

(9/2/26) This continuing education resource is from the national
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA

Featured

(1) RAND Report Explores How Students & Parents View Absences

(2) Do Health Hubs Help Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching?

(3) Want to Improve Student and Learning Supports?

And, as always, you will find

(4) Links to more resources

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

For discussion and interchange:

>RAND Report Explores How Students & Parents View Absences

Reducing school absences remains one of the most challenging matters facing schools. In addressing the problem, it is important to understand how absences are viewed by parents and students.

Here are excerpts from a recent RAND report:

Why Do Middle and High Schoolers Miss School?

“In this report, we investigate why secondary school–age students are missing school and to what extent these reasons differ by age. To do so, we use data from two surveys we administered to nationally representative samples in late 2025. The primary data source for the analyses in this report is a survey administered to 1,124 members of the RAND American Youth Panel

Key Findings

- > Although heightened levels of chronic absenteeism remain a serious national problem, one-third of youth between the ages of 12 and 18 surveyed in December 2025 agreed that missing three or more weeks of school—that being chronically absent—is mostly OK. Parents were more skeptical than youth that being chronically absent is OK, but 18 percent still thought it was mostly fine.
- > Parents of older youth, especially those with children ages 17 to 18, were less likely than parents of younger youth (ages 12 to 14) to report always making their children go to school if they did not want to go.
- > Twenty-two percent to 48 percent of youth and parents perceived that reasons not related to physical health, such as going on vacation, feeling down or anxious, or simply wanting a day to rest, are legitimate reasons to miss school. The oldest youth we surveyed (ages 17 to 18) were especially likely to feel that needing to rest or catching up on schoolwork were legitimate reasons to miss school.
- > High school–age youth (ages 15 to 18) were more likely than youth ages 12 to 14 to say that their parents have allowed them to take mental health days if they did not want to go to school....

Trying to get kids to avoid being chronically absent will continue to be a challenge as long as families do not view being absent as a problem. The results of our surveys showed that, although chronic absenteeism continues to be a serious national problem, many parents and youth did not view being chronically absent as a cause for alarm. Although parents were more likely to perceive

absenteeism as an issue than youth, large minorities of both groups thought that missing three weeks of school in a given year was mostly OK. School and district officials who are looking to combat chronic absenteeism may need to send messages to both students and their parents....

Our report also provided some indication that schools should put in the time and effort to tailor these messages by age group, so that the messages resonate better with older and younger youth and their parents.”

For more on this, see our Center’s Quick Find on [*Attendance*](#).

And here are a few Center developed resources that may be helpful:

>A Center Policy & Practice Analysis Brief: School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies & Practices Going in the Right Direction?

>About Policy and Practice Trends for Reducing Truancy

>Chronic Absenteeism and the Need for a Comprehensive System of Student and Learning Supports

>School Attendance: Focusing on Engagement and Re-engagement

>Absenteeism: Beyond Reporting and Beyond Another Special Initiative

For discussion and interchange:

>Do Health Hubs Help Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching?

Research consistently links chronic absenteeism to students experiencing poverty, housing instability, transportation barriers, family caregiving responsibilities, negative school climate, weak adult – student relationships, physical and mental health challenges, and community stressors. Given that schools have an important role to play in reducing poverty, that role must involve more than the fragmented and marginalized approaches generally advocated for schools. Dealing with multiple, interrelated concerns, such as poverty, child development, education, violence, crime, safety, housing, and employment requires multiple and interrelated solutions. Just adding a few additional services and programs to schools is not a solution. Interrelated solutions require wide based collaboration. In particular, schools, homes, and communities need to work together strategically in pursuing shared goals related to the general well-being of the young and society. Health hubs and community schools are examples of such efforts.

From: [*Housing, groceries, and medical needs: Detroit’s Health Hubs helping to get kids to school*](#)

“...Detroit Public Schools Community District’s 10 Health Hubs opened in 2023 to streamline wraparound services for students and their families and have contributed to improved attendance in the district and helped thousands of families. Nine navigators lead parents through a complex web of district resources, social services, and nonprofit assistance they may not otherwise know how to access.

Their offices serve as a one-stop-shop to triage the root causes that keep students from regularly attending school, such as poor health, unstable housing, and food insecurity. At the hubs, students are connected with vision and hearing screenings, as well as medical, dental, and mental health care.

The centers connect families with housing, utility assistance, and legal services. The school community can stop in for food and hygiene product distribution. From July 1, 2023, through June 14, the hubs served families 19,200 times and more than 1,100 referrals were made....

