A Center Report   .   .   .

2021-22: Addressing Learning, Behavior, and Emotional Problems Through Better Use of Student and Learning Support Staff

This report highlights the following four matters that warrant particular attention as the 2021-2022 school year gets underway.

- *Outreaching and reengaging disconnected students*

- *Improving differentiated instruction*

- *Broadly embedding social emotional learning and development*

- *Reorganizing student/learning supports*

To address these concerns most productively, steps must be taken to enhance the roles and functions of student and learning support staff and, at the same time, rein in the tendency to proliferate school teams, work groups, and committees.

With these matters in mind, this report begins by underscoring the need to rework school and district operational infrastructures in ways that end the fragmentation and marginalization of school efforts to address barriers to teaching and learning. Then we explore the four matters listed above to illustrate that these and a range of other school improvements can benefit from the enhanced involvement of student and learning support staff.

During the COVID 19 crisis and the renewed protests about racial injustice, widespread statements have appeared anticipating the growing number of learning, behavior, and emotional problems that schools need to address this year. In this context, interest in enhancing the role of mental health in schools has grown exponentially.

In the past, many well intentioned initiatives and policy reports focused on how to best use student and learning support staff to address student problems. For the most part, however, such personnel continue to remain marginalized in school improvement plans. And rather than calling for addressing this state of affairs, advocates have argued mainly for just adding more bodies, as reflected currently in calls for how to use pandemic relief funds.

Increasing the numbers of student/learning support staff can help, but not if their primary use is only to provide services for a few more students. (Consider also the downside when funding for the added staff ends.)

Improving how schools address barriers to learning and teaching requires thinking about new roles and functions for student/learning support staff. This is illustrated as this report explores the following matters that warrant particular attention this year.

- ***Outreaching and reengaging disconnected students*** – Student/learning support staff can help find and reengage missing students and, in the process, improve ways to address chronic absenteeism.

- ***Improving differentiated instruction*** – Student/learning support staff can team with teachers *in classrooms* to enable personalized instruction and offer more classroom-based special assistance.

- ***Broadly embedding social emotional learning and development*** –Many schools are planning to emphasize social and emotional learning. Student/learning support staff can help with classroom-based efforts and can work toward ensuring a focus on natural opportunities to foster positive social and emotional development schoolwide.

- ***Reorganizing student/learning supports*** – At the district and school levels, there is a need and an opportunity to revamp student/learning supports (including upgrading the MTSS framework) with a view to developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports that effectively addresses learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

As indicated, student and learning support staff can play a major role in addressing each of the above matters (as well as many other schooling matters). For them to do so most productively, (a) their roles and functions must be enhanced, (b) some rethinking is in order about how school teams, work groups, and committees, and (c) steps must be taken to end the fragmentation and marginalization of student and learning support staff in school improvement planning and implementation.

With transformative changes in mind, we begin this report by underscoring the need to rein in the tendency to proliferate school teams, work groups, and committees by reworking school and district operational infrastructures. Teams and work groups clearly are essential to enhancing school improvement; however, they must be designed in a way that addresses barriers to learning and teaching effectively and efficiently. And this requires rethinking the work of student/learning support staff.

About Operational Infrastructure, Leadership Teams, and Workgroups for School Improvement

*School improvement agenda emphasizing enhanced participation and shared leadership seem to have accelerated the **ad hoc** creation of teams and work groups at all levels of the education system. Teams and work groups are essential mechanisms; problems arise, however, when "another team" is naively added to the operational infrastructure.*

With almost every new initiative, schools are called upon to establish a team dedicated to making it happen. Recent examples include calls for teams related to guiding social and emotional learning, as well as specific concerns arising from the pandemic.

It should come as no surprise, then, that a common lament at schools is: "Not another team! We don't have the time, there's not enough of us, and many of us already are on the same teams." This is particularly true of student and learning support staff who are assigned to school teams focused on crisis response, student study/assistance, the IEP team, and sometimes teams to support student transitions and wellness and teams to enhance parent involvement and community engagement, etc.

A robust literature supports the idea that teams, workgroups, committees, and collaboratives can productively enhance organizational functioning (see references in Appendix A). Such mechanisms can meet objectives such as promoting teamwork, stakeholder engagement, and shared leadership; they can improve efforts to carry out a variety of functional tasks; and they can enhance outcomes. However, when these operational infrastructure mechanisms are established in ad hoc and piecemeal ways, they tend to further fragment and marginalize school improvement efforts, especially development of a comprehensive and systemic approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students.

Toward Rethinking the Essential Operational Infrastructure Mechanisms for a School

The fundamental principle in designing an operational infrastructure is that *structure follows function*. Thus, before creating another team, decision makers and planners need to have a clear picture of the full set of functions that must be carried out at a school and priorities and strategies for pursuing them effectively.

As a guide for organizing major functions related to school improvement, we stress a three component functional framework (e.g., discussed from a policy perspective in the section of this report on *reorganizing student/learning supports*).

From the perspective of such a framework, three direct and overlapping functional components are essential to school improvement.

These components focus on:

Three direct and overlapping functional components are essential to school improvement

- *facilitating learning and development* (e.g., enhancing instruction and curriculum); in our work we designate this as the instructional component;
- *addressing barriers to learning and teaching* (e.g., enabling learning by addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students); in our work we designate this as the learning supports component;
- *governing schools and managing resources*; in our work we designate this as the management/governance component.

To enable equity of opportunity, school improvement decision makers and planners must engage available personnel and other resources in ways that treat *each* of the three components as fundamental (i.e., primary and essential). This may seem obvious but the prevailing approach to school improvement marginalizes the component focused on addressing barriers to learning.

Given a three component framework for school improvement, specific sets of functions and major tasks can be delineated for each component and for overall system cohesion and continuous improvement. Then, essential mechanisms can be conceived to ensure leadership, including leadership teams, workgroups, committees, and collaboratives. Properly designed, such an operational infrastructure can incorporate new initiatives without establishing another team.

A Leadership Team to Develop the Component for Addressing Barriers to Learning

As already noted, teams frequently associated with addressing barriers to learning and teaching are student study/assistance and IEP team. Such teams focus on individual students. For example, they triage, refer, formulate intervention objectives, monitor, manage, and conduct student progress reviews. *These teams are better viewed as workgroups.*

Clearly, an emphasis on specific students is warranted. However, as the primary focus associated with student and learning supports, this approach tends to sidetrack development of improvements at schools that can prevent many individual problems and help many more students. As stressed below, critically missing are mechanisms devoted to the functions and tasks necessary for unifying student and learning supports and then developing them into a comprehensive and equitable system. Examples of the type of functions that are involved in developing a learning supports component include the following:

Functions & Tasks

- aggregating data across students and from teachers to analyze school needs re. addressing barriers to learning
- mapping student and learning supports activity and resources (including personnel) at the school and those working with the school from the community
- analyzing resources and doing a gap analysis using a comprehensive intervention framework that covers prevention and amelioration of problems
- identifying the most pressing program development needs at the school
- coordinating and integrating school resources
- setting priorities and planning for system development (e.g., for strengthening existing efforts, including filling gaps through development and connecting with community resources)
- recommending how resources should be deployed and redeployed (e.g., clarifying which activities warrant continued support and suggesting better uses for nonproductive resources)
- reaching out to connect with and weave together additional resources in a feeder pattern (or family of schools), in the school district, and in the community
- developing strategies for increasing resources and social "marketing" for development of a *comprehensive system* of student and learning supports.

- enhancing processes for information and communication among school staff and with the home
- establishing standing and ad hoc work groups to carry out tasks involved in system development and individual student and family assistance
- performing formative and summative evaluation of system development, capacity building, maintenance, & outcomes (including expanding the school accountability framework to assess how well schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students)

Clearly, the above set of tasks involves more than the current emphasis on a relatively few troubled and troubling individuals; it encompasses reworking resources to ensure attention is given to the needs of all students. Initially, a leader for an enabling or learning supports component, working with a leadership team, can reduce fragmentation and enhance cost-efficacy by ensuring existing programs and services are coordinated and increasingly integrated. Over time, the group can provide school improvement leadership to guide stakeholder work groups in evolving the school's vision for student and learning supports. The aims are not only to prevent and correct learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems, but contribute to classroom and schoolwide efforts to foster academic, social, emotional, and physical functioning and promote an increasingly positive school climate.

Leadership Team and Work Group Composition and Capacity Building

At a school, the leadership team and work groups focused on developing a comprehensive system of learning and student supports draw on a wide range of stakeholders. This might include, for example, guidance counselors, school psychologists, nurses, social workers, attendance and dropout counselors, health educators, special education staff, after school program staff, bilingual and Title I program coordinators, health educators, safe and drug free school staff, and union reps. They can also include representatives of any community agency that is significantly involved with schools. And, schools are well-advised to add the energies and expertise of regular classroom teachers, non-certificated staff, parents, and older students. Some individuals will end up on several work groups.

Needed: an administrative lead, a leadership team, and work groups focused on functions related to component development

For the leadership team and its work groups to operate well, they must consist of a delimited nucleus of members who have or will acquire the ability to work together effectively in carrying out identified functions. Building group commitment and competence should be a major focus of school management policies and programs. Too often, teams and work groups are established with little investment in substantive capacity building. Despite the ample literature on forming and building the capacity and motivation of teams, time and deadline pressures often work against pursuing best practices (see references in Appendix A).

Formal leadership of the team belongs to the school's administrative lead for the component. System development is a key facet of that individual's job description and accountability. (For more on the leadership team for learning supports, see Appendix A.)

