type of social support that allows a new student to learn about the school culture and how to become involved in activities. Peer buddies can sit next to and show the new student around during recess and lunch and make introductions to schoolmates.
- >**SUPPORT GROUPS:** Groups that are designed to help new students and families learn about the community and the school and to allow them to express concerns and have them addressed. Such groups also allow newcomers to connect with each other as another form of social support.
- >**REGULAR POSITIVE CONTACTS:** Among the variety of ways students and their families can feel an ongoing connection with the school and classroom are opportunities to volunteer, positive communications home that tell “all about what’s happening”, and invites to participate.

Welcoming actions, of course, are just one facet of providing supports for transitions. The immediate goals are to enhance a successful beginning and minimize transition problems. As with all transitions, there are opportunities as school begins to promote healthy development, reduce alienation, increase positive attitudes toward school and learning, address systemic and personal barriers to learning and teaching, and reengage disconnected students and families. See the Center’s Quick Find on *Supports for Transitions*.

About the Role of School Engagement in Preventing School Dropout

From: *Weaving Student Engagement Into the Core Practices of Schools*
A National Dropout Prevention Center/Network Position Paper

A major theme woven throughout the position paper is that student engagement is an effective dropout prevention strategy but has the potential to be part of a comprehensive strategy to engage students to fully develop their academic, social-emotional, civic, and career knowledge and skills. Such an approach requires schools to focus on individual student engagement, group and social collaborations, family and community engagement, and the school's climate to ensure congruence among activities and stakeholders in support of student engagement.

This position paper provides specific context and strategies to engage all education stakeholders to successfully integrate and sustain student engagement as a core expectation and experience of each student to assist them to stay in school and fully develop their knowledge and skills.

From: *Application of school attachment factors as a strategy against school dropout*

... School attachment has been variously described as school connectedness, school engagement, school climate, school involvement, students satisfaction and school bonding.... Positive classroom engagement and reinforcement by teachers can develop a passionate and engaged school atmosphere conducive to retention of students in schools. Teachers are placed in a unique advantageous position to engage and motivate students towards extended school learning and can impact positive outcomes. Teachers can gauge the abilities of the students and direct them towards areas that might be better suited to students' temperament and aptitude. Teachers can adopt a one-on-one approach to help students achieve better academic success by helping them build on their strengths and address their weaker abilities through encouragement and specific teaching methods. When teachers establish a proactive relationship with their students, the entire educational process is elevated to a more meaningful phase in student's school attitude, engagement, and performance. ...

For more on student engagement, see

>*About School Engagement and Re-Engagement.*

>*Improving Working Relationships Inside the Classroom*

>*School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate*

The Center also has a Quick find on

>*Motivation, Engagement, Re-engagement*

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

Interdisciplinary Collaboration: A School Wellness Team Model

Adolescent Social Inclusion to Improve School Completion

Impact of co-teaching on general educator self-reported knowledge and use of inclusive practices for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities

Perceived Neighborhood Safety and Depressive Symptoms

When do pupils talk about their problems? Explaining pupils' intentions to seek help

Body Image and Eating Disorders Among Southeast Asians: A Student's Perspective

Building Protective Communities for Black Children and Families

AI in Education: New Guidance from the Department of Education

Reading reform across America: A survey of state legislation

Collaborating to transform and improve education systems: A playbook for family-school engagement

Concerns about Media Use Among Children and Adolescents

Schools and Eating Disorders: Addressing Differences

Hot Topic: Mandated Reporting; Mandated Supporting

A Few Upcoming Webinars

For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts – <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

8/9 Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates

8/9 A Welcoming and Healthy Return to School

8/15 Getting Ready for My Child's IEP Meeting

8/16 Youth psychological strength

8/16 Paving the Way to College for Students Experiencing Homelessness

8/17 Start the school year strong

8/23 Strategies for School and District Leaders

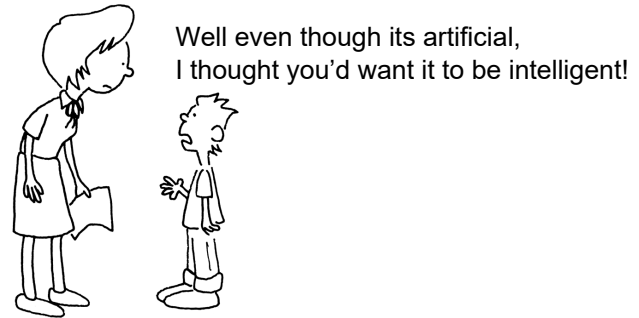
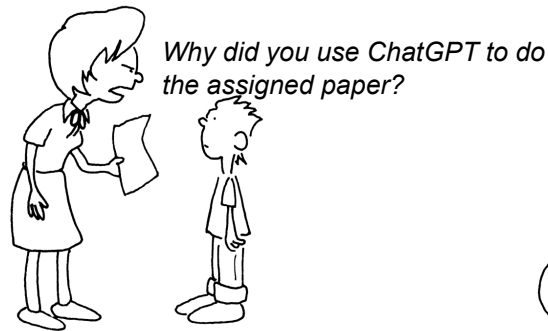
8/29 McKinney-Vento 101: Basic Requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act

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 your views** about the topics shared and about 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**
- **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



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.

For information about the *National Initiative* go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

It is essential to continue to urge districts/schools to play an increasing role in helping to transform student/learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system.

Our Center has many resources online focusing on transforming student/learning supports that can be used for discussion, continuing education, and planning. As a start, see, the following brief resources:

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

The work is detailed in three free books:

- > ***Improving School Improvement***
- > ***Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide***
- > ***Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change***

Note: We caution that, unless they are evolved from their current limitations, moves to MTSS and Community Schools will exacerbate the prevailing marginalization and fragmentation of student/learning supports in school improvement policy and practice. See

- > ***Rethinking MTSS to Better Address Barriers to Learning***
- > ***Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports***

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

For new sign-ups – email Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.

**We post a broad range of issues and responses to the Net Exchange
on our website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm>
and on Facebook (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>)**