

(12/3/25) This continuing education resource is from the national  
**Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

### Featured

**(1) Extracurricular activities can enhance school connectedness**

**(2) Raising graduation rates for three groups who need more student/learning supports**

And, as always, you will find

**(3) Links to more resources**

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

### **For discussion and interchange:**

**>Extracurricular activities can enhance school connectedness**

From: *Extracurricular Activities—Extra Beneficial: The Role of Motivation for Extracurricular Activities on Outcomes in High-School Students*

“... There has been growing interest in the role of extracurricular programs for engaging youth, specifically with regard to promoting school achievement and psychological well-being, as well as preventing school dropout. Extracurricular activities are defined as structured and supervised activities that students participate in at school, outside of regular class hours.

A growing body of research demonstrates the benefits of participating in extracurricular activities for a wide variety of outcomes. For example, participation in extracurricular activities during the high school years is associated with positive academic outcomes, such as higher grades and an increased likelihood of pursuing a postsecondary education.

By filling nonclassroom time with constructive activities, extracurricular activities can also help to decrease youth violence, increase social skills, and enhance academic achievement. Participation in extracurricular activities has also been shown to facilitate the adoption of desirable goal self-regulation strategies, the acquisition of teamwork skills, and the development of soft skills (i.e., adaptability, personal initiative, perseverance, curiosity, leadership, and social awareness;). Moreover, extracurricular activities can represent a valuable opportunity for encouraging academically vulnerable students to develop their strengths and decrease the likelihood of school dropout....

Our study confirms the well-established benefits of self-determined motivation but provides novel insight by demonstrating how self-determined motivation for a nonacademic structured activity can seep into the academic domain, by being positively associated with self-determined academic motives and psychological need satisfaction in school. ...

This has exciting implications for educational practices where it may not be possible to alter certain aspects of the academic environment (e.g., the mandatory school curriculum). However, it may be possible to make extracurricular activities more appealing and personally relevant to students, thus enhancing self-determined motivation....

Our results demonstrate the importance of teenagers' self-determined motivation for extracurriculars, which appears to be beneficial across cultures and outcomes. Moreover, these effects appear observable to the students' teachers. Thus, a promising strategy to unleash a child's full potential and keep them committed to their education may be to have them wholeheartedly engage with extracurricular activities, which appears to be strongly associated with motivation, psychological need satisfaction, and adaptation to the school environment.”

### Center Comments

The school day ends, and what happens in the interim up to bedtime often leaves much to be desired from a school and parenting perspective. Many students transition from the structure of a school day to relatively unstructured and unsupervised time. The problem can be particularly acute in communities where poverty and inequities of opportunity prevail. After-school programs for this transition period intend to provide safe spaces for students to gather and engage positively in academic, recreational, and social activities. The aims are to promote healthy and enriching development, enhance school connectedness and engagement, and address factors interfering with school success. Given this, non-school hour programs should be an integral part of school improvement policy and practice and fully embedded into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports at every school.

For more, see our Center Quick Find on

>[\*Expanded Learning Opportunities\*](#)

A few brief related Center resources are:

>[\*After School Calls for Transition Supports\*](#)

>[\*After-School programs and Addressing Barriers to Learning\*](#)

>[\*About Children and Adolescents Participating in Performing Arts\*](#)

>[\*About Programs for After School Hours and Non-school Days\*](#)

### For discussion and interchange:

>[\*\*\*Raising graduation rates for three groups who need more student/learning supports\*\*\*](#)

From: [\*Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Raising High School Graduation Rates\*](#)

“For over three decades beginning in 1970, the national high school graduation rate hovered around 70 percent... In the early 2000s, however, many efforts converged to put the dropout crisis on the national agenda,... In 2010, with the build-up of all of this work, .. the national on-time graduation rate rose from 71 percent in 2001 to 86.5 percent....

The graduation rates of students with disabilities (70.6 percent), English learners (71.3 percent), and low-income (81.3 percent) students also reached all-time highs....

Research has identified attendance, behavior, and course performance as powerful predictors of high school completion.... The next generation of early warning systems, now being referred to as student success systems, incorporate school connectedness into the data schools are using to determine the most strategic ways to improve high school graduation outcomes....”

