

Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(June, 2026 Vol. 30 #9) – 40 Years & Counting

Featured

Summer:

>*A Time for Enriched Learning Opportunities*

>*A Time for Strengthening Student/Learning Supports*

Also in this issue

>Quick links to online resources

>*A Few Stories Excerpted from Various News Sources*

>Comments and sharing from the field

Summer:

>*A Time for Enriched Learning Opportunities*

>*A Time for Strengthening Student/Learning Supports*

Summer is far more than a break from school – it is a critical window for expanding enriched learning opportunities and transforming student and learning supports. When schools, families, and communities work together, the summer months can enhance learning, reduce barriers, re-engage learners, and ensure all students have equitable access to meaningful experiences that promote development and success.

The following two-part feature highlights how summer can be leveraged to benefit student and schools.

Part I: Summer – A Time for Enriched Learning Opportunities

Summer offers a powerful opportunity to expand and deepen learning in ways that are often difficult during the regular school year. Free from many constraints, this period allows schools and communities to facilitate experiences that stimulate curiosity, foster intrinsic motivation, and make learning engaging and relevant.

When learning is active, meaningful, and connected to real life, students are far more likely to engage, persist, and thrive.

Expanding Learning Beyond the Classroom

While many summer programs emphasize academic remediation, enriched summer learning goes well beyond that goal. It includes a broad array of experiences – arts, cultural engagement, STEM exploration, outdoor education, and technology-based activities – that allow students to discover new interests and talents.

These opportunities reflect good teaching: facilitating active participation and exploration of relevant and personally meaningful experiences and content.

Promoting Active and Experiential Learning

Summer is ideally suited for approaches that emphasize active participation and exploration:

- Project-based and inquiry learning
- Hands-on and experiential activities
- Community-based experiences
- Independent and self-directed learning

Such strategies deepen understanding while cultivating creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving – key competencies for lifelong learning.

Fostering Motivation and Lifelong Learning

A central goal of enriched summer opportunities is strengthening intrinsic motivation. By providing choice and encouraging student voice, programs can help young people:

- Build confidence and a sense of competence
- Discover personal interests
- Develop a lasting enthusiasm for learning
- Enhance interpersonal connections

These experiences are especially important for students who may have become disengaged during the school year.

Connecting Learning to Real Life

Summer also offers opportunities to link learning to real-world applications:

- Teenagers can engage in internships, apprenticeships, and paid work
- Students of all ages can participate in service learning and community projects

Service learning is particularly valuable because it connects academic learning to authentic community needs while fostering empathy, reflection, and civic responsibility.

*Service learning not only addresses real needs –
it builds purpose, connection, and empathy.*

Facilitating Equitable Access

Families play a vital role in supporting enriched learning. Schools can encourage involvement by helping families access local enrichment opportunities. They can enhance equity by braiding school and community resources to:

- Reduce cost and transportation barriers
- Expand access for all to high-quality programs
- Ensure all students benefit from enriching experiences

For more on this topic, see

>[*Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth*](#) (National Academies Press)

Also see our Center Quick Find on:

>[*Expanded Learning Opportunities -- After-School & Summer Programs*](#)

And for a brief discussion, see

>[*Potential Beneficial Effects of Summer Programs for Children from Low Income Families*](#)

>[*Enhancing Summer Learning*](#)

Part II: Summer as a Time for Strengthening Student/Learning Supports

Summer is also a pivotal time to strengthen student and learning supports. And as feasible, rather than a pause in supports, summer can extend efforts to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development.

Summer is a prime time for strengthening the systems that enable students to learn and thrive.

Enhancing the Continuum of Supports

A key facet of the learning supports framework is a full continuum of interventions – from promotion and prevention to early intervention and intensive assistance. Summer enables schools to focus on how to make all points along this continuum more flexible, personalized, and less stigmatizing. Summer is a particularly good time to enhance school-community resource braiding to strengthen each level of the continuum. For example:

- Promotion and prevention can be strengthened through enrichment programs that keep students socially and intellectually engaged.
- Early intervention can target students who show indications of disengagement, academic difficulty, or social-emotional concerns.
- Intensive support can be continued to ensure continuity of care and connection for those with significant needs.

