

(8/5/26) This continuing education resource is from the national
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA

Featured

(1) Should screen time be limited in schools?

(2) What do students want from schools?

And, as always, you will find

(3) Links to more resources

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

For discussion and interchange:

>Should screen time be limited in schools?

Screen use among children has risen sharply over the past two decades. A 2025 Pew Research Center report found that 60% of parents say their child age 12 or younger uses a tablet. Research suggests that too much screen exposure may contribute to symptoms associated with attention deficit disorders, hinder social-emotional development, increase vulnerability to technology overuse or addiction, disrupt sleep patterns, and potentially affect healthy brain development.

It is important, however, to distinguish between recreational screen time and academic screen use. Unstructured “for fun” screen time tends to be more harmful than screen exposure in educational settings. This is largely due to the fast-paced, highly stimulating nature of much recreational digital content.

Concerns about screen use in schools are clearly gaining momentum among educators, parents, and policymakers. As a colleague recently stressed: “Excessive screen time in classrooms is a big problem, from both a developmental and mental health perspective, and a lot of parents are calling for screen time limits.” This comment was accompanied by a request for resources.

Do you have any resources on balanced tech use in the classroom?

If you have anything to share in the way of resources and/or comments about this matter, please send them to Ltaylor@ucla.edu for sharing.

What Research Says

Risks of excessive or unstructured screen use include:

- Attention problems, distraction, and reduced academic performance
- Increased anxiety, depression, and sleep disruption
- Reduced social interaction and physical activity

At the same time, not all screen use is the same:

- Passive use (drill apps, scrolling, videos) is more strongly linked to negative outcomes
 - Active use (research, collaboration, creative production) can support learning and engagement
- This distinction is becoming central in current guidance.

What's the current consensus?

What we note at this juncture is that there has been a shift in recent expert guidance.

Leading pediatric and education groups have moved away from strict time limits alone. For example: The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) now emphasizes quality, context, and balance, not just minutes and ensuring screens don't crowd out sleep, relationships, physical activity, and play. The U.S. Department of Education similarly stresses active vs. passive use, rather than clock-based limits.

So an emerging consensus argues that the issue isn't just "how much screen time," but what kind, for what purpose, and at what developmental stage. This has led to the following recommendations:

1. *Developmentally appropriate use* – with little to no independent device use in early grades and gradual introduction with clear purpose
2. *Priority on instruction, not devices* – starting with learning goals, then deciding if tech adds value and avoiding tech-driven lessons that replace strong teaching
3. *Limiting passive screen time* – reducing drill-and-practice apps and low-engagement activities and careful, intentional decisions about videos/gaming
4. *Blending digital with non-digital* – protecting time for reading, writing by hand, frequent discussions and play; avoiding "defaulting" to screens
5. *Building healthy habits* – teaching students self-regulation and digital literacy and creating screen-free routines (e.g., transitions, lunch, group work)

Policymakers are moving forward with limitations

California, for example, passed a law requiring districts to adopt phone restrictions by July 2026. In April 2026, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) approved a major shift to limit classroom screen use, including:

- >Eliminating devices for the youngest students (early ed–1st grade)
- >Setting daily/weekly screen-time limits by grade
- >Restricting access to platforms like YouTube and non-instructional games
- >Encouraging more paper-and-pencil work and in-person interaction

It should be noted that Dylan Elliott, a fourth grade teacher in the LAUSD and a doctoral student in curriculum and instruction at the University of Virginia, wrote a piece in EdSource entitled:

>LAUSD's proposed screen-time policy will harm students and teachers

Here's an excerpt:

"...This spring, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) set screen-time limits, a familiar approach many families use at home. The proposed policy would sharply restrict screen use in elementary classrooms, including a daily cap of 20 minutes in second and third grade, and 30 the teachers expected to carry it out. minutes in fourth and fifth grade. While this might be an effective tactic to get children off Roblox after dinner, applying this strategy in the classroom is misguided at best and pedagogically reckless at worst. If adopted, this policy will harm the students it claims to protect and undermine

While I understand the impulse, limiting screen time by the clock mistakes the symptoms for the disease. Much of the research alarming families and educators focuses on recreational screen use at home. That work is worth taking seriously, but linking recreational and educational device use is a false equivalence. Doomscrolling on TikTok and typing an essay are both forms of "screen time" in the same way 3D glasses and prescription lenses are both eyewear. ...

The harm does not come from the screen or the time spent on it. The harm comes from the kind of work the screen is used for. To a clock, 30 minutes of mindless drilling and 30 minutes of genuine research are the same 30 minutes. For us teachers, knowing the difference is the job.

