Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(February, 2024 Vol. 28 #5) – *37 Years & Counting*

Featured

Increasing Graduation Rates by Enhancing Personalization and Special Assistance in the Classroom and Schoolwide at All Levels

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Increasing Graduation Rates by Enhancing Personalization and Special Assistance in the Classroom and Schoolwide at All Levels

"Schools and teachers need to become a bit more flexible and encouraging towards students who seem as if they are losing gusto and falling behind. Sometimes its towards the end of the year that the pressure that has been building up ... becomes too much. Schools need to outreach to kids who seem to be having trouble, talk to them, make them feel important and connected and provide them with a plan to get back on their feet. Things like make-up assignments, make-up tests, tutoring opportunities, etc., should all be made available. If this has been implemented, and it doesn't help, get parents involved." -a recent high school graduate

Most late high school dropouts (83%) listed a school-related (versus a family or employment related) reason for leaving. These reasons included missing too many school days, thinking it would be easier to get a GED, getting poor grades, and not liking school.
National Center for Education Statistics, Late High Schools Dropouts

As with so many problems in our society, increasing high school graduation rates could be tremendously aided by reducing generational poverty. As a societal institution, schools play an indirect role in this. Their direct role is to ensure they do the best they can to promote positive development and address barriers to learning and teaching – especially school-related experiences that push students out.

> Time is running out for helping students catch up. Decisions made in the coming weeks will determine who passes and who fails.

>The National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC)has identified strategies that they have determined to have "the most positive impact on reducing school dropout." As described by the NDPC:, "These strategies appear to be independent, but actually work well together and frequently overlap. Although they can be implemented as stand-alone strategies, positive outcomes will result when school districts or other agencies develop program improvement plans that encompass most or all of these strategies. These strategies have been successful at all school levels from PK 12 and in rural, suburban, and urban settings. These strategies are grouped into four general categories:

Foundational strategies (school-community perspective), early interventions, basic core strategies, and managing and improving instruction." See **Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention.**

>The U.S. Department of Education provides a practice guide on **Preventing Dropouts** that recommends the following:

1. Monitor the progress of all students, and proactively intervene when students show early signs of attendance, behavior, or academic problems.
2. Provide intensive, individualized support to students who have fallen off track and face significant challenges to success.
3. Engage students by offering curricula and programs that connect schoolwork with college and career success and that improve students' capacity to manage challenges in and out of school.
4. For schools with many at-risk students, create small, personalized communities to facilitate monitoring and support

Our Center has noted that there is general agreement that schools must become more proactive in addressing and preventing problems. The aim is to engage all students in learning and reengage those who have become disengaged from schooling. Engagement and reengagement call for practices based on an in depth understanding of motivation (especially intrinsic motivation) and that use authentic classroom assessments that inform personalized interventions (e.g., RtI). Positive motivation toward schooling is key to reducing misbehavior, enhancing attendance and achievement, and increasing graduate rates.

At this time of the school year, our Center stresses that teachers need to work with student and learning support staff with an emphasis on turning things around for students who are falling further and further behind. This involves reaching out to help students who need special assistance to "catch-up" (e.g., homework help, tutoring, peer to peer support, mentoring, career advising).

This usually requires an indepth conference, shared problem solving, and a series of personalized follow- ups with the student and family. In essence, the content focus is on clarifying specifics related to the problem and formulating flexible steps to solve it; the process focus is on establishing and continuously enhancing a positive and caring working relationship and monitoring the intervention steps closely to make immediate changes as necessary. Special attention needs to be paid to addressing any underlying factors interfering with school learning and performance.

The following have been advocated as ways to enhance students' motivation to graduate:

Service Learning. Investigators have found that when rigorous study in academic disciplines is linked to serious work on real needs, students' motivation to learn increases. One approach is to integrate community service into the academic curriculum. When teachers partner with young people to design and carry out service-learning projects that are tied to curricular objectives and standards, there are academic, social-emotional, and civic benefits.

Alternative Programs. Where good educational alternative programs are available, they can provide a non-traditional approach to curriculum and instruction. Good programs offer personalized teaching that accounts for both the student's needs and interests and maximize the student's feeling of self determination, competence, and connection with significant others, and such programs minimize threats to such feelings.

