

(5/14/25) This continuing education resource is from the national  
**Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

### Featured

**(1) 45% of School Aged Children Lack Summer Learning Opportunities**

**(2) Protective Buffers: Accentuating the positive and focusing on student strengths**

And, as always, you will find

**(3) Links to a few other resources relevant to continuing education**

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

### For discussion and interchange:

**>45% of School Aged Children Lack Summer Learning Opportunities**

Summer can add to the many disparities experienced by children from low-income families. Often mentioned are summer learning loss, insufficient childcare, and periods of limited access to positive physical, social, and enrichment activities. School programs during the summer are vital to addressing summer learning loss and to addressing achievement and opportunity gaps. In addition to academic knowledge and skills, example of the benefits that children and youth can derive from positive summer activities include “the opportunities to explore interests, practice new skills, and practice independence and self-regulation during free time.” ([National Academies Press, 2019](#))

### Here are a few excerpts from a sample of recent articles:

From: [\*\*45% of Children Lack Summer Learning Opportunities\*\*](#)

“Slightly more than half of U.S. parents, 55%, report their school-aged children participated in at least one structured program last summer that provided opportunities to learn or refine academic, athletic, creative, social or other skills. Forty-five percent of parents say their children did not participate in any such program.

Local day camps and weekly enrichment courses are the most common structured summer programs for U.S. children, followed by summer school and overnight camps. Lower-income children are much less likely than middle- and upper-income children to participate in most types of summer programs.

About half of parents of kindergarten through grade 12 students say there were summer programs they wanted their children to take but couldn’t. The cost of the programs is the main reason they give for not being able to participate.

With 48% of U.S. parents saying they had to forgo or limit their children’s participation in summer learning programs, and 66% of this group citing cost as a barrier, that means 32% of all U.S. K-12 parents could not have their child participate in a summer program specifically because of cost considerations....”

From: [\*\*The cost of school holidays for children from low income families\*\*](#)

“School holidays can be stressful periods for children from low-income families. Poor provision of appropriate childcare, limited access to enrichment activities, and food insecurity mean that children’s health and well-being can suffer and their learning stagnate or decline...

There is now an emerging body of evidence which suggests that the prolonged summer break

has an accumulative effect on educational outcomes and may be one of the most fundamental, yet least acknowledged, contributors toward the attainment gap between richest and poorest children, accounting for almost two-thirds of the gap by the time children reach the age of 14.... There are clearly broader structural inequalities at work in shaping educational outcomes and children's well-being. However, the cost of summer holidays and its effect on attainment, both educationally and in terms of well-being, points to a policy blind spot with respect to providing equal opportunities for children....

For many low-income families, the summer holidays are an exceptionally difficult period. Not only are children from poorer families prevented from participating in enriching activities that many others take for granted, but their health is also put at risk through malnourishment, isolation, and extended periods of inactivity. These disadvantages emerge from a range of overlapping issues, including low income; welfare cuts and unsuitable, inaccessible, and insufficient childcare; the absence of free school meals; and the lack of suitable childcare during the summer.

Parents' opportunities to pursue working commitments are made increasingly difficult and this may further hinder attempts to move out of poverty. The disadvantages that low-income families face meld together and reinforce each other in ways which deeply permeate children's lives. There is evidence to suggest that the combination of these factors exacts a toll upon children's learning through the phenomenon of summer learning loss which in turn may contribute to the widening of attainment gaps between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students.

Although presently there is no definitive solution to the problems faced by low-income families, evidence suggests that if we are to tackle learning inequalities and support children's education, health, and well-being, a system of social protection is required to negate the impact of poverty during the summer holidays..."

From: *Exploring the Summer Activity Gap*

"...Research shows that while most children learn at about the same pace during the school year, poor children tend to fall behind academically during the summer months. In terms of grade-level equivalents, the reading gap between low- and middle-income children widens by more than three months....

Several simple policy ideas emerge from our research.

- > First, we should establish summer programs that are free (or inexpensive), provide transportation, accommodate parents' work schedules, and last for most of the summer.
- > Second, we should ensure that these programs offer the kinds of enriching experiences that middle-income children enjoy, including music, art, and sports lessons; remedial tutoring that addresses children's academic weaknesses as well as enrichment tutoring that builds on their strengths and interests; and trips to museums, the zoo, historical sites, parks, and other fun, educational places.