Used effectively, digital tools enable students to revise work efficiently, collaborate productively, access challenging material and identify reliable online sources....

The proposal also carelessly ignores the digital divide. Children from under-resourced communities often arrive with less practice using digital tools fluently and critically than their wealthier peers. School is one of the few places where that gap can be closed. This proposed policy risks leaving already disadvantaged students underprepared for our digitized world. ...

I have watched students waste time on screens. I have also watched them use those same devices to act on meaningful feedback, build persuasive arguments, revise their writing and find answers to fascinating questions. A strict usage limit punishes both kinds of screen time equally.

Supporters may hope a cap forces better choices. More likely, meaningful digital work will lose out to whatever is easiest to justify, and screen time becomes another compliance fight....”

We discussed this issue previously in

*>iPads and Tablets in Elementary vs. Secondary Schools:
What Research Says About Learning Outcomes –*

We continue to enhance our Center’s Quick Find on

>Technology as an Intervention Tool

Let us know about resources we should add to the Quick Find.

For discussion and interchange:

>What do students want from schools?

Student voices offer diverse insights shaped by differences in background, life experiences, social and economic circumstances, development, interests, and opportunities. Listening to students is more than a courtesy. It is an essential component of improving schools.

Research and practice indicate that meaningful student participation can contribute to:

- >Greater student engagement and motivation
- >More personalized and relevant instruction
- >Improved learning and behavior
- >A more positive school climate
- >Stronger relationships and social capital
- >Policies and practices that better reflect student needs

Consider the following excerpt from a recent article:

What it takes to transform education systems

“...Youth perspectives on what meaningful education systems transformation should look like.... Drawing on responses from more than 100 young people across multiple countries, participants between the ages of 15 and 25 shared their experiences, priorities, and hopes for more inclusive and responsive education systems.

The responses were striking in their consistency. Young people across very different contexts identified critical thinking, adaptability, and mental health as the skills they most want and need. They asked for transferable, practical capacities to navigate life: how to manage failure, regulate emotions, exercise agency, build financial literacy, and turn ideas into action. As one respondent put it, “school taught me how to pass exams, but not really how to navigate life.”

Young people also emphasized that schools cannot support them in isolation. Many reflected on the importance of supportive relationships and environments in helping them thrive, particularly the role of families, teachers, and mentors. At the same time, they spoke candidly about the barriers they continue to face, including financial constraints, mental health challenges, limited opportunities, and unsafe or exclusionary environments. Underlying many of these reflections was a broader call for education systems that not only deliver academic content but also create space for young people to exercise agency, feel heard, and engage meaningfully with the realities shaping their lives and futures...

Young people are not passive recipients of education. They have a clear view of what is failing them and what would help....”

A Few Related Center Resources

- > [*Youth Participation: Making It Real*](#)
- > [*About Student Voice and Participation*](#)
- > [*Youth Participation in School Policy and Practice*](#)

Some Questions for Reflection/Discussion about Understanding What Students Want

- To what extent are students in your area meaningfully involved in shaping policies, practices, and learning opportunities?
- What are students telling us that we may not be hearing clearly enough?
- How can schools create authentic opportunities for students to exercise agency and participate in decision-making?
- What barriers limit student participation, and how can these barriers be addressed?

*Meaningful school improvement requires more than listening to student voices.
It requires acting when students tell us what isn't working for them.*

>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

Here are some “back to school” ideas for welcoming and connecting with students and families.

Mayor’s back to school fair – Since 1996, the Dallas Mayor's Back to School Fair has connected tens of thousands of Dallas children and families with the resources they need to start each school year strong.

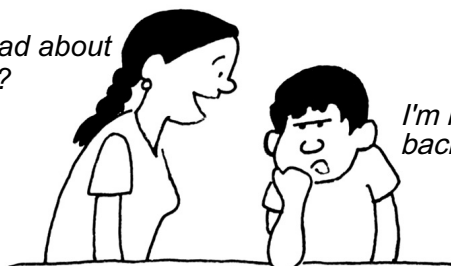
Back to School Fair – Getting ready for school with free haircuts, backpacks and school supplies for kids, and health checks and helpful resource info for busy parents.

Back to School Community Carnival – Each student receives a backpack filled with essential school supplies, ready to tackle the year ahead. Free haircuts help students feel their best and start the school year with confidence. Onsite sports physicals and health-related services get students ready for extracurriculars. Games, activities, and entertainment for the whole family.