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Some Research-Based Conclusions about Distributive Leadership and Teams

"At a time when schools are adopting reforms and new strategies to adapt to the constraints and needs of students in modern society, many have reached the conclusion that teamwork is necessary to ensure the achievement of school goals. It seems that outcomes that are best and most effective for students and communities can be achieved when experts work together, learn together, and suggest improvements and changes to ensure advancement of ... methods. Teams play a central role in identifying the needs of students, planning and developing policies at the class and school levels, and implementing innovation.... Teams seem more than merely a structure for individuals who work together. Teams have to learn how to exchange information, learn, negotiate with each other, and motivate each other so that they can utilize their heterogeneity properly and work innovatively."[1]

"Distributed leadership enhances opportunities for the organization to benefit from the capacities of more of its members; it permits members to capitalize on the range of their individual strengths; and it develops among organization members a fuller appreciation of interdependence and how one's behavior effects the organization as a whole. Through increased participation in decision making, greater commitment to organizational goals and strategies may develop....The increased self-determination arising from distributed leadership may improve members' experience of work."[2]

"Leadership is consistently recognized as important for initiative and ongoing development of teams and is often included as an important determinant in models of team outcomes. ... [Our] findings call on leaders to invest in enhancing [staff] motivational mechanisms rather than focusing only on the bottom line of the outcomes. ... Leaders need to recognize that ... a sense of self-determination and sell-efficacy may be translated into high levels of innovation."[3]

"Team meetings are very difficult to institute because, when the workload, pressure, and other priorities (e.g., the teacher's individual work in the class) increase, they are the first to be canceled because of time constraints.... It is important that the principals' views of the importance of teamwork to improving school effectiveness are reflected in the allocation of time and personnel to implement teamwork.... Given the importance of team interaction processes, it is recommended that any organization into teams be accompanied by suitable training of the team members and coordinators. This type of training, which is very common in business and service organizations, should also be adopted in the education system."[4]

"Team size was found to affect team effectiveness through its effects on team structures as well as on team processes.... studies typically quoted the numbers seven to ten as an optimal size for obtaining effectiveness. ... Concerning team's frequency of meetings, the literature demonstrated close relationship between the frequency of meetings and the performance of the team... It seems that the more the team meets, the more team-mates are motivated and committed to the team's mission, and hence contribute to the success of the team in achieving it goals."[5]

Regular and productive meetings are key to group success. Meetings must be facilitated in ways that keep the group task-focused. Meetings also require someone assigned to record decisions and plan and remind members of planned activity and products. Where available, advanced technology can be used to facilitate communication, networking, program planning and implementation, linking activity, and a variety of budgeting, scheduling, and other management concerns. (See Appendix B for more on meeting process.)

Prototype of an Integrated School Operational Infrastructure

Properly constituted, trained, and supported, a leadership team and its work groups complement the work of the site's governance body through providing on-site overview, leadership, and advocacy for all activity aimed at addressing barriers to learning. Having the component's administrative lead at the school's administrative and governance "tables," as well as on the key planning bodies ensures the type of infrastructure connections that are essential if programs and services are to be maintained, improved, and increasingly integrated with classroom instruction.

As illustrated in the figure on the following page, each of the three primary and essential components for school improvement requires (1) administrative leadership, (2) a leadership team to work with the leader on system development, and (3) standing and occasionally ad hoc work groups to accomplish specific tasks. The leaders for the instructional and enabling components are part of the management/governance component to ensure all three components are integrated and that the enabling/learning component is not marginalized. If a special team is assigned to work on school improvement planning, implementation, and evaluation, the leaders for all three components must be on that team.

With specific reference to the component to address barriers to learning, the administrative leader has responsibility and accountability for continuous development of a comprehensive and cohesive system of student and learning supports. In regular meetings with a leadership team, the agenda includes guiding and monitoring daily implementation and development of all programs, services, initiatives, and systems intended to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

Standing work groups are established to pursue tasks related to developing and implementing the component's schoolwide and classroom programs. In our work, we organize them around six major intervention domains (often with a work group focused on two at a time).[6] The six domains cover:

Teams and work groups focus on schoolwide & classroom efforts designed to enable equity of opportunity

(1) *Embedding student/learning supports into regular classroom strategies to enable learning* and teaching (e.g., working collaboratively with other teachers and student support staff to ensure instruction is personalized with an emphasis on enhancing intrinsic motivation and social-emotional development for all students and especially those manifesting mild-moderate learning and behavior problems; reengaging those who have become disengaged from instruction; providing learning accommodations and supports as necessary; using response to intervention in applying special assistance; addressing external barriers with a focus on prevention and early intervening)

(2) *Supporting transitions* (i.e., assisting students and families as they negotiate the many hurdles encountered related to reentry or initial entry into school, school and grade changes, daily transitions, program transitions, accessing special assistance, and so forth)

(3) *Increasing home and school connections and engagement* (e.g., addressing barriers to home involvement, helping those in the home enhance supports for their children, strengthening home and school communication, increasing home support of the school)

(4) *Responding to, and where feasible, preventing school and personal crises* (e.g., preparing for emergencies, implementing plans when an event occurs, countering the impact of traumatic events, providing follow-up assistance, implementing prevention strategies; creating a caring and safe learning environment)

(5) *Increasing community involvement and collaborative engagement* (e.g., outreach to develop greater community connection and support from a wide range of resources -- including enhanced use of volunteers, developing a school-community collaborative infrastructure)

(6) *Facilitating student and family access to special assistance,* first in the regular program and then, as needed, through referral for specialized services on- and off-campus

Additional, ad hoc work groups/committees are formed by the leadership team only when absolutely needed to deal with exceptional matters (e.g., formulating a set of guidelines, developing a specific resource aid). Tasks for ad hoc groups always are clearly defined and the work is time limited.

The added challenge in a small school is how to do it with so few personnel

Small schools, obviously, have less staff and other resources than most larger schools. Thus, in a small school, leadership teams and work groups will consist of fewer members. Nevertheless, the three major components necessary for school improvement remain the same in all schools. The challenge in any school is to pursue all three components in an integrated and effective manner. The added challenge in a small school is how to do it with so few personnel.

In a small school, the principal (and whoever else is part of the governance leadership team) will need to ensure that someone is assigned leadership for each of the three components. For the enabling/learning supports component, this may be someone already on the leadership team or someone in the school who has major involvement with student supports (e.g. a pupil services professional, a Title I coordinator, a special education resource specialist). If not already in an administrator's role, the newly designated component leader needs to become part of the administrative team, assigned responsibility and accountability for ensuring the vision for the component is not lost, and provided additional training for the tasks involved in the new leadership assignment.
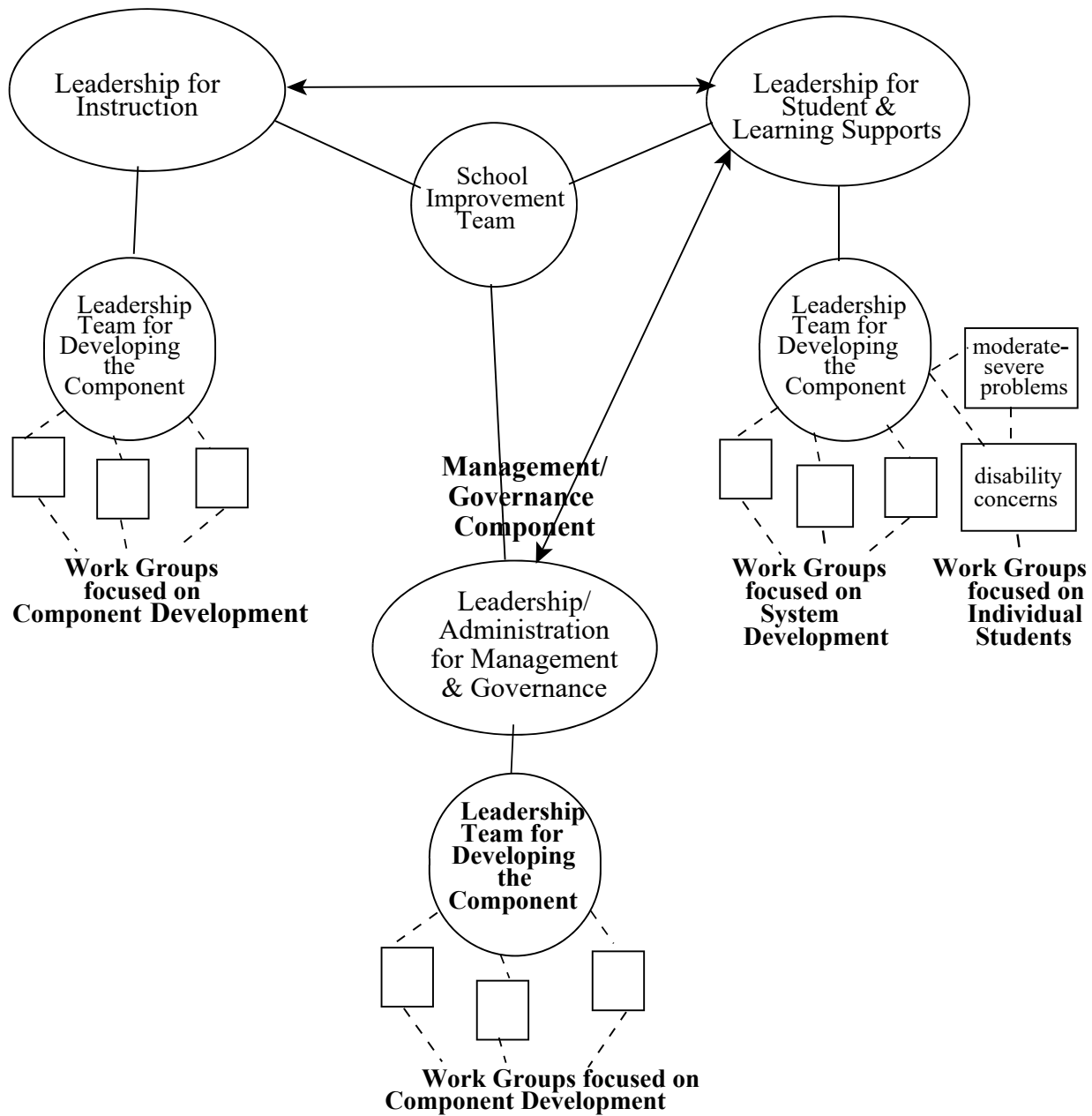
All this involves reframing the work of personnel responsible for student and learning supports, establishing new collaborative arrangements, and redistributing authority (power). With this in mind, those involved in such restructuring must have appropriate incentives, safeguards, and adequate resources and support for making major systemic changes.