We asked several colleagues for recommendations to increase graduation rates for students with disabilities (70.6 percent), English learners (71.3 percent), and low-income (81.3 percent). Here is a sample of what they suggested:

- (1) “Have a portion of high school offer academies that are trades based, offering certifications to prepare students for the work place. Most students in our complex area are not going to college and if they do, there are still no academies with trades for them to participate in. We only have to ask Chat GPT what

careers are going to offer a livable wage for 18-25 year olds without a college degree and it all points to automotive, HVAC, elevator/escalator repairs, plumbers, pilots, truck drivers, construction, IT techs, and real estate agents etc. On the job training needs to be part of the High School repertoire. It is already known that reading the manual for repairing a car is at the same or higher level of reading as Tolstoy's War and Peace. Even now, our high schoolers are still in school to go to college. I think we should prep students for trades, because where are the other opportunities and where can students get trained? They have to wait to get out and pay for a certification after high school? Why not right in high school?"

- (2) "What a great and complicated question. There is no easy answer, nor is there one direction to take. The report referenced here has general but very important recommendations that should be considered by anyone working to improve graduation rates. Review policies that may contribute to academic disparities, strengthen transitions, align graduation requirements with college admission requirements, consider credit recovery programs, etc.

Based on my experience, I know that the likelihood of an individual student graduating from high school can often be predicted by second or third grade. Anything that schools, families and communities can do to support early learning makes a huge difference in the long-term. But how to begin? With data! Look at the information the school already has regarding attendance, behavior, grades, where and how students spend time out of school, etc. and figure out how to influence the greatest number of students with changes that are not that difficult to implement. Monitor the changes to see if they're having an impact and adjust as needed.

And what to do about those who don't graduate? Again, look at the data. Who are these individuals and what are the challenges that prevent them from being successful in school? Interpreting the data will give school staff an idea of where to begin. Look at what is already in place and see how existing programs, policies and approaches could be enhanced to meet needs identified by the data. What does the research say about the best ways to tackle these issues?

One size never fits all. Look at what you have. Look at what students need. Figure out who else cares about these issues. Sit down with them and use the Learning Supports framework, data and research to develop plans. Monitor and continually adjust to ensure success."

- (3) "While the push to help all students graduate is essential, equally important is understanding what additional or different supports are needed for those who remain on the margins.

>For students with disabilities, the barriers to graduation are often multifaceted—ranging from inconsistent access to specialized instruction to the lack of early transition planning that aids students as they transition from school to school and even classroom to classroom. Some school districts have found success when developing individualized transition plans for students. With those types of strategies, schools can address these gaps by ensuring instruction follows the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which benefits all students, and by monitoring Individualized Education Program (IEP) progress data regularly to catch problems before they become entrenched. Inclusive co-teaching models, where general and special educators work side-by-side, have proven effective in raising expectations and improving outcomes.

>English learners (ELs) face a different but equally daunting set of challenges. Language barriers intersect with cultural adjustment, poverty, and mobility, making it harder for students to stay engaged. Schools must move beyond viewing language acquisition as the sole responsibility of ESL teachers and embed structured academic language instruction across all subject areas. Bilingual counselors, liaisons, and paraprofessionals play a vital role in bridging communication with families. Culturally responsive teaching—where students' linguistic and cultural assets are valued—fosters belonging and engagement. Extended learning opportunities, such as summer bridge programs or after-school tutoring focused on literacy and language development, can help close achievement gaps. Outside of school, community-based family literacy programs and immigrant resource centers can strengthen the home-school connection and address social stressors that impede learning.

>For students from low-income families, chronic instability often undermines educational progress. Poverty shapes attendance, concentration, and access to enrichment opportunities. Schools serving these students benefit from adopting comprehensive, multi-tiered frameworks—such as the Multi-Tiered System of Supports—that integrate academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions. Addressing basic needs through school-based telemental health, food pantries, clothing closets, and transportation assistance can remove practical barriers to attendance.

For all three groups, mentoring programs that pair students with trusted adults can help them set

goals, manage stress, and maintain motivation. We know from research that the most significant component of school climate is whether a student has a trusted adult to talk to at the school. Some schools are making a deliberate effort to link every student in the school with an adult.

Early-warning systems that track attendance, behavior, and grades allow schools to identify and intervene with struggling students before disengagement leads to dropout. See this website for more information on student attendance: Attendance Resource Toolkit - Get Georgia Reading

<https://getgeorgiareading.org/log-in/attendance-toolkit/>

At the community level, adopting a “community schools” model ensures that schools serve as hubs for family and health services, bringing together educators, social workers, and health professionals under one roof. Partnerships with Family Connection collaboratives, DFCS, workforce agencies, and local nonprofits can strengthen economic supports, offer employment resources to parents, and stabilize housing—all of which directly influence a student’s ability to attend and succeed. Aligning these community supports with postsecondary opportunities, such as apprenticeships and dual-enrollment programs, ensures that students see tangible, real-world value in staying engaged with school.