Back-To-School Extravaganza – This free, family friendly event is expected to welcome 1,000–1,500 children, each receiving a backpack, a book, and educational materials. Beyond providing resources, the goal is to create a joyful, memorable experience for families as they prepare for the new school year.

Jersey Cares – Each year, thousands of New Jersey children attend their first day of school without basic educational tools such as backpacks, notebooks, and calculators. These under-resourced children struggle to succeed academically. Jersey Cares works with dozens of schools, children's shelters, and community centers with the goal that no children in New Jersey will have to experience a first day of school without these basic necessities.

What's making you sad about going back to school?



I'm not sad. This is just my back-to-school face.

NEW REPORT

New Directions for Student and Learning Supports: From Fragmented Initiatives to System Transformation

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Newdirs.pdf>

This national report concludes that the next major frontier in school improvement is not adding more programs, services, or initiatives, but fundamentally transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

The report, analyzes major efforts underway across the nation to strengthen supports for students and identifies the lessons, challenges, and policy implications emerging from those initiatives.

Seven major and overlapping initiatives related to strengthening student and learning supports are reviewed. These are:

- Whole-child approaches
- Integrated student supports
- Community Schools Movement
- Comprehensive school mental health initiatives
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS)
- Expansion of student support personnel
- Efforts aimed at transforming student and learning support systems

While acknowledging the contributions of these initiatives, the report stresses that none, by itself, provides a sufficiently comprehensive framework for organizing the wide range of programs, personnel, services, funding streams, and community resources schools use to address barriers to learning and teaching.

A central theme of the report is that fragmentation of student and learning supports is widespread and the focus of many reform initiatives. But, fragmentation is a symptom. The deeper concern is that addressing barriers to learning and teaching has never been established as a primary component of school improvement. As long as these essential supports remain secondary, fragmentation will continue.

The report calls for reframing the prevailing school improvement framework from its traditional two-component focus on (1) *Instruction* and (2) *Management-Governance* and expanding it into a three-component framework that encompasses (3) *Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* as essential and primary. This third component is operationalized as a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports.

The report also highlights that now is a unique opportunity for transformation. The growing convergence of whole-child initiatives, MTSS implementation, community schools, school mental health efforts, chronic absenteeism initiatives, and equity-focused reforms means that many of the building blocks for change are already in place. The challenge now is bringing those efforts together within a coherent and sustainable system.

Among its recommendations, the report calls for:

- Elevating student and learning supports as a primary component of school improvement policy
- Organizing fragmented initiatives within a unified intervention framework
- Strengthening leadership and infrastructure dedicated to student and learning supports
- Prioritizing prevention and early intervention
- Expanding school-community collaboration
- Developing accountability measures directly related to student supports as well as academics

The report concludes that improving instruction and transforming student and learning supports are not competing agendas. Together they define a full approach to school improvement. the authors write. "The future of student and learning supports depends not on launching one more initiative, but on transforming how schools organize efforts to address the barriers to learning and teaching that hamper success at school for too many students and staff."

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>

8/5 Support for kinship care
8/5 Building strong parent-teen relationships
8/5 Understanding depression
8/10 Supporting emotional regulation in kids
8/11 Reducing Chronic Absenteeism and Improving Attendance at the Start of the Year
8/11 Choosing prevention programs that fit
8/12 Communicating clearly under stress
8/12 Strategies for Supporting New Teacher Happiness and Success
8/19 Eating disorders
8/24 Supporting emotional regulation in kids
8/25 How AI is being incorporated into tools that support reading, writing, communication
8/25 Adapting prevention programs
9/16 Rethink Classroom Management
9/16 Communicating with the IEP team
9/23 Navigating IEP disagreements
9/29 Leading Teams: Building Capacity for Teacher Leaders
10/7 How AI can help you build flexible options for diverse learners

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)

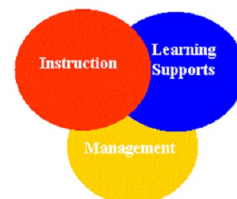
The Case for Systemic Redesign of Student/Learning Supports

Fundamental, systemic redesign is urgently needed for how schools address factors interfering with learning and teaching. Immediate action is essential to move beyond crisis driven responses toward a cohesive, proactive, and equitable system of student/learning supports.

For guidance and resources on how to pursue this transformation, see the

>National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports.

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.



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To Listserv Participants

We hope you will share this resource with others who may find it helpful.

And 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.)

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

**Send resources ideas, requests, comments,
and experiences for sharing to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

@#@#@#@#

**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! Contact: Ltaylor@ucla.edu

THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER

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 and now is named the *Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports*.