Example of an Integrated Infrastructure at the School Level*

Facilitating Learning/Development
Instructional Component

Addressing Barriers to Learning
Enabling or Learning Supports Component

Leadership for Instruction

Leadership for Student & Learning Supports

School Improvement Team

Leadership Team for Developing the Component

Leadership Team for Developing the Component

moderate-severe problems

disability concerns

Work Groups focused on Component Development

Work Groups focused on System Development

Work Groups focused on Individual Students

Management/ Governance Component

Leadership/ Administration for Management & Governance

Leadership Team for Developing the Component

Work Groups focused on Component Development

*The infrastructure for a comprehensive system of learning supports should be designed from the school outward. That is, conceptually, the first emphasis is on what an integrated infrastructure should look like at the school level. Then, the focus expands to include the mechanisms needed to connect a family or complex (e.g., feeder pattern) of schools and establish collaborations with surrounding community resources. Ultimately, central district units need to be restructured in ways that best support the work at the school and school complex levels.

For more resources on Reworking Infrastructure, see Section B of the Center's *System Change Toolkit* at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm

Well-designed, compatible, and interconnected infrastructures at schools, for school complexes, at the district level, and for school-community collaboratives are essential for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports. Each level plays a key role in weaving together existing school and community resources, developing a full continuum of interventions over time, and ensuring that the system operates in an increasingly cohesive, cost-efficient, and equitable way.

> **Expanding the Infrastructure to Connect with Community Resources**
>
> To enhance resource availability and use, schools need to mobilize and weave together school and community resources. This requires connecting the school infrastructure with the community using a collaborative infrastructure. Additional resource enhancement and economies of scale can be garnered by an infrastructure linkage that connects clusters or families of schools, such as feeder patterns.[7]

In sum, the ongoing dilemma for those expected to improve schools is how to meet our society's basic aims for public education in ways that level the playing field. The dilemma is exacerbated by the need to do more with less and to use sparse resources in the most cost-effective ways.

A new team for every new initiative is not cost-effective.

Teams and work groups are an essential facet of a productive operational infrastructure for school improvement. They must be formed to ensure that schools are able to carry out basic functions and tasks related to three fundamental components of school improvement: (1) facilitation of learning and development, (2) addressing barriers to learning and teaching, and (3) managing resources and school governance. An effective operational infrastructure at a school requires that each of these components has a strong leader and leadership team and productive work groups, and each is integrated with the other and fully integrated into school improvement policy and practice.

A properly designed and implemented operational infrastructure enables leaders to steer together and to empower and work effectively with staff. And, it enables them to avoid the problem of naive team proliferation by readily integrating new initiatives into existing teams and work groups.

With a Learning Supports Leadership Team established as an integral part of school infrastructure and planning, student and learning support staff can effectively evolve. Although some current roles and functions will continue, many will disappear, and others will emerge. Opportunities will arise for student/learning support personnel not only to provide direct assistance, but to play increasing roles as advocates, catalysts, brokers, and facilitators of school improvements. They can move beyond consulting with teachers to teaming with them as collaborators for part of each day. Improving student and learning supports in classrooms and schoolwide requires such collaboration and is essential to ending the myths and expectations that teachers can do it all and can do it alone.

The need for and power of enhancing ways for student and learning support staff to address barriers to learning and teaching is illustrated as we discuss addressing the matters covered in the following sections of this report.

Outreaching to and Reengaging Disconnected Students

Schools can't teach students who aren't there. So, the new school year will require particular attention to

(1) finding students who were expected, but did not return

and

(2) pursuing new approaches in addressing the long-standing problem of chronic absenteeism.

Outreach to Those who Haven't Returned

The numbers remain uncertain and the reasons vary, but a significant concern this school year is outreach to students who have not returned to campuses. As with chronic absenteeism, this problem will not be easy to overcome.

There are personal and institutional factors that must be addressed. On a personal level, some families are fearful about returning; some are angry and frustrated over the hardships encountered in schooling their children during the pandemic. Some have negative attitudes toward schools because of past encounters. Institutionally, concerns about equity and justice have been exacerbated by recent events.

There is no magic bullet intervention. A first step is to develop a good understanding of the different reasons students have not returned. A second step is to use that understanding to design a *social marketing* campaign to attract families back. The third step involves extending a personalized meeting invitation to each unenrolled student's family – with the clearly stated goals of (a) addressing their concerns and (b) establishing a mutually productive working relationship.

About Social Marketing

Student/learning supports staff can organize and mobilize enrolled students and families as an outreach network to their reluctant neighbors. The network can also help mobilize trusted community leaders to make ongoing outreach efforts.

A flow of informal messages from students, families, youth and religious leaders, and others in the neighborhood can take place through direct contacts, through social media, and through conversations in places where locals regularly gather.

In mobilizing the group, it is important to recognize that primary child caretakers differ. They include more than *parents*. Think about students being raised primarily by grandparents, aunts, older siblings, "nannies," and in foster homes. (That is why we stress the term *home involvement*.) And, of course, a degree of diversity among primary caretakers is to be expected. Some factors can limit involvement; others can enhance involvement and influence when outreaching in the neighborhood.

Like it or not, social marketing of in-school learning is critical at this time, and it is clear that neighbors have a potent influence on each other.

The process of organizing and mobilizing families provides a renewed opportunity to build a foundational infrastructure for ongoing parent/home involvement and engagement with a school and connecting it with efforts to establish a school-community collaborative.

For more on these matters, see

>*Home Involvement, Engagement, and Re-engagement in Schooling* –
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/ch6home.pdf

>*Community Outreach and Collaborative Engagement* –
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/ch7comm.pdf

Absenteeism: Beyond Reporting and Beyond Another Special Initiative

School absences reached unprecedented rates during the pandemic. As schools intensify their efforts to recover students, Robert Balfanz stresses that the tone of the interventions matters.

"We really have to approach this from a problem solving, not a punitive, perspective," he says. Historically, the only place where people got noticed for missing a lot of school was through truancy. Most states still have rules on the books that would allow districts to refer students to the justice system if they meet the legal definition of truancy.

That approach has proven to be ineffective, says Balfanz. Most kids want to be in school, and the issues that are keeping them out are real and need to be solved. It would be a mistake to tell students it's their own fault that they are disengaged.

"As we make this more of an issue, we have to guard against falling back into seeing it as something to be handled legally and punitively and recognize that it should be handled with good data and problem solving — and that sometimes our own policies are counterproductive and we've got to fix them."[8]

From: *Chronic Absenteeism Is a Huge School Problem. Can Data Help?*
https://www.governing.com/now/chronic-absenteeism-is-a-huge-school-problem-can-data-help?utm_source=ECS+Subscribers&utm_campaign=ec6de26f6b-ED_CLIPS_05_21_2021&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1a2b00b930-ec6de26f6b-53599575

Under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) states are required to report chronic absenteeism rates for schools, and school districts are allowed to spend federal dollars on training to reduce absenteeism. Since all schools take attendance, an immediate focus has been on establishing systems for reporting chronic absenteeism (including truancy).

Establishing a good reporting system is necessary and not too hard to accomplish. Significantly reducing chronic absenteeism always is difficult.

In 2016, the federal government decided to create a national *Every Student, Every Day* initiative to "address and eliminate chronic absenteeism"
http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-white-house-launches-new-national-effort-and-ad-council-campaign-eliminate-chronic-absenteeism-and-drive-student-success

The initiative outlined key steps that states, districts and communities could take to improve student achievement by monitoring and reducing chronic absence. For example, it emphasized

- looking beyond average daily attendance rates to identify students who are missing so much school that they are falling behind academically

- sharing strategies that work for improving attendance and achievement, including positive messaging, family outreach, student incentives and mentoring programs

- engaging community partners, such as health providers and criminal justice agencies, to launch this college-linked model as part of this effort

And, it provided a community toolkit to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism. (The Toolkit offers information, suggested action steps, and lists of existing tools and to begin or enhance the work of effective, coordinated community action to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism.)
http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf

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The special initiative did focus attention on the problem, and the stated commitment, motivation, and aims were wonderful. The reality, however, is that effectively dealing with the problem of chronic absenteeism over the long-run requires a fundamental rethinking of policies and practices, and an expanded role for student/learning supports staff.

Moving Forward

A review of past policies indicates a primary emphasis on mandating attendance and delineating harsh punishments for unexcused absences. Analyses point out that such practices fail to take into account the range of underlying causes of attendance problems and the range of prevention, early intervention, and ongoing support that might more effectively address the problem. If, as often is said, school attendance is both a right and a responsibility, there is growing consensus that society must play a greater role in addressing barriers that are abridging student rights and enhance their motivation and capability to meet their responsibilities.

Given the variety of factors that play a role in school attendance problems, policies and practices must avoid lumping all youngsters together. A particular danger arises when the problem is truancy. Some truancy is reactive and some is proactive; the underlying motivation for not coming to school can vary considerably in both cases. For example, there are some students who experience school as not a good fit for them and, therefore, see school not as a right or a responsibility but as an infringement on their self-determination. This engenders avoidance motivation and psychological reactance. In such cases, addressing the problem requires strategies that are more psychologically sophisticated than the prevailing ones used by most schools and the society in general.

Policy and practice must now evolve to reflect the complexity of attendance problems. The complexity calls for moving to more comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated solutions. Focusing only on "What's wrong with that kid!" often is tantamount to blaming the victim and contributes to policies and practices that are not making significant inroads in addressing school attendance problems.