Educators themselves need robust system-level support to sustain these efforts. Professional learning in trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and differentiated instruction equips teachers to respond effectively to the diverse needs of their students. Structured planning time for collaborative problem-solving among teachers, counselors, social workers, and speech-language pathologists fosters a team-based approach to intervention. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and other school climate initiatives create environments where students feel safe, respected, and connected conditions that are proven to increase both attendance and achievement.

At a policy level, progress will depend on continued alignment across agencies and sectors. Stronger coordination among the state departments of education, mental health, DFCS and other collaboratives can create a unified framework of prevention, support, and accountability. Expanding telemental health, family navigation services, and early intervention programs—especially in rural and high-poverty areas—can close access gaps and ensure equitable delivery of supports. Policymakers must continue to champion data-driven approaches that link funding to programs addressing the root causes of absenteeism, disengagement, and dropout.

Importantly, research has shown that literacy proficiency by the end of third grade is one of the most powerful predictors of high school graduation. In a statewide longitudinal study, students—regardless of disability status, income, or race—who were reading on grade level by the end of third grade had the same graduation rate as their more advantaged peers. This finding highlights that early reading success can effectively neutralize the negative effects of poverty and disability on long-term educational outcomes. It reinforces that literacy is not just an academic skill but a protective factor that influences attendance, engagement, and even school safety. Ultimately, while celebrating the achievement of higher graduation rates, it is crucial to remember that the final 10 percent represents the students most in need of sustained and systemic support. For them, graduation must mean more than receiving a diploma—it must signify readiness for life, work, and continued learning. Achieving that vision requires a coordinated system of academic, behavioral, and community supports that begins early, engages families meaningfully, and ensures that every student, regardless of background or circumstance, is seen, supported, and set up to thrive.

In most states, responsibility for improving graduation rates — especially for vulnerable student groups such as students with disabilities, English learners, and low-income youth — must be shared across three interconnected levels: district, state, and community, which is embedded in your question. ...

*Do you know how many dropouts  
our school had this year?*



*30 if we count the 10 teachers*

### Center Comments

Schools, districts, and state education agencies are working tirelessly to boost high school graduation rates—but these efforts are falling short. Why? Because we continue to neglect the critical need to rethink student and teacher supports. Without improving how schools address barriers to learning and re-engage disconnected students, graduation initiatives will remain incomplete and ineffective. The time to act is now—systemic change cannot wait.

For more on enhancing learning support to enhance graduation rates for these three groups, see our Center's Quick Finds and documents.

>*Children and Poverty*

>*Dropout Prevention*

>*About Addressing Poverty: What's a School's Role?*

>*Defining Multiple Pathways for High School Graduation*

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

### 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>

12/3 Authentic partnerships with families and communities  
12/3 Proactive AI safety in schools  
12/3 Understanding anxiety  
12/8 Supporting those who experience bullying  
12/9 Conflict management and problem solving  
12/9 Title I dollars to support homelessness  
12/9 Evolving high school to engage learners  
12/10 Strategic planning for education leaders  
12/11 Shifts in federal education funding  
1/2 Building belonging in schools  
1/13 Positive classroom interactions  
1/15 Elevating school staff talent and recruiting  
2/10 Strengthening school community partnerships  
2/10 Prevention core competencies  
2/24 Whole school approach  
3/3 Strong leaders make strong schools  
3/24 Student voice and advocacy

*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)

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

- >> **Funding Student Needs: A Review of State Funding Policies for English Learners and Students from Low-Income Backgrounds**
- >> **What's the difference between "School Mental Health" and "Mental Health in Schools"**
- >> **English learner toolkit**
- >> **Promising Practices of Out-of-School Time Programs for Low-Income Adolescents: A Systematic Review**
- >> **Strengthening Support for Students with Disabilities: Revisiting Section 504 Compliance**
- >> **Comparing the Concepts of ACEs and Barriers to Learning and Teaching**
- >> **Educational Advocacy for Youth in Foster Care: Perceptions of Program Staff, Caregivers, Educators, and Foster Care Liaisons**
- >> **About Indigenous Children Being Raised by Grandparents**
- >> **Major Reasons for Transforming K-12 Student/Learning Supports**

***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.

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

**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](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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***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 140,000 on our listserv.)

**For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto: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](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

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**THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER\***

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

**Send resources ideas, requests, comments,  
and experiences for sharing**  
[Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

\*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.