Enhancing Key Domains of Support

The other key facet of a transformed student/learning support system that can be advanced during the summer is six major support domains:

- Classroom-based special assistance
- Supports for transitions
- Home involvement and engagement
- Community outreach and connection
- Crisis prevention and response
- Student engagement and re-engagement

Strengthening School-Community Collaboration

A cornerstone of good student and learning supports is weaving together resources from schools and communities (including families and other stakeholder). Summer is especially conducive to:

- Expanding partnerships with community organizations and businesses
- Increasing family access to a variety of resources and opportunities

Collaboration aims to enhance both the availability and effectiveness of supports.

A proactive summer approach can reduce risk, prevent disengagement, and strengthen resilience.

Directly Connecting with Students and Families and Re-engaging the Disconnected

As feasible (e.g., through summer school and special summer initiatives), concerns about summer learning loss and increased exposure to risky behavior can be proactively addressed. Well-designed summer initiatives can:

- Reduce vulnerability and disconnection
- Maintain continuity of care
- Promote resilience and well-being

For students who have become disengaged, summer offers a critical opportunity to reconnect. With fewer pressures, staff can:

- Build stronger relationships with students and families
- Provide personalized and interest-based learning
- Address underlying barriers such as low motivation or confidence

These efforts directly support re-engagement in learning.

By improving supports at every level, schools can reduce the likelihood that problems don't worsen over the summer and ease transitions into the new school year.

Informing Systemic Improvement

Summer initiatives also provide a valuable opportunity to pilot innovations and refine practices. Successful strategies – especially those that enhance engagement – can be incorporated into school-year efforts, strengthening the overall system of supports.

In sum, summer is not simply an “off time” – it is a critical window for strengthening the infrastructure that addresses barriers, enhances engagement, and promotes equity. When approached strategically, summer becomes an essential part of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system that supports all students in learning and thriving.

Closing Thought

Taken together, enriched learning opportunities and strengthened student/learning supports make summer a powerful lever for advancing equity, engagement, and success. By approaching this time strategically, schools and communities can ensure that all students return ready to learn – and better supported in doing so.

Immediate Steps Schools and Districts Can Take in Transforming Student/Learning Supports

Learn more about transforming student and learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system. See, for example:

>[*Criteria and Rubric for a Best Practice Approach to Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*](#)

>[*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*](#)

Use the rest of the school year and the summer to begin the improvement process. See, for example:

>[*An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports: A Month by Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing Resources*](#)

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At Parks and Recreation we take part in friendly Fridays around town where we'll go and greet the kids as arrive at school. Events that are geared to encouraging kids is fun for everyone involved. It just lets them know that people do care about them. – Parks Director Jeff Atkins, St. Joseph, MO

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>Quick Links to Online Resources

- >>What to expect from summer school
- >>Jumpstart Toolkit: Summer Learning Program
- >>Interdisciplinary Mental Health Collaboration in Schools
- >>Universal Parenting Interventions for Parents of Adolescents: A Systematic Review
- >>Exploring the Associations Between Adverse and Positive Childhood Experiences and Mental Health and Behavioral Concerns Among Youth
- >>Kids are in a ‘reading recession’ as test scores continue to decline
- >>Wealthy Students More Likely to Get Disability Accommodations, Study Finds
- >>Online schools with statewide reach are growing in Colorado. School districts want their students back
- >>What It Takes to Retain Teachers in High-Needs Schools
- >>Achievement dip coincided with high-stakes testing ‘breakdown,’ study finds

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This is a time to celebrate the extraordinary impact educators have on our students and our future. They help students build confidence, discover their strengths, and reach their full potential, shaping the future every day. When we come together to support and invest in educators, we strengthen our public schools and expand opportunity for every student. – Becky Pringle, NEA

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Here's what was discussed in the *Community of Practice* during May

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

Note: All community of practice editions contain Links to relevant shared resources.

- >Technology – an important tool for schools, but . . .
- >At issue: AI being used for student mental health
- >A colleague comments on concerns about online therapy
- >Planning for next steps in enhancing school climate
- >Engaging students less stress and anxiety enhanced classroom climate
- >School climate reflects school culture: Implications for Whole-Child Development and
- >Student/Learning Supports
- >Preparing for peer involvement in newcomer transitions
- >Do you know how to make sustainable systemic changes to improve MH in schools?

Summer – that magical time of year when the sun tries to kill you, your car turns into an oven, and your only real plan is finding the nearest air conditioner.