But we worry that creating programs specifically for low-income students will not result in high-quality programs because free camps often pale in comparison to their expensive counterparts. Thus, we highly recommend investing in programs that seek to serve both advantaged and disadvantaged students. Specialized, high-quality programs that provide scholarships to low-income students or use sliding scales to determine fees give poor students access to the exact same programs that their middle-class counterparts enjoy. Helping programs such as these to provide scholarships, transportation, and extended-care hours could vastly expand the opportunities for low-income students to experience high-quality enrichment over the summer.

Some lower-cost solutions should help as well. Schools should give children access to their computer labs and libraries over the summer, even just one day a week (after all, these resources often sit unused all summer). For students in low-income communities (where parents often don't feel safe letting kids walk very far), we should also bring more resources to children, by funding more bookmobiles (and artmobiles and museums-on-wheels). Finally, we should make sure to advertise existing community resources, parks, and summer programs widely-both to parents and students. ..."

From: *More than 8 in 10 districts to keep or expand summer learning*

"More than 8 in 10 superintendents said their district is planning to maintain or increase access to summer learning this year, with 73% saying that maintaining or improving academic skills is the single most important benefit of summer programming...

In addition to improving academic performances, superintendents cited advantages such as engaging students in enriching activities, offering opportunities for fun and improving children's mental health as top benefits of summer learning activities...."

### **An Example of Paid Positions for Youth During the Summer**

HIRE LA focuses on preparing young adults for the 21st Century workforce. It is designed to provide a starter job for youth ages 14-24. HIRE LA is funded by multiple sources and used to provide work experience, as well as work skills development, financial literacy, career coaching and mentoring, and career exposure. HIRE LA programming provides youth with the preparedness needed to enter the workforce and sets them on a path of becoming lifetime earners. <https://www.hirelayouth.com/>

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**

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

>**Protective Buffers: Accentuating the positive and focusing on student strengths**

Positive psychology is devoted to the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and positive enabling institutions. An understanding of positive psychology is consistent with the efforts of schools to

- >avoid a deficit view of students and emphasize strengths, assets, resilience, protective buffers
- >develop a supportive, nurturing, and caring climate in classrooms/school-wide
- >enhance student self-regulation
- >promote social and emotional learning

Protective factors are conditions that buffer against the impact of barriers (risk factors). Such conditions may prevent or counter risk producing conditions by promoting development of neighborhood, family, school, peer, and individual strengths and assets. Protective buffers are a natural by-product of comprehensive, multifaceted efforts to reduce risk factors and foster positive development.

From: *Gratitude Buffers Against the Effects of Stressful Life Events*

"...Positive psychology focuses on the study of optimal psychological functioning, including personal strengths (e.g., hope, gratitude, prosocial behavior) and environmental assets (e.g., social support; positive school climate) that may serve as protective factors for individuals facing difficult life events.

One of the primary propositions of positive psychology is that the most effective way to prevent psychological problems is by fostering human strengths and adaptive behaviors ... childhood and adolescence represent optimal stages to promote well-being. ...

Being grateful for another person's kindness increases one's likelihood of being socially responsive to that person, such as through verbally communicating thanks.

Further, this social responsiveness aids one in finding new relationships, reminds them of the value of existing relationships, and binds them to these relationships... Gratitude strengthens social bonds and increases the likelihood of receiving social support from others...

Activities that foster gratitude can be easily integrated into reading and writing programs in the school setting ....”

From: *Focusing on a child's strengths*

“When parents are concerned about their child's development, they often seek an assessment to address concerns and identify any conditions, such as autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, or learning disorders. It might seem counterintuitive but assessments are starting to focus on a child's strengths during this process. This can create powerful opportunities to improve child and family outcomes, particularly when too much of the focus is on challenges in the family home, school and play settings....

Focusing on a child's strengths can have a powerful impact on children and parents. It can boost a child's motivation, self-esteem, cognitive skills, language development, problem-solving abilities and build stronger relationships.

For parents and caregivers, it can increase their own feelings of self-worth and improve the quality of their relationship with their own children.

When parents and caregivers believe in their child's abilities and encourage their strengths, children and families thrive. We asked caregivers to identify their child's strengths on their first assessment visit. Nearly 700 caregivers reported an average of 2.8 strengths about their children. We identified six categories of child strengths: cognitive and intellectual, social and interpersonal, hobbies and passions, character and personality, physical, and resilient behaviors.

Some caregivers might report that while their child had difficulty with peer interactions, they were also kind, affectionate, honest and caring. Other caregivers described concerns about cognitive delays, but they also described how children persevered and persisted with tasks....