From an intervention perspective, current policy is mainly reactive. There is a clear need for greater attention to prevention and intervening as early as feasible after attendance problems are noted. As discussed later in this report, there is a need for developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system that weaves together the resources of school and community to directly address barriers to learning, reengage disconnected students in classroom instruction, and reengage disconnected families in working with schools. Student/learning support staff are essential to making this happen.

As the folks at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory have noted in discussing dropouts in their School Improvement Research Series:

"Children at-risk need to be identified at a young age (as early as preschool) so that early sustained intervention can be applied. Success in the elementary grades diminishes the possibility of later dropping out in high school. The key ... is helping youth to overcome their sense of disconnectedness. It is imperative not to isolate or alienate any students from the school. Not all factors related to dropout [and truancy] reduction are school controllable, and solutions to the complex problem[s] of dropouts [and truancy] cannot be achieved by the schools alone. ... It requires resources that go beyond the school, and solutions require a team approach – the combined efforts of students, parents, teachers, administrators, community-based organizations, and business, as well as the federal, state, and local governments."[9]

A Note About Reengaging Students

During the current period of transition, greater attention is needed to designing potent interventions to ensure all students are welcomed and connected with ongoing social supports. For those who are tasked with reengaging disconnected students we recommend four general strategies:

(1) *Clarifying student perceptions of the problem* – Talk openly with students about why they have become disengaged so that steps can be planned for how to alter the negative perceptions and prevent others from developing such perceptions

2) *Reframing school learning* – In the case of those who have become disengaged, it is unlikely that they will be open to schooling that looks like "the same old thing." Major changes in approach are required if they are even to perceive that anything has changed.

   Minimally, exceptional efforts must be made to have these students (a) view the teacher as supportive (rather than controlling and indifferent) and (b)perceive content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable. It is important, for example, to eliminate threatening evaluative measures; reframe content and processes to clarify purpose in terms of real life needs and experiences and underscore how it all builds on previous learning; and clarify why procedures can be effective– especially those designed to help correct specific problems.

(3) *Renegotiating involvement in school learning* – New and mutual agreements must be developed and evolved over time through conferences with the student and where appropriate including parents. The intent is to affect perceptions of choice, value, and probable outcome. The focus throughout is on clarifying awareness of valued options, enhancing expectations of positive outcomes, and engaging the student in meaningful, ongoing decision making. For the process to be most effective, students should be assisted in sampling new processes and content, options should include valued enrichment opportunities, and there must be provision for reevaluating and modifying decisions as perceptions shift.

   In all this, it is essential to remember that effective decision making is a basic skill (just as fundamental as the three Rs).If a student has difficulty making appropriate decisions, this is not a reason to move away from student involvement in decision making. Rather, it is an assessment of a need and a reason to focus on improving this basic skill.

(4) *Reestablishing and maintaining an appropriate working relationship* (e.g., through open communication, creating a sense of trust, providing supports, guidance, and accommodations as needed, highlighting accomplishments, and generally minimizing threats to feelings of competence, self determination, and relatedness to valued others)

To further highlight the topic and provide a tool for discussion by school policy makers and practitioners, see the following Center brief:

>*School Attendance Problems: Are Current Policies & Practices Going in the Right Direction?*
   http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/school%20attendance%20problems.pdf
This brief (1) provides some background and overview of issues related to school attendance problems and (2) discusses new directions for policy and practice.

Also see Chapter 5. "About Re-engaging Disconnected Students" in *Improving School Improvement* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

For more, see the Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds which provide easy access to a variety of resources relevant to intervening to enhance school attendance.
   Start with the Quick Finds on
         >*Attendance* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/attendance.html
         >*Motivation* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm

Improving Differentiated Instruction:
Moving Toward Personalized Learning and
More Special Assistance in Classrooms

L earning is an ongoing, dynamic, and transactional process. Students differ – so must instructional practices.

Personalized Instruction

Personalized instruction is meant to enable school staff to effectively pursue the art, craft, and science of teaching in ways that more optimally match the range of individual differences in *both motivation and capabilities* that exist in every classroom.

Properly conceived and implemented personalized instruction and student and learning supports are essential to enabling equity of opportunity, closing the achievement gap, assuring civil rights, promoting whole child development, and fostering a positive school climate.

Policy makers have embraced the concept of personalized learning, but personnel preparation and continuing professional development for most school personnel has not included an in-depth focus on making it a reality in classrooms.

It is commonplace to see references to meeting learners where they are; analyses indicate the emphasis often is on individualized approaches that stress matching individual differences in developmental capabilities. In contrast, we define personalization as the process of accounting for individual differences in both capability and motivation. Furthermore, from a psychological perspective, we stress that it is the learner's perception that determines whether the instructional fit is good or bad. Given this, personalizing learning means ensuring learning opportunities are perceived by learners as good ways to reach their goals. Thus, a basic intervention concern is that of eliciting learners' perceptions of how well what is offered matches *both* their interests and abilities. This dual emphasis has fundamental implications for all efforts to improve education.

Discussions of personalized learning often leave the impression that the process is mainly about incorporating technological innovations. Moreover, personalized learning often is not discussed in the context of conditions that interfere with student learning and performance.

Personalizing instruction is intended to ensure a student *perceives* instructional processes, content, and outcomes as a good match with his or her interests and capabilities.
- A primary emphasis is on *motivation*. Practices focus on (re)engaging the student in classroom instruction, with special attention paid to increasing intrinsic motivation and minimizing psychological reactance.
- Matching *developmental capabilities* is a parallel concern. Practices focus on accounting for current knowledge and skills.[10]

Personalization is made more feasible when student/learning support staff work collaboratively with teachers *in the classroom*.

Personalization First, then (as needed) Special Assistance in the Classroom

Effective personalization of instruction is step 1 in countering learning problems. Special assistance is step 2. We conceptualize special assistance in terms of a sequence and hierarchy of interventions that are *added immediately* to personalized instruction whenever an instructional problem arises (see Exhibit on next page).

In keeping with the principle of using the least intervention necessary (e.g., doing what is needed in ways that are least intrusive, restrictive, disruptive), special assistance interventions are first applied in the classroom, and they are pursued as follows:

- students with minor problems maintain a direct focus on readily observable problems interfering with classroom learning and performance (Level A);
- students who continue to have problems often require addressing prerequisites (e.g., readiness attitudes, knowledge, and skills) they haven't acquired (Level B);
- when interventions at Levels A and B don't ameliorate the problem, the focus shifts to possible underlying factors.

Students with severe and chronic problems require attention at all three levels and usually require some specialized assistance outside the classroom. Here, too, the process calls for student/learning support staff and teachers working collaboratively *in the classroom.*

Intrinsic Motivation: A Primary Concern Throughout Both Steps

Among the constant instructional matters confronting schools are (a) enhancing motivational readiness and engaging students, (b) minimizing conditions that decrease engagement in learning and that maintain engagement, (c) reengaging students who become disengaged, and (d) increasing intrinsic motivation as an outcome. In addressing these matters, it is invaluable to understand what enhances and what undermines intrinsic motivation.

Self-determination theory emphasizes that people are intrinsically motivated by their feelings of self-determination (not being controlled, having choices) competency, and connectedness to significant others. Personalized instruction and special assistance stress practices that capitalize on intrinsic motivation to enable and support learning. Such practices include offering a broad range of content, outcomes, and procedural options, including a personalized structure to support and guide learning, as well as significant enrichment opportunities. With real options come real opportunities to involve learners in decision making.

The emphasis on intrinsic motivation also stresses the importance of developing nonthreatening ways to support and guide learning and behavior and provide ongoing information about learning and performance. An understanding of intrinsic motivation cautions that an overemphasis on controlling behavior generally produces psychological reactance, and overreliance on extrinsic motivation risks undermining enhancement of intrinsic motivation and can produce avoidance reactions in the classroom and to school. And when learning problems are identified, restricting the focus mainly to "remedying" problems cuts students off from experiences that enhance good feelings about learning at school. All this can undermine positive learning and development of positive attitudes. Over time, such practices result in too many students disengaging from classroom learning.
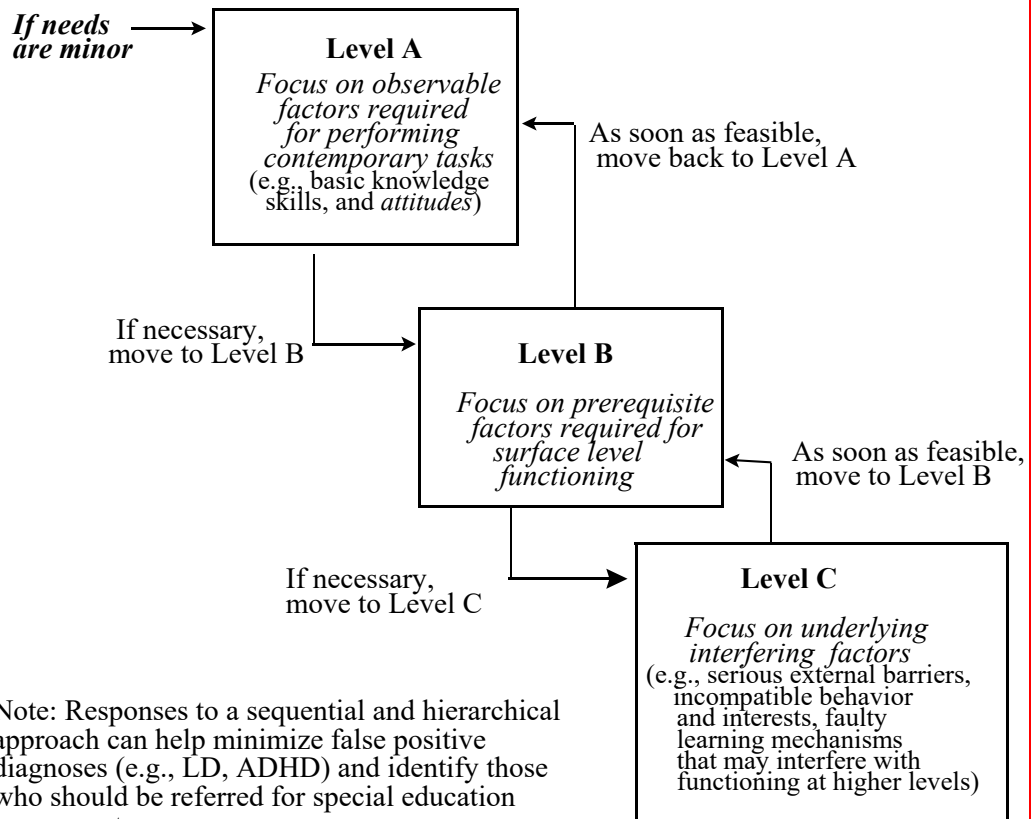
In sum, an understanding of intrinsic motivation clarifies how essential it is to

