

Students & Schools: Moving Forward

(November, 2025 Vol. 30 #2) – 39 Years & Counting

Featured

**November is a Good Time to Appreciate and
Take Steps to Improve Student/Learning Supports**

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**November is a Good Time to Appreciate and
Take Steps to Improve Student/Learning Supports**

Take some time to review how a school's sparse resources are being used to address barriers to learning and teaching. You will find student and learning support staff are making heroic efforts to support students who are not doing well. You will also find everyone wants improvements.

Appreciation: Everyone wants to feel appreciated. Most school leaders have a bag full of inexpensive ideas for celebrating staff. Public and personal examples include: spotlighting efforts in staff meetings, newsletters, social media; thank-you notes, celebration boards, and more.

Improvement: Moving forward requires a sound understanding of existing resources. This involves mapping and analyzing what's in place. This can be done by establishing a workgroup tasked with

- mapping existing student/learning support activities and personnel (including those accessed at the district and those the community brings to the school)
- analyzing the map to identify overlaps, gaps, underutilized resources, what's working, what's not, etc.
- mapping and analyzing the existing operational infrastructure (e.g., leadership, teams, workgroups)
- identifying priority student/learning support needs

Note: Mapping is best done using a template. In this respect, there is a tendency simply to use a multi-tiered framework (e.g., MTSS). However, given the limitations of such a framework, we suggest a more comprehensive intervention framework. And we use a three component framework for mapping the operational infrastructure.

We have developed resource aids for accomplishing the above tasks – see

>Mapping & Analyzing Learning Supports

>An Aid for Initial Listing of Current Resources Used at a School

>Leadership Infrastructure: Is What We Have What We Need?

For some next steps, see

**>An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports:
A Month-by-Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing Resources**

And, in the spirit of celebration, we want to appreciate schools that are making significant strides in rethinking and restructuring student/learning supports to better address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students. See below:

Call for Nominations:

National Award for Work on Transforming Student/Learning Supports

The National Center for Mental Health in Schools & Student/Learning Supports is pleased to call for nominations for its award to a school making significant strides in rethinking and restructuring student/learning supports to better address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

Award Details:

- Recognition: National acknowledgment of your school's accomplishments
- Award Amount: \$1,000 to support your efforts to share your trailblazing efforts with others

Nomination Deadline: December 1, 2025

How to Submit:

We welcome both nominations and self-nominations. Please include a brief description of the work accomplished to date and send submissions to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

More Information:

Visit the Center's website for details about transforming student/learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>.

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Widespread public access to knowledge, like public education, is one of the pillars of our democracy, a guarantee that we can maintain a well-informed citizenry. Scott Turow

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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



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>Quick Links to Online Resources

- >>AI-Augmented Clearinghouse to Facilitate Evidence-Based Decision-Making and Social Spending: a Conceptual Framework.
- >>Promoting Positive School Climate Among Newcomer Immigrant Adolescents
- >>How to reimagine education for the 21st century
- >>Examining the relationship between multiple facets of professional development and teacher job satisfaction
- >>Everyday Prevention of Radicalization: The Impacts of Family, Peer, and Police Intervention
- >>Risk factors for (violent) radicalization in juveniles: A multilevel meta-analysis
- >>How districts help students gain real-life skills
- >>Lost Opportunity: Afterschool in Demand, But Out of Reach for Many
- >>You're Tired Because You Care (and Probably Running on Goldfish Crackers): A Micro Reset for Overwhelmed Caregivers
- >>School Active Shooter Drills: Mitigating Risks to Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Health

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Difficult emotions have been redefined as disorders to be erased rather than signals to be understood. Sadness, anger, fear, frustration: these are not pathologies. They are forces that push us to adapt, grow, and find purpose. Jonathan Alpert

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

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

- >Are we over-pathologizing young people's mental health?
- >Why are Schools Talking About Kindness?
- >About Embedding Mental Health in Schools
- >Current Status of Funding for School Mental Health Services: A Quick Overview
- >Understanding youth perspectives is key to supporting healthy and positive youth development
- >Social connections are essential for youth mental health

If you missed the resources and news in previous issues of the Community of Practice, see
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

>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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Public education is a broad general education, as defined over time by the public — the voters, the school boards, and to some extent the legislature. It provides a mechanism for preparing children for their adult roles in society, the governing, economic and beyond. It gives students a common frame of reference. Public schools are part of what allows us to communicate with each other, and at least in general use a common base of information. Randy Stapilus

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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>

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

‘A game changer’: New virtual learning program addresses Mississippi’s teacher shortage.