For caregivers, along with discussing concerns, reflect on and talk with your clinicians about your child's strengths. Make sure clinicians keep these in mind when devising supports.

For both caregivers and clinicians, it can be helpful to think about characteristics often seen as challenges—such as a strong need for routine—as also potential strengths. It may lead to new ways of supporting children. With the right environment and support, these traits can be valuable assets in a child's development....”

For more, see

>*Positive Psychology Goes to School: Conceptualizing Students' Happiness in 21st Century Schools While 'Minding the Mind!' Are We There Yet? Evidence-Backed, School-Based Positive Psychology Interventions*

Our Center has a Quick Find on

>*Resilience/protective factors*

Here are a few brief Center resources:

>*Protective Factors (Resiliency)*

>*About Positive Psychology*

>*Engaging the Strengths of Families, Youth, and Communities in Rebuilding Learning Supports*

>*Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH*

>*Promoting Mental Health and Preventing Problems at School*

***How are the above topics being discussed in your locale?***

Please let us know so we can share the info widely. Send to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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

- >> **Managing in a Storm of Chaos: The Ecology of School Principals' Crisis Management**
- >> **Using Social Media to Promote Life Skills Among Adolescents: A Debate on Opportunities, Challenges, and Implications for Health and Education**
- >> **Using community organizing to build a system of care**
- >> **Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth**
- >> **Patterns of participation in summer programming among United States' elementary children from low-income urban households**
- >> **National Academies of Sciences ... 2025. Blueprint for a National Prevention Infrastructure for Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders**
- >> **Study reveals misconceptions among professionals assessing dyslexia**
- >> **Education Department stops \$1 billion in funding for school mental health**
- >> **Authentic Youth Engagement in Policy Project**

**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>

- 5/14 Health, Well-being and Safety is Essential to Showing Up
- 5/15 Social media tactics for prevention
- 5/15 Mental health and student outcomes
- 5/17 Using AI for student success
- 5/20 Strategies to enhance student mental and physical well-being
- 5/20 Understanding anxiety
- 5/20 Making the case for prevention
- 5/22 How AI is expanding in schools
- 5/22 Community centered prevention
- 5/27 Creating a low stress environment
- 5/29 Understanding depression
- 5/29 End student boredom
- 6/2 Raising resilient children
- 6/3 Prevention science: application to practice
- 6/4 Understanding social anxiety
- 6/16 Nurturing connections with children
- 6/17 Responsive youth justice system
- 8/6 Student Connectedness Fosters Attendance and Engagement /
- 9/24 Family Engagement is the Foundation for Attendance and Learning

***How Learning Happens*** (Edutopia's updated series of videos)

***Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth*** (Webinar recording)

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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 130,000 on our listserv.)*

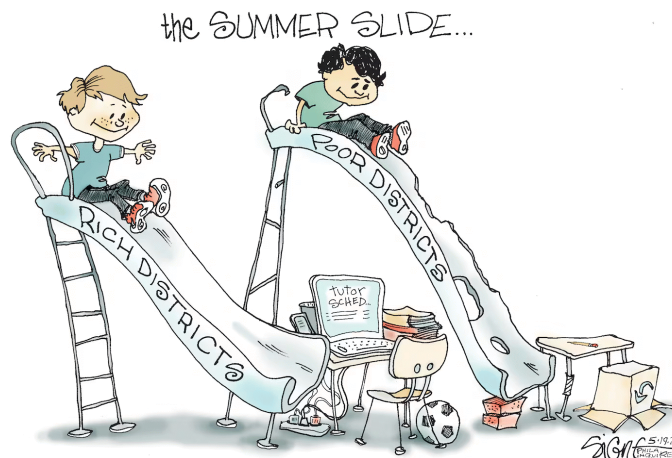
**For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**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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The work of the **National Initiative for Transforming Student/Learning Supports** emphasizes that:

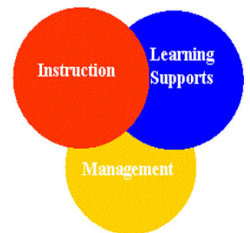
***Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to promoting whole child development, advancing social justice, and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.***

Our research indicates that transforming student/learning supports involves

- >moving school improvement policy from a 2 to a 3 component framework and
- >unifying and developing student/learning supports into a comprehensive and equitable intervention system

**See:**

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



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

**For new sign-ups – email [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto: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/> )**