- minimize coercive social control interactions (especially strategies designed only for purposes of social control)
- increase real options and choices (including an emphasis on real life interests and needs)
- enable a meaningful role in decision making (which involves enhancing a students' desire and ability to enter into open dialogues with the adults at school)
- provide effective support and guidance (structure, scaffolding)

Exhibit

Special Assistance Sequence and Hierarchy

Step 2 is introduced as necessary using best practices for special assistance (remediation, rehabilitation, treatment). These are applied differentially for minor and severe problems.

If needs are minor →

Level A

Focus on observable factors required for performing contemporary tasks (e.g., basic knowledge skills, and *attitudes*)

As soon as feasible, move back to Level A

If necessary, move to Level B →

Level B

Focus on prerequisite factors required for surface level functioning

As soon as feasible, move to Level B

If necessary, move to Level C →

Level C

Focus on underlying interfering factors (e.g., serious external barriers, incompatible behavior and interests, faulty learning mechanisms that may interfere with functioning at higher levels)

Note: Responses to a sequential and hierarchical approach can help minimize false positive diagnoses (e.g., LD, ADHD) and identify those who should be referred for special education assessment.

For more on special assistance, see *Improving School Improvement* (Chapters 9 and 10) http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html. Relatedly, Chapter 10 emphasizes the need to broaden current approaches to response to intervention (RTI) and ensure a wide range of accommodations. Chapter 5 highlights reengaging disconnected students.

A Note About Personnel Preparation

In keeping with the primary accountability focus on academic achievement, the emphasis of school improvement and teacher preparation is mainly on curriculum content and instruction. Nobody should minimize the importance of thorough and ongoing preparation related to curriculum and instruction. Every teacher must have the ability and resources to bring a sound curriculum to life and apply strategies that make learning meaningful. At the same time, however, teachers and student support staff must learn how to "enable" learning by addressing barriers to learning and teaching – especially factors leading to low or negative motivation for schooling.

Analyses indicate that implicit in much school personnel preparation is a presumption that students are motivationally ready and able to absorb the lesson being taught. Recognition that the teacher must deal with some misbehavior and learning problems generally is treated as a separate matter calling for training in classroom management and help from student support personnel.

Typically, schools offer a few, relatively brief sessions on various social control techniques. Examples include eye contact, physical proximity, being alert and responding quickly before a behavior escalates, using rewards as a preventive strategy, assertive discipline, and threats and other forms of punishment. All this, of course, skirts right by the matter of what is causing student misbehavior and ignores the reality that social control practices can be incompatible with enhancing student engagement with learning at school. Indeed, such practices can lead to greater student disengagement.

For the most part, pre-service teacher preparation provides little or no discussion of what to do when students are not motivationally ready and able to respond appropriately to a lesson as taught. This lapse in training is less a problem for teachers in classrooms where few students are doing poorly. In settings where large proportions are not doing well, however, and especially where many are "acting out," teachers decry the gap in their training. In such settings, one of the overriding inservice concerns is to fill this gap.

By teaming *in the classroom* with teachers, student/learning support staff can help fill gaps in teacher preparation related to ameliorating learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Reciprocally, teachers can enhance support staff learning related to classroom instruction.

Our current school system follows a one-size-fits-all model that does not account for differences in backgrounds, assets or opportunities. And so we tend to overlook strategies that are responsive to the differentiated characteristics of families, communities and schools. My concern is that an exclusively instructional focus optimizes teaching and content, but if the students aren't present and able to concentrate then we'll never be able to truly support all children on their path to realizing their full academic potential, which is the aspirational goal of education reform.

In other words, instruction alone is not enough to help all students succeed.

Paul Reville, former Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts & Founding Director, Harvard Graduate School of Education's Education Redesign Lab (http://edublog.scholastic.com/post/instruction-alone-not-enough-help-all-students-succeed)

Broadly Embedding
Social Emotional Learning and Development

Referencing the U.S. Department of Education's *COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs*, a recent article notes that SEL is taking "center stage" as schools reopen. Another article stressed that, after a year of upheaval and disruption, trauma-informed SEL is needed to help students heal, cope, and build resilience.

An earlier article in EducationWeek noted some concerns about SEL:

> Teaching social-emotional skills in class sounds great, and the idea has a broad and growing following in K-12 schools. In practice, however, executing evidence-based strategies to teach skills like empathy and self-control to students can be challenging for schools, and prohibitively so. Comprehensive SEL curricula on the market today can be expensive, putting them out of reach for lower-income school districts. They are complex and can be difficult to graft onto existing curricula and school day routines. And they may not be culturally relevant to all students.

While it is clear that SEL is on the minds of school planners, it is also evident that there are major differences in agenda and approach, and so a bit of caution is in order.

- Some are approaching social and emotional development as a separate *curriculum* matter designed to

>promote social emotional development
and/or
>promote mental health (e.g., enhance students' personal and social well-being).

- Others want to use SEL with targeted students to address skill deficiencies related to social and emotional functioning.

- Still others are calling for addressing social and emotional growth through natural opportunities in the classroom and schoolwide.

These and other approaches are not mutually exclusive, and all have merit. We suggest that students and schools will benefit the most if planners take a broad approach that includes

- providing integrated, formal instruction for all students
- using natural school opportunities to facilitate social and emotional development
- enhancing supports and coping strategies for those experiencing problems.

At the same time, we caution that it is important not to frame the work as a special initiative with a separate operational infrastructure. Rather, the effort should be fully *embedded* into school improvement policy and practice. This means incorporating (1) regular instructional facets into curriculum and instruction design and planning and (2) interventions designed for those with problems into the design and planning for student/learning supports.

Successful implementation and sustainability depend on:

- school policy that institutionalizes social emotional learning and development and that deploys appropriate resources for implementation and necessary systemic changes

- fully integrating the work into the operational infrastructure mechanisms established for (a) curriculum and instruction and (b) student/learning supports

- personnel development and related capacity-building for daily implementation.

Note: In discussing the ecological approaches to social emotional learning being tested by Harvard University. The article emphasizes using flexible, bite-sized lessons ("kernels") "designed to be adaptable to students' interests and needs to teach social and emotional learning." (https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/09/11/can-bite-sized-lessons-make-social-emotional-learning-easier.html)

One example offered in that article deals with the problem of the transition from recess back to classroom learning. As described: "teachers began using exercises after recess that included structured discussions about what took place during recess, and if there had been a problem, how students could solve it and move on. The goal is to help them leave behind the drama of the playground and refocus on their academics." This is a good example of a natural opportunity (e.g., daily transitions) for promoting social emotional development. See our Center's earlier discussion *Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH* (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/naturalopportunities.pdf)

Also see *Common Behavior Problems at School: A Natural Opportunity for Social and Emotional Learning* (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/behaviorsocialemot.pdf) and the Center's Quick Find on *Classroom Climate* (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/environments.htm)

Here are some additional matters to think about as schools wrestle with the challenges of pursuing an agenda related to Social Emotional Learning (SEL).

    (1) Keep the big picture in mind: The aim is to continuously promote positive social emotional development – not just teach a limited set of social skills.

    (2) Identify places in existing curricula to embed social emotional learning.

    (3) Map natural opportunities for promoting and supporting social emotional development at school.

    (4) Stress ways to improve how the school staff models social and emotional functioning every day.

    (5) Ensure that students have many opportunities and support for connecting and building strong relationships with positive peers and adults at school.

    (6) Also transform how the school staff responds to students' learning, behavior, and emotional problems to ensure that the responses enhance social and emotional growth and a positive school climate. Addressing these matters goes beyond just thinking about SEL. The need is to embed the growing emphasis on SEL into the school's efforts to both promote positive development and address barriers to learning and teaching.

And as a consequence of the pandemic, there is a critical need at this time to address the problems experienced by students, their families, and staff. The focus on SEL and mental health concerns is helpful. And, more broadly, this time is an opportunity to focus on fundamental systemic changes in how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

Whatever the approach, it is important to clarify whether the agenda is primarily to pursue the school's role in (a) socializing students, (b) helping students address problems, or (c) both. This is especially a concern when the focus is on students who need help related to learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

The reason for concern is that a school's socialization agenda often comes into conflict with its agenda for helping students (see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/helping.pdf). The problem of conflicting agenda is particularly acute when staff are confronted with the need to both help a student overcome behavior problems and, at the same time, control misbehavior to maintain social order. In such situations, the need for social control can overshadow the concern for

helping, and this can exacerbate a student's problems (e.g., can generate psychological reactance, motivate additional misbehavior, increase disengagement from instruction).

The potential for conflicting agenda is especially concerning as this school year begins. Because of the pandemic, everyone (students, families, staff) has experienced considerable stress, some have been ill, some are grieving for a relative or friend who died. Students, as well as families and staff, who are having trouble recovering from recent events need support in readjusting to school. As a consequence, the calls for mental health in schools and for SEL are receiving considerable attention.