Thanks to a new partnership between the Mississippi Department of Education and Mississippi Public Broadcasting, students across the state will be getting new teachers this year. But those teachers won’t be in classrooms, sitting behind desks. They’ll be on the screen. The REACH MS program, also called the Mississippi Virtual Synchronous Learning Initiative, funded by a \$2.2 million appropriation from the Legislature, is a response to the teacher shortage afflicting swaths of Mississippi schools. Participating districts that are struggling to staff core subjects can get a virtual teacher through the program. Another teacher is an in-person facilitator, keeping students focused and passing out worksheets.

Mock trial connects classroom to real-world civics for third graders. In conjunction with Freedom Week and Constitution Day, third-grade students at three elementary schools participated in a virtual mock trial hosted by Olathe Public Schools (KS). The unique learning opportunity even featured a special guest appearance from U.S. Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch and U.S. Senator Jerry Moran of Kansas. The event brought government concepts to life in a way that was both fun and meaningful, while also aligning with the Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies (HGSS) standards approved by the Kansas State Board of Education for third grade.

Houston ISD asks businesses, nonprofits to ‘adopt’ low-performing schools. Houston Independent School District is asking local businesses and organizations to “adopt” its remaining low-performing schools, which could include making donations for principals to use at their discretion or for specific district-chosen initiatives like literacy and college access. Sponsorship would also cover support for events like teacher appreciation lunches, student celebrations and campus cleanup days. In another recent example, Illinois’ Decatur Public Schools is hoping its Adopt A School program expands from events like luncheon sponsorships to also supporting student academics directly through initiatives like helping with reading instruction.

‘Take a stand’: To fight Idaho’s ‘vouchers’ bill, one school district sued. Public school advocates suing over a new Idaho law to direct public money to private education included a broad range of plaintiffs, from a Republican state lawmaker to the Mormon Women for Ethical Government. Public school advocates referred to the program implemented by the law as “vouchers,” and have said it will exacerbate shortages in the state’s already-underfunded public schools, which are held accountable through state and federal standards, unlike private schools..

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From Idaho Story (above)

Maybe they will end up dismantling the public schools anyway, but I’m not going to sit by the sidelines and let them do it. I can’t do a whole lot. But I’m going to do what little I can to try to stop it. ... You gotta take a stand, I feel, and this is a stand we can take. Ken Faunce

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>Comments and sharing from the field

Response to 10/8/25 Practitioner:

“Are we Overpathologizing Young People’s Mental Health?”

“Regarding the notion of “over-pathologizing young people’s mental health,” too often, discussions about children’s mental health are framed in binary terms: a child either has a diagnosable mental illness or does not. This false dichotomy oversimplifies a complex reality and contributes to missed opportunities for early support. In truth, mental health exists on a continuum of functioning and distress, much like physical health. A child’s emotional well-being can range from thriving (a “1” on the scale) to severe impairment (a “10”), with countless variations in between. Viewing children’s mental health through an all-or-nothing lens creates systemic blind spots. It delays intervention until symptoms become severe enough to meet diagnostic thresholds—by which point challenges are more entrenched, more disruptive to learning, and more difficult to treat. This approach also overlooks the many children who experience moderate levels of anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, or trauma-related stress that interfere with school success, yet never receive attention because they do not meet clinical criteria. Recognizing mental health as a continuum allows schools, families, and communities to respond earlier and more effectively. It shifts the focus from labeling to supporting—from crisis response to prevention. Early interventions, social-emotional learning, and tiered supports within frameworks like PBIS and MTSS can strengthen resilience, reduce the need for intensive services, and keep students engaged in learning. Mental health should not be seen as a binary state but as a dynamic part of child development—one that requires continuous monitoring, graduated support, and compassion. By embracing a spectrum-based understanding, we can better identify needs before they escalate and create educational environments where all children have the opportunity to thrive.”

Some general feedback: “I was thinking about your message that rings true to this day... “addressing barriers...” When I was at a meeting about two weeks ago, I noticed that one of the key practices in leadership of behavior initiatives is to address resistance. When it was framed that way, I really felt that that needs to be part of my work with leaders. So since then, I have been working on all things

ownership and addressing resistance, asking myself what are the preconditions needed for rolling out better practices? It is hard, but for the last 7 years, the baby steps are paying off and it is about addressing "resistance" and for me right now helping people not judge or blame, but rather ask what can we do to improve the systems, resources or skill needs we hope to see implemented. I appreciate all your 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