Multiple Pathways. Students also need desirable alternative career and vocational pathways. Multiple pathways offer choices in pursuing careers. Some are keyed to higher education; some provide preparation for jobs immediately after high school. The emphasis is on providing both academic and career foundations for advanced learning, training, and effective and responsible participation in society.

Clearly, there is no way to escape dealing with immediate problems. Over time, however, it is essential to rethink classroom and schoolwide approaches to

> (a) enhance engaged, personalized learning

and

>> (b) provide students with special assistance (in the classroom and schoolwide) as soon as problems are identified.

In this respect, see:

>**Addressing barriers to learning: In the classroom and schoolwide**.

.>**Improving School Improvement**

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The dropout crisis is just the tip of an iceberg. What it doesn't count are all the kids who are in school but being disengaged from it, who don't enjoy it, who don't get any real benefit from it. - Ken Robinson

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>Quick Links to Online Resources

Risk and Protective Factors Associated with Student Distress and School Dropout

Dropout rates have ticked up in some states. How big is the problem?

Facing the school dropout dilemma

Status dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24

Cultural Identity and the Academic, Social, and Psychological Adjustment of Adolescents with Immigration Background

Attendance Works

Promoting positive development among refugee adolescents

The Role of Informal Sources of Help in Young People's Access to, Engagement with, and Maintenance in Professional Mental Health Care

Efficacy of the Fast Track Friendship Group Program for Peer-rejected Children

Mind the Gap… But Which Gap? The Distinctions Between Social Inequalities in Student Achievement

Framing community safety

A Few upcoming Webinars

2/7 **Paving the Way to College for Students Experiencing Homelessness**
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2/7 **Preventing depression**

2/8 **Artificial intelligence and school policies**

2/13 **Technology, bias, careers**

2/13 **Basic Requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act**

2/14 **Planning an IEP Team Meeting When Your Child has Mental Health Challenges**

2/14 **Providing targeted support**

2/15 **Wellness & Resilience**

2/15 **Equity focused alignment**

2/21 **Threat assessment**

2/21 **Social skills and how to build them**

2/26 **Multicultural orientation to therapy**

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> Think about the importance of a community coming together with a shared vision of what could be, and that as an individual, I might be frustrated and overwhelmed, but that together we can find those pathways and strategies, and there's a shared energy. - Chan Hellman

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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.

Let Us Know about what ideas are being proposed for moving in newdirections for transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

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 can help. Send all info to ltaylor@ucla.edu

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>*A Few News Stories* (excerpted from various news sources)

Iowa school students walk out of class to protest gun violence after Perry shooting. In the wake of the Jan. 4 deadly shooting at Perry High School, students across Iowa are walking out of class to protest what they say is lawmakers' inaction on gun violence. Around 100 students gathered at the Statue of Liberty outside Iowa City High School and began the nearly two-mile march toward the Old Capitol. Some students felt the shooting at Perry could have been prevented if lawmakers had taken legislative action in the wake of recent school-related shootings in Iowa.

How many students are still missing from American schools? Here's what the data says. Since the pandemic first upended American education, an estimated 50,000 students are still missing from any kind of U.S. school. That's according to an Associated Press analysis of public, private and homeschool enrollment as of fall 2022, and U.S. Census data in 22 states, plus Washington, D.C. The reasons students left during the pandemic are varied, and still not fully understood. Some experienced homelessness, lost interest or motivation, or struggled with mental health. Some needed to work or assume adult responsibilities. Some fell behind in online school and didn't see the point of re-engaging. The number of missing students has fallen from fall 2021, when over 230,000 students were still unaccounted for in an analysis by AP. Slowly, many students returned to some form of schooling, or aged out of the system. The decline in missing students is a hopeful sign the education system is moving toward recovery.