Clearly, there is a need for addressing the mental health concerns of students (and their families and school staff). And an enhanced focus on facilitating social and emotional learning and development is long overdue (especially when the focus involves enhancing a wide range of *knowledge, skills, and attitudes* and not just socializing behaviors and manners and teaching a limited set of coping skills).

However, while all this is essential, it is not sufficient.
So, as schools pursue the call for enhancing mental health in schools and implementing SEL, it is important to broaden the focus and discuss how to

(1) continuously promote positive social emotional development in ways that create an atmosphere of caring, cooperative and responsible participation in learning, and a sense of community and well-being
(2) embed social emotional learning in existing curricula
(3) map natural opportunities for promoting and supporting social emotional development at school
(4) improve how school staff model social and emotional functioning every day
(5) ensure that students have many opportunities and support for connecting and building strong relationships with positive peers and adults at school
(6) minimize transactions that interfere with positive social and emotional functioning and growth
(7) transform the ways that school staff respond to students' learning, behavior, and emotional problems to ensure that the responses promote positive development, enhance engagement in learning, address barriers to learning and teaching, and generate a positive school climate. (Such a transformation should ensure that SEL and mental health in schools are fully embedded in school improvement policy and practice.)

 >For CASEL's work related to SEL, see https://casel.org/resources/

 >Also see the various resource links on our Center website's online clearinghouse Quick Find *Social Emotional Development* (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102_05.htm)

There are many relevant online resources available.
   A good starting place is with CASEL (https://casel.org/resources/)

   We also have various resources on our Center website that may be of some help.
      See our online clearinghouse Quick Find on *Social Emotional Development* (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102_05.htm)
      It has links to resources from our Center and from others.

For context, see:
      >*Improving School Improvement*
      >*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
      >*Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*
        (All three accessible at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)

CASEL's Definition of SEL (2020 Update)

"Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities."
...
While SEL alone will not solve the deep-seated inequities in the education system, it can help adults and students build more meaningful relationships and develop knowledge, skills and mindsets to interrupt inequitable policies and practices, create more inclusive learning environments and nurture the interests and assets of all individuals,

... our updated framework reflects expanded definitions and examples of five core social and emotional competencies — self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. The updated language pays attention to personal and social identities, cultural competency and collective action as part of SEL. It also emphasizes the skills, knowledge and mindsets needed to examine prejudices and biases, evaluate social norms and systemic inequities, and promote community well-being.
...
SEL is most beneficial when school leaders and educators enhance both the competencies of young people and adults and the systems in which those competencies are promoted. Poorly implemented SEL will be less beneficial and actually may harm kids when contexts are ignored. Authentic partnerships among schools, families and communities are critical to creating equitable learning environments, supportive relationships and coordinated practices to truly promote SEL across all the settings where students live and learn.
...
When SEL is woven into the daily life of school — from academic instruction to discipline practices — it is more likely to produce the many benefits that research has documented, including the promotion of students' skills and attitudes, improved school climate and long-term academic achievement."

Promoting Student Social and Emotional Development AND Staff Well-Being

One hoped for outcome of a broad approach to fostering students' social and emotional development is the enhancement of a positive school climate. However, in the absence of a sense of well-being on the part of a school's staff, efforts to promote the social and emotional development of students and a positive school climate are jeopardized.

Staff wellness and health promotion programs and stress-reduction activities often are advocated and sometimes pursued in meaningful ways. However, these approaches are unlikely to be a sufficient remedy for the widespread draining of motivation. Reducing environmental stressors and enhancing job supports are more to the point, but again, alone these are insufficient strategies.

The solution requires reculturing schools in ways that minimize undermining and maximize enhancement of intrinsic motivation. This requires policies and practices that ensure a regular, often a daily, focus on school supports that (1) promote both staff and student well-being and (2) enhance how barriers to teaching and learning are addressed.[11]

This fall promoting staff well-being and preventing burnout will call for ensuring a school climate that is experienced by staff and students as a caring environment in which there is a strong collegial and social support structure, personalized opportunities for growth, and meaningful ways to participate in decision making. Some workplace processes that contribute to such a climate are well-designed and implemented interventions for

- developing and institutionalizing a culture that welcomes and provides ongoing social support for staff, students, and families, with particular attention to inducting newcomers into the school

- transforming working conditions by ensuring a safe environment and opening classroom doors to enhance collaboration, caring, and nurturing support to facilitate staff and student learning each day

- transforming inservice training into personalized staff development and support from first induction into a school through ongoing capacity building

- restructuring school governance to enable shared decision-making.

> Student/learning support staff can play a role both in helping establish natural classroom and schoolwide approaches to promote students' social and emotional development and broadening the way schools promote the well-being of school staff.

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Some Things to Consider in Promoting Staff Well-Being

- Welcoming and ongoing social support for staff, students, and families, especially newcomers. This begins with first contact, personalized orientations, and frequent checks to be certain that initial adjustment is successful.

- *"Open up" classrooms to invite in help*. This is essential to ensuring use of effective mentoring, teaming, and other collegial supports. In general, the array of school and community people who can end the isolation of teachers in classrooms includes: (a) aides and volunteers (including students), (b) fellow teachers – regular and specialists, (c) family members, (d) student support staff, (e) professionals-in-training, (f) school and community librarians, and more..

- *Personalize staff development and ongoing supports.* Personalized staff development and support promotes feelings of competence. Enhanced feelings of competence promote feeling of self-determination. Personalized mentoring promotes feelings of relatedness between staff and mentors. All this promotes well-being and can productively counter alienation and burnout. Some staff, of course, require additional, specialized support, guidance, and accommodations.
  Regular mentoring is essential. However, learning from colleagues is not just a talking game. Good mentors model and then actively participate in making changes (e.g., demonstrating and discussing new approaches; guiding initial practice and implementation; and following-up to improve and refine). Specialist personnel (e.g., school psychologists, counselors, special education resource teachers, social workers, nurses) can become mentors and demonstrate rather than play traditional consultant roles. For example, instead of *telling* teachers how to address student learning, behavior, emotional, and physical health problems, specialists can learn how to go into classrooms to model and guide teachers in the use of practices for engaging and reengaging students in learning.
  For teachers, depending on practicalities, mentor modeling could take place in a teacher's own classroom or be carried out in colleagues' classrooms. Some of it may take the form of team teaching.)

- *About Shared governance.* Who is empowered to make decisions in an organization can be a contentious issue. Putting aside the politics of this for the moment, we stress the motivational impact of not feeling empowered. A potent and negative impact on motivation occurs when staff (and students and all other stakeholders) are not involved in making major decisions that affect the quality of their lives. This argues for ensuring that staff are provided with a variety of meaningful opportunities to shape such decisions. Participation on planning committees and teams that end up having little or no impact can contribute to burnout. Alternatively, feelings of self-determination that help counter burnout are more likely when governance structures share power across stakeholders and make room for their representatives around the decision-making table.

For more, see *Promoting Staff Well-being and Preventing Burnout as Schools Re-open*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/staffwellbeing.pdf

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Reorganizing Student/Learning Supports

The call for reorganizing student and learning supports stems from findings that the current approach is highly fragmented, marginalized in school improvement policy and practice, inequitable in meeting the needs of students, and contributes to counterproductive competition among staff for sparse resources. Improving the situation requires implementing transformative systemic changes related to efforts at schools designed to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

An Example of a Prototype for a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System of Learning Supports

The prototype highlighted here is designed to unify student/learning supports and then develop the various interventions into a comprehensive and equitable system. As a primary facet of school improvement, it is not just a bunch of auxiliary services; it is an essential component of a school's efforts to accomplish its instructional mission.

The prototype has two facets:
  (a) a full continuum of integrated intervention subsystems that interweave school–community–home resources and
  (b) an organized and circumscribed set of classroom and schoolwide student and learning support domains.

