August 15, 2016

Concern
>About *framing* evidence based interventions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching

Concern
>What's wrong with just adopting specific evidence-based practices from the provided lists?

Featured Set of Related Center Resources
>On evidence based programs and learning supports

Follow-up
>Catalyzing efforts to strengthen student/learning supports

##
Please forward this to a few colleagues you think might be interested. The more who join, the more we are likely to receive to share.

For those who have been forwarded this and want to be part of the weekly exchange, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

For previous recent postings of this community of practice, see
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm
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Note: In keeping with the *National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports,** this community of practice network has expanded in number of participants and topics discussed. The thematic emphasis is on (1) daily concerns confronting those working in and with schools, (2) the transformation of student and learning supports, and (3) promoting whole child development and positive school climate.

Concern: "ESSA has throughout the language the need for "evidence based" programs/ initiatives for use of Title and block grant funds. For grant writing purposes, would your Learning Supports framework be an evidence-based program or would you consider it the vehicle (the how) of applying other evidence based programs? The ability to scale up your work using ESSA funding seems very dependent on getting it "right" in the grant writing, and we need to be knowledgeable."

Center Response: We would stress that just as schools have frameworks for curriculum and standards, they need frameworks to guide development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports. Such frameworks guide policy development, are critical to decisions about which new practices to adopt and which to eliminate and for setting priorities to fill critical gaps at schools; they also are essential for realigning operational infrastructure, and for replication, scale-up, sustainability, formative and summative evaluation, and accountability.

Specifically, our work helps FRAME the dimensions of the needed system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. For example, using the intervention framework and prototype we have developed, states/districts/schools can embed the student/learning support practices they identify as needed and clarify how they will evolve them.

This is similar to what is done with the instructional component. Think about evidence-based practices to teach reading; they do not stand alone. Specific practices are framed as part of a total literacy curriculum. Within the literacy curriculum, choices are made about which practices to use to enhance vocabulary, comprehension, writing, etc. etc.

> Even though there is widespread recognition of the limitations of the current evidence-base (see below), we understand that anyone writing a proposal seeking funds will want to stress the "science base" for their proposal. What we recommend is that they indicate they are developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system that frames and transforms student and learning supports and that doing so will enable them to most effectively pursue the best practices that are available related to each facet of the framework.

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Invitation to listserv participants: *What's your take on all this?*
     What frameworks for organizing student/learning supports are being used?
  Do they unify interventions into a comprehensive and equitable system?
                    Any lessons learned you can share? Comments?
                    Recommendations? What's happening locally?
           Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Concern: *What's wrong with just adopting specific evidence-based practices from the provided lists?*

As Tom Vander Ark sagely noted: "Effective practices typically evolve over a long period in high-functioning, fully engaged systems."

Lists of evidence based interventions are contributing to the problems of fragmentation and counterproductive competition for sparse resources and the ongoing marginalization of student and learning supports in school improvement policy. No one argues against using the best science available to improve professional expertise. However, the evidence-based practices movement is reshaping public policy in ways that have raised concerns.

A central concern is that practices developed under highly controlled laboratory conditions are being pushed prematurely into widespread application based on unwarranted assumptions. This concern is especially salient when the evidence-base comes from short-term studies and has not included samples representing major subgroups with whom the practice is to be used.

Until researchers demonstrate a prototype is effective under "real world" conditions, it can only be considered a promising and not a proven practice. And, even then it must be determined whether it is a best practice. With respect to the designation of best, it is well to remember that best simply denotes that a practice is better than whatever else is currently available. How good it is depends on complex analyses related to costs and benefits. As the evidence-based movement has gained momentum, an increasing concern is that certain interventions are officially prescribed and others are proscribed by policy makers and funders. This breeds fear that only those practitioners who adhere to official lists will be sanctioned and rewarded.

For more on this, see resources listed in the following section.

Featured Set of Center Resources
>On evidence based programs and learning supports

>Historically, schools have been confronted with yet another project, another program, and another initiative. Many of these aim at addressing learning, behavior, and emotional problems and making schools safe and drug free. Added to the picture in recent years has been the demand that schools adopt practices that are evidence-based. Increasingly, terms such as science-based or empirically-supported are assigned to almost any intervention identified as having research data generated in ways that meet scientific standards and that demonstrates a level of efficacy deemed worthy of application. For a discussion of all this, see

Evidence-Based Practices in Schools: Concerns About Fit and Implementation
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/summer07.pdf