How do you discipline an in-school overdose? In some districts, you don't. In Los Angeles Unified School District, instead of the traditional, zero tolerance approach to student overdoses, the district is piloting a focus on rehabilitation. This pilot project is a response to a growing number of student opioid overdoses on LAUSD campuses. After a student has been cleared and sent home from the hospital, his school's efforts shift to getting the student back into the classroom. Administrators and the school's psychiatric social worker work with the student's parents to create a re-entry plan. These plans are tailored to meet each student's individual needs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Summer Food Aid. The USDA announced that nearly 21 million children will receive expanded grocery benefits this summer. The USDA said summer 2024 will be the first launch of its new permanent grocery program for children, called Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer. States will give eligible families $40 per month for each child under this new program, which Congress approved in 2022. Thirty-five states, five territories and four Native American tribes opted into the program for this summer. The USDA said the program would cover approximately 70 percent of the eligible children in its inaugural launch, and that it hopes to continue expanding.

> From the above Iowa story:
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> *It's simply time to do something. Because people at the end of this session should feel safer taking their kids to school in the morning than they do today. That's our job. Let's work together to get something done.* Iowa House Minority Leader Jennifer Konfrst

>Comments and sharing from the field

Response to our discussion:
  Support for peer-rejected students; About Student Voice, Participation, and Support

"Great to see this topic. I have such heart for these kids. I did not struggle too much with this but I was a weird kid and not only did I struggle socially in elementary (things got better later on), even the teachers ignored me. I failed 9th grade deliberately as a rebellious teenager and not one single teacher or administrator ever talked to me. I will never forget it. That whole experience really prompted deep empathy from me to others and we both know that is a GIFT. Over the years I have come across a lot of folks like me that peers and teachers ignored. All in all, good on you!"

Response to our discussion:
  Problems with Current Advocacy and Approaches Focused Mainly on Advancing Mental Health in Schools

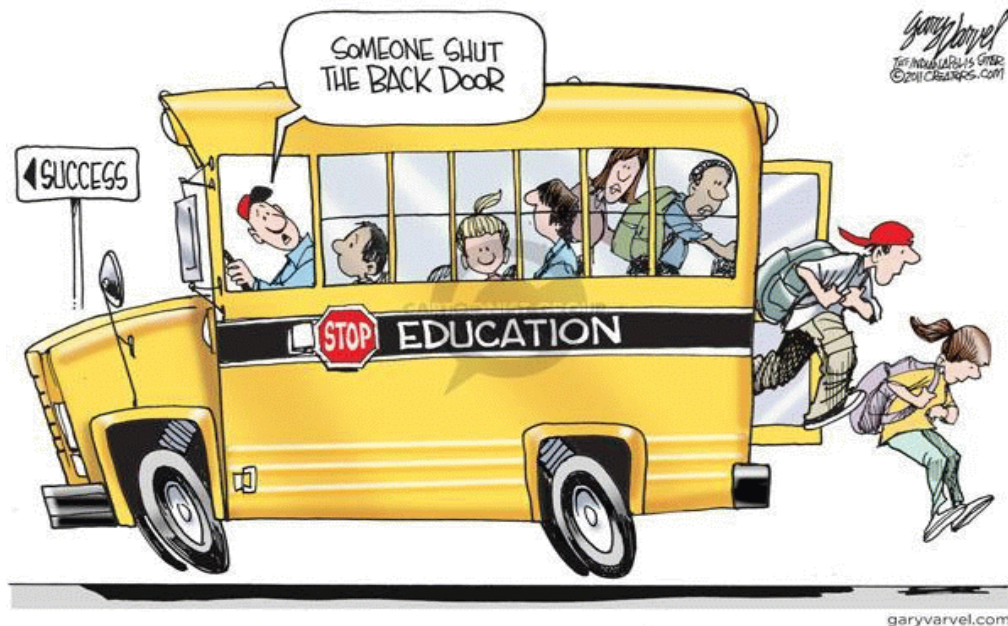"The Interconnected Systems Framework model is a great alternative to piece meal efforts. California PBIS training efforts are focused on aligning academic, SEL, Mental Health initiatives into one team and having one single referral that staff can use to request assistance, also known as a Request For Assistance (RFA). There are regional technical assistance centers throughout California (out of County Offices of Education) that train hundreds of districts and schools in the state on ISF."

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THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF ENEWS

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.

For more information about the Center and its many resources, go to the website at https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu or email Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu

Send info to share with others or ask for specific resources by email to **Ltaylor@ucla.edu**