The Continuum Conceptualized as a Set of Subsystems

Conceiving interventions along a continuum is a long-standing convention. In the field of education, the recent trend has been to depict the continuum as a tiered model – widely referred to as a *multitier system of supports* (MTSS). This framework is specified in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA).
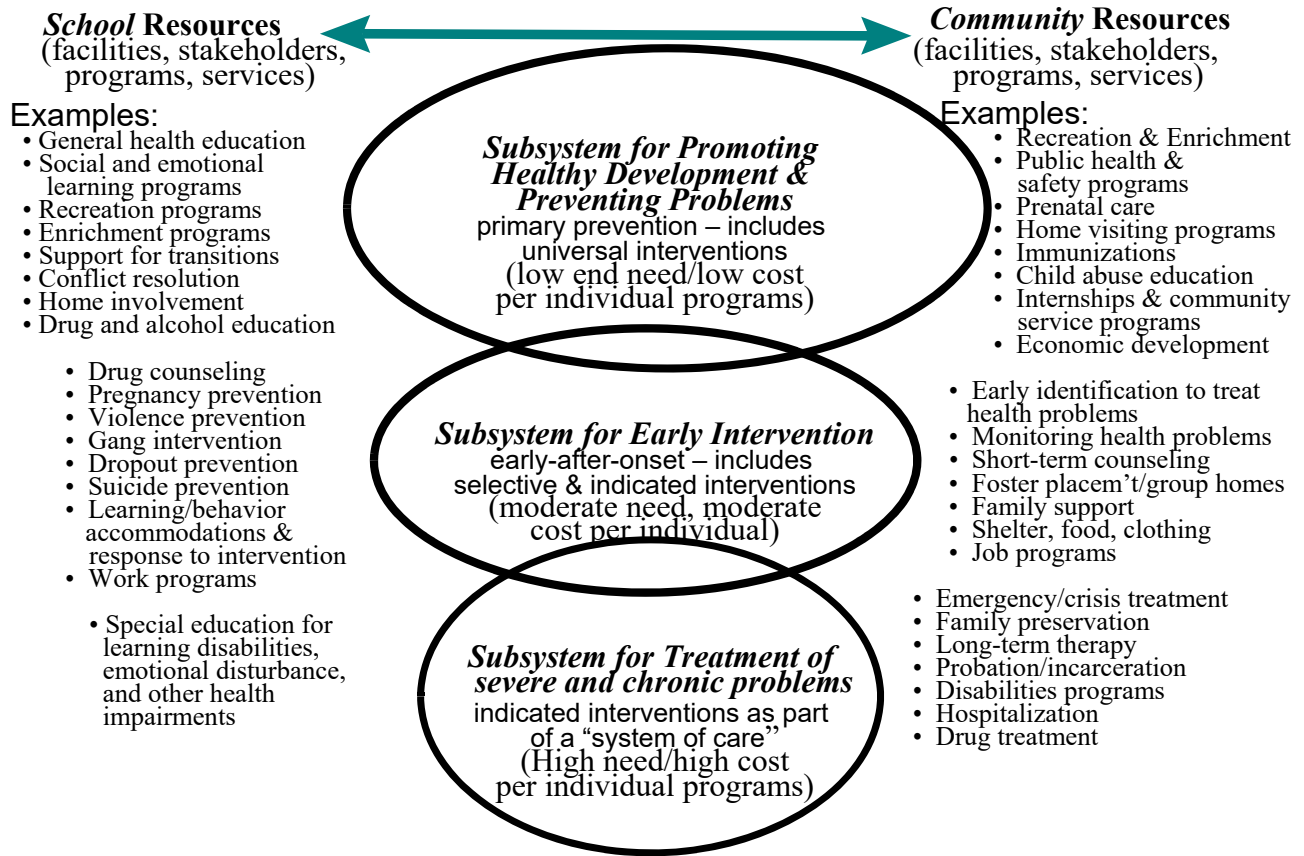
The MTSS framework provides a starting point for framing the nature and scope of student and learning supports. However, the model needs expandsion to become a potent organizing framework for developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

The continuum used in our work is illustrated in the Exhibit on the next page. The intervention continuum is conceived as intertwined sets of subsystems. The subsystems focus on
  • promoting whole child development and preventing problems
  • addressing problems as soon as they arise
  • providing for students who have severe and chronic problems.

As illustrated, the intervention continuum consists of three overlapping subsystem levels. The intent at each level is to braid together a wide range of school and community (including home) resources. The subsystems are illustrated as tapering from top to bottom. This is meant to convey that if the top subsystem is designed and implemented well, the number of students needing intervention are reduced and fewer need "deep-end" interventions.

Exhibit

Framing a School-Community Intervention *Continuum* of Interconnected *Subsystems*

School Resources
(facilities, stakeholders,
programs, services)

Examples:
• General health education
• Social and emotional
  learning programs
• Recreation programs
• Enrichment programs
• Support for transitions
• Conflict resolution
• Home involvement
• Drug and alcohol education

• Drug counseling
• Pregnancy prevention
• Violence prevention
• Gang intervention
• Dropout prevention
• Suicide prevention
• Learning/behavior
  accommodations &
  response to intervention
• Work programs

• Special education for
  learning disabilities,
  emotional disturbance,
  and other health
  impairments

Community Resources
(facilities, stakeholders,
programs, services)

Examples:
• Recreation & Enrichment
• Public health &
  safety programs
• Prenatal care
• Home visiting programs
• Immunizations
• Child abuse education
• Internships & community
  service programs
• Economic development

• Early identification to treat
  health problems
• Monitoring health problems
• Short-term counseling
• Foster placem't/group homes
• Family support
• Shelter, food, clothing
• Job programs

• Emergency/crisis treatment
• Family preservation
• Long-term therapy
• Probation/incarceration
• Disabilities programs
• Hospitalization
• Drug treatment

Subsystem for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems
primary prevention – includes universal interventions
(low end need/low cost per individual programs)

Subsystem for Early Intervention
early-after-onset – includes selective & indicated interventions
(moderate need, moderate cost per individual)

Subsystem for Treatment of severe and chronic problems
indicated interventions as part of a "system of care"
(High need/high cost per individual programs)

Domains of Student/ Learning Supports

After analyzing typical "laundry lists" of district programs and services used to address barriers to learning and teaching, it became clear that framing a prototype for a system of student/learning supports requires more than conceiving a continuum of intervention. It is necessary in addition to organize interventions cohesively into a circumscribed set of well-designed and delimited domains that reflect a school's daily efforts to provide student/learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide. Our analysis led us to group what we found into the following six domains:

• *Embedding student and learning supports into regular classroom strategies to enable learning and teaching* (e.g., working collaboratively with other teachers and student support staff to ensure instruction is personalized with an emphasis on enhancing intrinsic motivation and social-emotional development for all students, especially those experiencing mild to moderate learning and behavior problems; reengaging those who have become disengaged from instruction; providing learning accommodations and supports as necessary; using response to intervention in applying special assistance; addressing external barriers with a focus on prevention and early intervention);

- *Supporting transitions*, including assisting students and families as they negotiate the many hurdles related to reentry or initial entry into school, school and grade changes, daily transitions, program transitions, accessing special assistance, and so forth;

- *Increasing home and school connections and engagement*, such as addressing barriers to home involvement, helping those in the home enhance supports for their children, strengthening home and school communication, and increasing home support for the school;

- *Responding to—and, where feasible, preventing – school and personal crises* (e.g., by preparing for emergencies, implementing plans when an event occurs, countering the impact of traumatic events, providing follow-up assistance, implementing prevention strategies, and creating a caring and safe learning environment);

- *Increasing community involvement and collaborative engagement* (e.g., outreach to develop greater community connection and support from a wide range of resources – including enhanced use of volunteers and developing a school–community collaborative infrastructure);

- *Facilitating student and family access to special assistance*, first in the regular program and then, as needed, through referral for specialized services on and off campus.

Combining the Continuum and Domains

As illustrated in the following Exhibit, combining the continuum and the six domains of supports provides an intervention framework that can guide development of a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports.

The matrix framework provides a guide for organizing and evaluating a system of student/learning supports and is a tool for (a) mapping existing interventions, (b) clarifying which are evidence-based, (c) identifying critical intervention gaps, and (d) analyzing resource use with a view to redeploying resources to strengthen the system. As the examples illustrate, the framework can guide efforts to embed supports for compensatory and special education, English learners, psychosocial and mental health problems, use of specialized instructional support personnel, adoption of evidence-based interventions, integration of funding sources, and braiding in of community resources. The specific examples in the matrix are illustrative of those that schools already may have in place. Using the framework to map and analyze resources provides a picture of system strengths and gaps. Priorities for filling gaps then can be included in strategic plans for system improvement; outreach to bring in community resources can be keyed to filling critical gaps and strengthening the system.

Detailed discussions and guides related to the practices outlined by the prototype framework are provided in
>*Improving School Improvement*
>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
    Accessible at (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)

Exhibit

Intervention Framework for the Third Component

		Integrated Intervention Continuum (levels)		
		Subsystem for promoting healthy development & preventing problems	**Subsystem for early intervention**	**Subsystem for treatment ("system of care")**
Categories of Classroom & Schoolwide Student and Learning Support Domains	**Classroom-based learning supports**	e.g., personalized instruction	e.g., special assistance in the classroom provided as soon as a problem arises	e.g., referral for specialist assistance
	Supports for transitions	e.g., welcoming newcomers and providing social and/or academic supports	e.g., when problems arise, using them as teachable moments to enhance social-emotional development and learning	e.g., personalized supports for students returning to school from incarceration
	Home involvement & engagement	e.g., outreach to attract and facilitate participation of hard-to-reach families	e.g., engaging families in problem-solving	e.g., support services to assist families with addressing basic survival needs
	Community involvement & collaborative engagement	e.g., outreach to recruit volunteers	e.g., developing community links and connections to fill critical intervention gaps	e.g., outreach to reengage disconnected students and families
	Crisis response & prevention	e.g., promoting positive relationships	e.g., immediate response with physical and psychological first aid	e.g., referral for follow-up counseling
	Student & family special assistance	e.g., enhancing coping and problem-solving capability	e.g., providing consultation, triage, and referrals	e.g., ongoing management of care related to specialized services
		Accommodations for differences & disabilities		*Specialized assistance & other intensified interventions (e.g., special education, school-based interventions)*

Clearly, our prototype is only one way to conceive transforming student/learning supports. Given that the problems indicated by available research indicate the need for an approach that is multifaceted and transformative, we hope our efforts will stimulate others to move student and learning supports in new and better directions.

Ensuring Policy Facilitates System Change/ Transformation

Policy for introducing multifaceted and complex interventions into an organization must be translated into clear guidelines and properly supported for effective development and sustainability. This includes delineating the nature and scope of systemic changes, budgetary allocations, and accountability mandates. With scale-up and sustainability in mind, policy makers must ensure that sufficient resources are allocated for establishing and building the capacity of the transitional infrastructure for accomplishing systemic changes and for eventually subsuming the functions of the transitional infrastructure into daily operational infrastructures.

Our analysis of school improvement policy under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) indicates that the efforts are guided primarily by a two-component framework, namely (a) instruction and (b) governance/management. School improvement plans focus mainly on these two components; interventions for addressing learning and teaching barriers are given secondary consideration at best. As a result, districts and schools tend to marginalize student and learning supports. This marginalization is a fundamental cause of the widely observed fragmentation and disorganization of student and learning supports.

The intervention prototype described above is designed to end the marginalization and fragmentation of student/learning supports by transforming the way schools address barriers to learning and teaching. The degree of system change called for by the multifaceted intervention prototype requires broadening school improvement policy to fully integrate, as primary and essential, a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. The following Exhibit illustrates such an exapnded policy framework. The designated *learning supports component* elevates efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching to equal status with the other two components.