Prolonged absenteeism has long been a problem for Detroit schools due to systemic socioeconomic barriers, which in turn severely hinders students' learning. Michigan students are considered chronically absent when they miss 18 days or more in a 180-day school year. Nearly 61% of the district's students were chronically absent in 2024-25. Though the rate was considerably higher than the statewide average of 28%, DPSCD has outpaced the rest of Michigan in reducing absenteeism since the COVID-19 pandemic.

District officials attribute the improvement to many long-term efforts – like creating a culture of improving attendance among leaders, hiring more counselors to address mental health needs, and student incentives – but they believe the hubs are a key piece.

Overall, the district's chronic absenteeism rate decreased by 5.2 percentage points last year compared to 2022-23, the last year before the hubs opened. Academic performance has also improved, with third-grade reading proficiency and graduation rates reaching historic highs last year...

While DPSCD has always tried to fill gaps for students with attendance agents and wraparound services, district officials say the hubs streamline the process. Navigators have the time for deeper conversations with families and take detailed notes on their case files. They can also better track how the children are served by outside organizations beyond the initial referral.

All of the hubs are strategically placed so every school has a location within 3 miles.... It costs around \$500,000 a year to operate each hub. But because most of the expenses are covered by donations from community partners, the actual cost for DPSCD is around \$172,000 a year per hub.

Coordinated school health plan models in New York City's school system and the Oakland Unified School District served as models for the district. Those districts reportedly saw improvements in attendance and academic achievement, as well as lower rates of student discipline. A third-party evaluator is currently examining how the hubs affect DPSCD student attendance. It is expected to be complete in the fall...."

For more on schools working with communities to address barriers to learning and teaching, see the following Center resources:

>Collaboration - School, Community, Interagency; community schools

>Schools, Families, and Community Working Together

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

>Student and family assistance self-study survey

The school called and said you missed school.



I admit I was absent, but I didn't miss school at all.

For discussion and interchange:

>Want to Improve Student and Learning Supports?

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

The challenge is not simply identifying promising practices. It is creating the policy, leadership, infrastructure, and accountability frameworks needed to develop fragmented efforts into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports that is replicable and sustainable.

Here are some basic considerations:

- **Fragmentation remains a widespread concern.** The field has accumulated many valuable initiatives, but too often they exist as disconnected activities rather than as an integrated system. Virtually every initiative reviewed in this report has emerged in part because existing student and learning supports are so fragmented. Schools typically operate multiple programs, services, personnel groups, and partnerships that address related concerns but function separately.
- **Fragmentation is a symptom of marginalization.** The concern is not simply fragmentation. Fragmentation persists because student and learning supports continue to be treated as secondary rather than primary responsibilities of schools. School improvement policy and practice focuses mainly on instruction and management-governance and pursue student and learning supports in an ad hoc and piecemeal manner.
- **System development matters more than adding a few more programs, personnel, and services.** The field has demonstrated considerable success in developing promising programs and expanding services. However, adding programs, personnel, and partnerships does not automatically produce better outcomes. Expansion without integration often increases complexity and competition for scarce resources. Sustainable improvement depends less on creating new initiatives and more on building systems capable of connecting and coordinating existing resources. The lesson is not that schools need more initiatives. The lesson is that schools need a framework capable of organizing initiatives into a coherent system.
- **Prevention and early intervention are essential.** Schools achieve greater impact when they address concerns before problems become severe. While intensive interventions are necessary, overreliance on crisis response limits effectiveness and strains resources. The most successful approaches emphasize prevention, early intervention, student engagement, positive school climate, and the timely identification of emerging problems.
- **Working relationships and collaboration are fundamental.** Experience demonstrates that schools cannot address many barriers to learning and teaching on their own. Across all efforts to improve schools, positive relationships emerge as a powerful contributor to student success. Strong connections among students, families, school staff, and community partners foster engagement, belonging, resilience, and learning. Effective collaboration with families and community partners is essential for expanding capacity and improving access to needed supports.
- **Leadership and infrastructure are indispensable.** Successful efforts depend not only on effective practices but also on the leadership and infrastructure needed to organize, coordinate, and sustain them. Schools and districts that establish leadership, planning, and accountability mechanisms for student and learning supports are better positioned to reduce fragmentation, strengthen implementation, and maintain progress over time.

Here are some steps the education leaders can take to begin transforming student/learning supports.

Elevate Student and Learning Supports as a Third Component of School Improvement

The most important next step is to establish addressing barriers to learning and teaching as a primary and permanent component of school improvement policy and practice. For too long, student and learning supports have remained secondary to instruction and management/governance. This marginalization has contributed to the fragmentation that continues to characterize schools' efforts to support learning, development, well-being, and equity of opportunity.