>Early research on moving empirically-supported practices into common use has tended to analyze and approach the matter with too limited a procedural framework and with too little attention to context. This document highlights information that can help advance work on what is widely called the implementation problem. Specifically, we frame the process in terms of the diffusion of innovations. And, we stress that such diffusion is being carried out in organized settings that have well-established institutional cultures and infrastructures that must change if effective widespread application is to occur. From this perspective, the implementation problem becomes one of diffusing innovation through major systemic change. It encompasses facilitating organizational changes that lead to effective adoption/adaptation of a prototype at a particular site and the added complexities of system-wide replication-to-scale. For a discussion of all this, see

Systemic Change and Empirically-Supported Practices: The Implementation Problem
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/implementation problem.pdf

>Also see
Addressing What's Missing in School Improvement Planning: Expanding Standards and Accountability to Encompass an Enabling or Learning Supports Component
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enabling/standards.pdf

>For more on these matters, See our online clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

Empirical Support for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/evaluation.htm

Empirically supported/Evidence Based Interventions
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/ests.htm

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Follow up

>Catalyzing efforts to strengthen student/learning supports

After a phone consultation, this follow-up was sent to a staff member who is initiating a process to strengthen learning supports in her district. It discusses the catalytic role staff can play using examples from our work across the country.

About Being a Catalyst for Improving Student and Learning Supports in a District

(1) Frame the need for improvement. Every school devotes significant resources to students who are not doing well at school and to preventing problems that interfere with student safety and well-being. In some schools, this amounts to as much as 25% of their budget. Unfortunately, the trend has been to expend such resources in an ad hoc and fragmented manner and to focus much of the attention on a relatively few students who manifest significant behavior, learning, and emotional problems. Clearly, current directions are not satisfactory.

As you know, from our perspective, we frame new directions for student and learning supports as encompassing a comprehensive *school-community continuum* (e.g., promoting healthy development and prevention of problems, responding as soon as problems are noted, intervening for chronic and severe problems). The continuum has content (which we group into six arenas -- classroom-based supports, supports for transitions, home/family engagement, community engagement, crisis prevention and response, student and family special assistance). Note the differences from the way multi-tiered support systems are usually framed.

(2) **Convene all who have a stake in improving student and learning supports.** In moving toward developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student supports, we recommend first convening all those who are directly involved in addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

The agenda is to (a) explore interest in moving forward and then (assuming sufficient interest), (b) identify about 5 potential members for a leadership team and others who might be willing to be on workgroups (e.g., related to mapping resources, enhancing data gathering).

We recommend asking them to prepare for the meeting by reading a quick overview. Here are some possibilities:

> >Brief pamphlet: *Toward Next Steps in School Improvement: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/towardnextstep.pdf
>
> > (Note: if this document doesn't seem to fit your situation, there are others to choose from in Section A of the Center's Rebuilding Toolkit http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm
>
> >2 page presentation: *What Is a Unified, Comprehensive. & Equitable System of Learning Supports?* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/whatis.pdf
>
> >Learning supports brochures from Districts and State Departments – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkita1a.htm
>
> >Watch ½ hour introductory webinar – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/powerpoint/briefintroslidesrec.pptx

(3) **Convene a meeting of the leadership team.**

> (Note: About a student and learning supports leadership team — see one page handout on *What is a Learning Supports Leadership Team?* – Http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resource%20coord%20team.pdf)

> *(a) First task for the team*. Organize workgroups to do the mapping and analysis of existing resources district-wide and for each school.

> As a guide for such mapping and analyses, the Center has developed a matrix tool based on a prototype intervention framework for a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports. This widely used school improvement aid can be downloaded at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf

After mapping what is going on, the workgroup can analyze gaps, redundancies, activities that are not cost-effective, etc.. Recommendations can focus on priorities for filling critical gaps and developing fragmented activity into a unified system. To underwrite the recommendations, the emphasis is on redeploying resources that are not cost-effective, enhancing collaboration across all district schools to create economies of scale, and establishing school-community linkages that allow for weaving together resources being expended separately on overlapping concerns.

> (For more on this, see *Resource Mapping and Management to Address Barriers to Learning: An Intervention for Systemic Change http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resourcemapping/resourcemappingandmanagement.pdf*)

(b) A second task can be to focus on enriching data for formative evaluation. The emphasis is on a system for amassing data the schools already gather and adding a few critical indicators of benefits for students and families and of system/school improvements. With respect to outcomes and impact, the focus is on major activity in each of the six arenas at each level (or each tier if that terminology is preferred). There are examples of indicators in *Evaluation and Accountability* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/evalaccount/evalmh.pdf

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*For information about the
National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports,
see
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html

And note that our new book detailing the prototypes and related resources is now in press.
For a preview, contact Ltaylor@ucla.edu .

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THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE BECOMES!

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

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 to *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/)