>For more resources in general, see our website
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

>For info on the status of upcoming conferences
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/upconf.htm>

>For info on webinars
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

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It's really essential that parents, teachers, priests, youth leaders,, physicians, pediatricians, social workers, just about everybody who comes into contact with young people would understand the preventive value of making everyone feel like they matter, and trying to find what is unique about this kid, this youngster, that can make them feel really unique, appreciated.... And when you hear stories about recovery or stories about the overcoming great adversity, you will often hear that there was a mentor or somebody, a teacher or an uncle or an aunt or somebody who found something special about the kid and nurture that. – Isaac Prilleltensky

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>Calls for grant proposals
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/upcall.htm>

> job and training opportunities
when available
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/job.htm>

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

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 new directions 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



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.

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

Youth Suicides Declined After Creation of National Hotline. Over the 2 ½ years following the 2022 rollout of the 988 national suicide prevention hotline, the rate of suicides among young people in the United States dropped 11 percent below projections, decreasing most sharply in states with a higher volume of answered 988 calls. The United States rolled out the three-digit hotline with bipartisan support in July 2022, replacing a 10-digit hotline number, and augmented it with a \$1.5 billion investment in crisis center capacity. Since its inception, the service has fielded more than 25 million contacts, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. The agency has asked Congress for \$534.6 million to fund the program for 2027.

Los Angeles becomes the first major school district to require screen time limits. The resolution followed pressure from parents who said their children developed unhealthy habits after schools required them to use iPads and laptops every day. The sweeping resolution, requires the district to create a screen time policy for each grade and subject, prohibits students in first grade and younger from using devices, clarifies the process for parents to opt their child out of using technology at school, and audits its education technology contracts.

Students' service day sparks interest in new tradition. Fulton, Missouri — South Callaway Middle School students took a proactive approach to community service. Students on the student council took ownership of the entire planning process, preparing for the event, creating schedules, organizing activities and preparing permission slips for students. The group's itinerary included volunteering their time at the Fulton Nursing & Rehabilitation facility

This Fund Moves Fast to Help Seattle's Kids Stay in School. From rental assistance to toiletries, The Right Now Fund responds to struggling families' requests in real time, filling gaps that fuel chronic absenteeism. The Right Now Needs Fund is run by the Alliance for Education, an independent, local group that works to advance educational justice and racial equity for Seattle students. Since 1995, it's invested \$200 million in the city's public schools. The Fund, which started with a \$2 million donation from Amazon, has delivered aid thousands of times throughout the years, helping families in the district's 104 schools with everything from hygiene kits to rental assistance, its director said. It's also boosted attendance.

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Housing, higher education, health care and childcare have long stretched families beyond their limits. People of color have an even harder time managing these costs. And while programs like the Right Now Needs Fund are helpful, they can't address the root issues. We are not going to nonprofit our way out of these problems. I certainly don't dismiss programs that provide families with the relief they need: We want people to be able to afford essentials. But every day that we promote a relief program is another day that we don't address these structural problems. Andre M. Perry,

Dir., Center for Community Uplift, Brookings Institution

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What do you want to do this summer?



Recover from this school year!

>Comments and sharing from the field

1. Response to *About screening students' problems -- being realistic and responsible*

“This is incredibly important and beyond necessary. I'll confess to a knee-jerk reaction to the following - *More responsible policy would: Emphasize capacity building and problem response systems before expanding screening mandates.*

Responsible policy is NOT "building capacity" under the current definition which translates to: We have decided that you need to be doing this, therefore we are going to train you on this and you will be accountable for more policy/legal requirements at a time when developing relationship with students and building trusting communities is edged out by multiple family surveys, end-of-unit assessments required by districts, EasyCBMs, state assessments, Erin's Law, climate surveys, school improvements plans, IEP and 504 meetings, equity work, etc.

If it can be done by a combination of training, consolidating, eliminating or re-imagining as many of those things as possible, then building capacity would make sense. Thank you for this work.

2. General feedback

“I am a school-based clinical social worker in New York City and am so very grateful for the work coming out of the UCLA Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports. I'm new to the field and find myself browsing your resources often. Thank you to the whole team for all your thoughtful and critically important work.”

3. Feedback on a Center report:

“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 and actually wrote a book about what I wish I knew - *Leading Change that Lasts: 5 Steps to SCALE your Vision into Saucerful Implementation*. My focus was schools, since that was my experience, not the broader system. I coach school leaders on leadership and their implementation of initiatives using the SCALE model I developed. It is pretty basic, especially compared to your broader systems view. But it has helped some schools so far. I just wanted to say thank you! If you know of any other resources and don't mind sharing, I would appreciate it. Thank you for doing this work!”

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**
- **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

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