School improvement policy should be expanded from its traditional two-component framework to a three-component framework that operationalizes the third component into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. Accomplishing this will reposition addressing barriers to learning and teaching as a primary and essential responsibility of schools rather than as an auxiliary set of functions.

Move From Fragmented Initiatives to a Unified System

A major next step is to organize existing programs, personnel, services, and resources within a common intervention framework. This requires delineating what is in place and recommending system changes. The tasks involved include:

- (a) adopting a comprehensive intervention framework
- (b) using the framework to map existing student support activities and operational infrastructure
- (c) analyzing what has been mapped – assets, redundancies, gaps, needs for alignment
- (d) identifying priorities for and clarifying the benefits of system changes,
- (e) developing recommendations for system changes around shared goals,
- (f) building a critical mass of support for the recommended changes
- (g) submitting recommendations for approval by appropriate authorities and policy makers

Strengthen Leadership and Infrastructure

Sustainable improvement requires more than promising programs and services. It requires leadership and infrastructure capable of and accountable for facilitating and monitoring implementation of system changes and continuous improvement.

Schools and districts should establish and institutionalize leadership mechanisms with explicit responsibility for student and learning supports. This includes establishing

- a permanent administrative position to transform and lead a student/learning supports component of school improvement
- a student/learning support leadership team as a permanent operational infrastructure mechanism to work with the administrative lead
- designating temporary mechanisms for facilitating system changes (e.g., change agents, coaches) and work groups as needed

Tasks involve:

- (a) building staff capacity related to system changes
- (b) implementation of student/learning supports transformation
- (c) formative and summative evaluation and accountability
- (d) ongoing development of new directions

The stronger the operational infrastructure, the greater the likelihood of surviving changes in personnel, funding, or organizational priorities.

Prioritize Development of Key Facets of the Transformed System

In carrying out first steps, it is important to ensure essential facets of the transformed system are effectively implemented. For example:

- **Prevention and Early Intervention** – A stronger prevention and early-intervention orientation can reduce reliance on more intensive and costly interventions while

improving outcomes for larger numbers of students. This calls for prioritizing preventing problems and responding early when concerns emerge. Although intensive interventions remain essential, schools can often achieve greater impact by strengthening conditions that promote learning, engagement, healthy development, and well-being for all students. Particular attention should be paid to efforts that enhance attendance and engagement, foster connectedness, build positive relationships among students, educators, and families, strengthen positive school climate, and identify concerns before they become severe.

- **School and Community Collaboration** – In a period of continuing fiscal pressures, it is essential to make strategic and effective use of the resources that already exist. Moreover, no school can independently address every factor that affects learning, development, and well-being. Enhancing school-community collaboration includes mapping existing resources, reducing duplication, weaving together programs and personnel, strengthening collaborative working relationships with families and community partners, and creating mechanisms for coordinated planning and action.
- **Advancing Equity of Opportunity** – Reducing disparities in access to supports is a major goal of transforming student and learning supports. This involves ensuring the system provides equitable availability, access, and outcomes for all students and their families. Particular attention should be given to outreach to those who have become disengaged from school.

Major challenges ahead involve system development and implementation. The next major frontier in school improvement is not program expansion – it is system transformation.

For guidance and resources on how to transform student/learning supports, see the

> [National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports.](#)



>Links to a few other relevant shared resources

- >> *Youth/Adult partnerships: toolkit*
- >> *The associations between screen time and mental health in children aged 0-12: A systematic review*
- >> *Gaps in Identification, Support, and Outcomes for Students Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability*
- >> *Shrinking Budgets, Fewer Students: How District Leaders are Navigating a New Landscape of Reduced Resources and Competitive Pressures*
- >> *An innovative and sustainable approach to delivering school-based mental health and wellness services. Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community.*
- >> *Department of Education Issues Long-Awaited Edtech Guidance for States and Districts*

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>

9/3 Teacher leadership
9/8 Federal policy on youth homelessness
9/9 Generation AI starts early
9/14 Supporting emotional regulation in kids
9/14 Technology innovations in schools
9/16 Rethink Classroom Management
9/16 Communicating with the IEP team
9/16 Hosting great meetings: planning and preparation
9/17 Helping students deal with image based abuse
9/17 Special education advisory councils
9/21 Attendance is everyone's responsibility
9/21 Discovering the best in you and your team
9/23 Navigating IEP disagreements
9/24 Adapting programs to fit the local need
9/24 Building school partnerships
9/29 The Principal's role in student outcomes
9/29 Leading Teams: Building Capacity for Teacher Leaders
9/30 Family engagement to promote attendance
10/7 Understanding special educations: the IEP
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)

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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*.