Exhibit

Expanding the Framework for School Improvement Policy and Practice
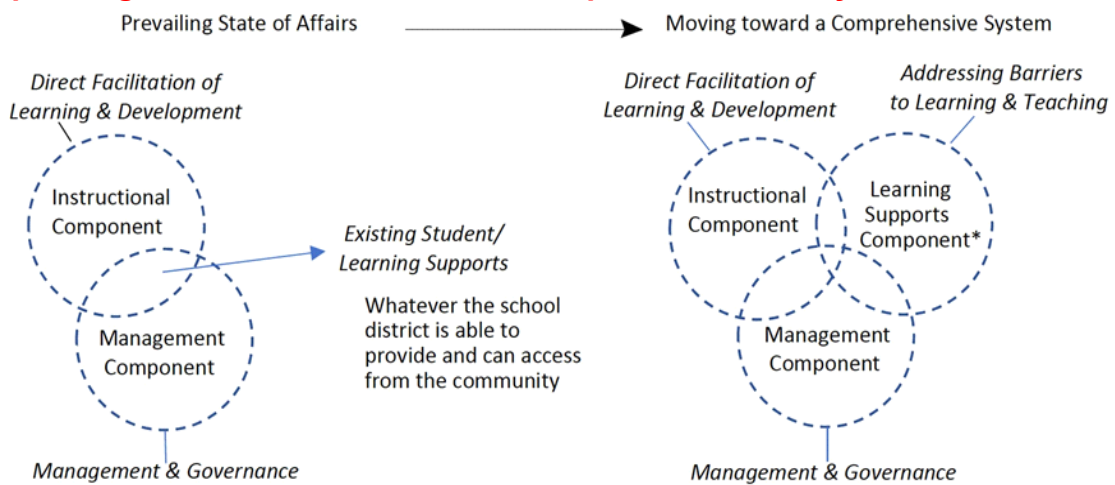
Note: The learning supports component is intended to enable learning by (a) addressing factors that affect learning, development, and teaching and (b) reengaging students in classroom instruction. The component includes programs, services, initiatives, and projects that provide compensatory and special assistance and promote and maintain safety, physical and mental health, school readiness, early school adjustment, and social and academic functioning.

In our work, given the sparse resources available to schools, the expanded policy involves deploying, redeploying, and weaving together all existing resources used for student and learning supports. The focus is on *braiding together all available school and community resources* to equitably strengthen interventions and fill critical gaps.

And because accountability and standards for guiding practice are two fundamental policy drivers for public education, we recommend (1) an expanded accountability framework that includes leading indicators of direct outcomes of a learning support system and (2) standards for a learning supports component (see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/account.pdf).[12]

Concluding Comments

Transforming the way student/learning supports staff work at schools is key to enhancing a school's effectiveness in addressing learning, behavior, and emotional problems. However, moving in this direction involves the difficulty of reworking operational and organizational infrastructures. The difficulty may daunted those who understand the need to move in new directions. But maintaining the status quo is untenable, and just doing more tinkering will not meet the need. It is time to end the marginalized status of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and ensure that there is full participation of student/learning supports on school and district governance, planning, and evaluation bodies and as team members *in classrooms*.

Notes

[1] Somech A. & Drach-Zahavy, A. (2007). Schools as team-based organizations: A structure-process-outcomes approach. *Group Dynamics: Theory. Research and Practice, 11,* 305-320. https://www.academia.edu/19822390/Schools_as_team_based_organizations_A_structure_process_outcomes_approach

[2] Leithwood, K. & Mascall, B. (2008). Collective leadership effects on student achievement. Educational Administration Quarterly, 44 (4) 529-561. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0013161X08321221

[3] Somech, A. (2005). Directive versus participative leadership: Two complementary approaches to managing school effectiveness. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 41,* 777-800. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0013161X05279448

[4] Somech, A., & Drach-Zahavy, A. (2007). Schools as team-based organizations: A structure-process-outcomes approach. Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 11(4), 305–320. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2699.11.4.305

[5] Drach-Zahavy, A. & Smoech, A. (2002) Team heterogeneity and its relationship with team support and team effectiveness. *Journal of Educational Administration 40,* 44-66. https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/09578230210415643/full/html

[6] See the resource list at the end of the report that highlights the relevant Center references.

[7] Again see the list of Center references.

[8] *Chronic Absenteeism Is a Huge School Problem. Can Data Help?* https://www.governing.com/now/chronic-absenteeism-is-a-huge-school-problem-can-data-help?utm_source=ECS+Subscribers&utm_campaign=ec6de26f6b-ED_CLIPS_05_21_2021&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1a2b00b930-ec6de26f6b-53599575

[9] Woods, E.G, (1995), *Reducing the Dropout Rate* https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/ReducingtheDropoutRate.pdf

[10] Based on our work over many years, we have detailed a personalized approach for classrooms. It is highlighted in *Improving School Improvement* – Chapter 8 "School Improvement & Personalizing Classroom Instruction" (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html). We also have developed a set of continuing education modules around the approach (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/personalizeI.pdf).

[11] One way to understand promoting staff well-being and preventing burnout is in terms of the three psychological needs that Ed Deci and Richard Ryan have articulated as major intrinsic motivational determinants of behavior. These are the need to *feel competent*, the need to *feel self-determining*, and the need to *feel interpersonally connected*. From this perspective, well-being is engendered by conditions that foster such feelings, and burnout is among the negative outcomes that result when these needs are threatened and thwarted. https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/

[12] For specific resources to aid in pursuing the changes described above, see the Center's *System Change Toolkit* (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm). The toolkit provides guides for superintendents, principals, and other planners, tools for mapping and analyzing learning supports, details about establishing a learning supports leadership team, overviews of hows to phase in the system changes, and much more.

WHAT IS A LEARNING SUPPORTS LEADERSHIP TEAM?

*E*very school that wants to improve student and learning supports needs a mechanism specifically working on system *development* to enhance how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. The goal is to rework existing resources by establishing a unified and comprehensive approach. A *Learning Supports Leadership Team* is a vital mechanism for transforming current marginalized and fragmented interventions into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive *system* that enhances equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school.

Most schools have teams that focus on individual student/family problems (e.g., a student support team, an IEP team). These teams pursue such functions as referral, triage, and care monitoring or management. In contrast to this case-by-case focus, a school's *Learning Supports Leadership Team,* along with an administrative leader*,* can take responsibility for developing a unified and comprehensive enabling or learning supports component at a school. In doing so, it ensures that the component is (1) fully integrated as a primary and essential facet of school improvement and (2) outreaches to the community to fill critical system gaps by weaving in human and financial resources from public and private sectors.

What Are the Functions of this Leadership Team?

A Learning Supports Leadership Team performs essential functions and tasks related to the implementation and ongoing development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system for addressing barriers to student learning and teaching.

Examples are:

- ♦ Aggregating data across students and from teachers to analyze school needs
- ♦ Mapping resources at school and in the community
- ♦ Analyzing resources & formulating priorities for system development (in keeping with the most pressing needs of the school)
- ♦ Recommending how resources should be deployed and redeployed
- ♦ Coordinating and integrating school resources & connecting with community resources
- ♦ Planning and facilitating ways to strengthen and develop new programs and systems
- ♦ Developing strategies for enhancing resources
- ♦ Establishing work groups as needed
- ♦ "Social marketing"

Related to the concept of an enabling/learning supports component, these functions and tasks are pursued within frameworks that outline six curriculum content arenas and the full continuum of interventions needed to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to student and learning supports that is integrated fully into the fabric of school improvement policy and practice. (See http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/frameworksforsystemictransformation.pdf)

Who's on Such a Team?

A Learning Supports Leadership Team might begin with only a few people. Where feasible, it should expand into an inclusive group of informed, willing, and able stakeholders. This might include the following:

- • Administrative Lead for the component
- • School Psychologist
- • Counselor
- • School Nurse
- • School Social Worker
- • Behavioral Specialist
- • Special education teacher
- • Representatives of community agencies involved regularly with the school
- • Student representation (when appropriate and feasible)
- • Others who have a particular interest and ability to help with the functions

It is important to integrate this team with the infrastructure mechanisms at the school focused on instruction and management/governance. For example, the school administrator on the team needs to represent the team at administrative and governance meetings. A member also will need to represent the team when a Learning Supports Leadership *Council* is established for a family of schools (e.g., the feeder pattern).

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Appendix B

**Resource Aids for Developing a Leadership Team for an
Enabling or Learning Supports Component**

- Checklist for Establishing the School-Site Leadership Team

- Examples of Initial and Ongoing Process Tasks for the Team

- Planning and Facilitating Effective Meetings

Checklist for Establishing the School-Site Leadership Team

1. ___ Job descriptions/evaluations reflect a policy for working in a coordinated and increasingly integrated way to maximize resource use and enhance effectiveness (this includes allocation of time and resources so that team members can build capacity and work effectively together to maximize resource coordination and enhancement). See Center toolkit for prototype job descriptions -- http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkitb4.htm .

2. ___ Every interested staff member is encouraged to participate.

3. ___ Team include key stakeholders (e.g., guidance counselors, school psychologists, nurses, social workers, attendance and dropout counselors, health educators, special education staff, after school program staff, bilingual and Title I program coordinators, health educators, safe and drug free school staff, representatives of any community agency significantly involved with the site, administrator, regular classroom teachers, non-certificated staff, parents, older students).

4. ___ The size of teams reflects current needs, interests, and factors associated with efficient and effective functioning. (The larger the group, the harder it is to find a meeting time and the longer each meeting tends to run. Frequency of meetings depends on the group's functions, time availability, and ambitions. Properly designed and trained teams can accomplish a great deal through informal communication and short meetings).

5. ___ There is a nucleus of team members who have or will acquire the ability to carry out identified functions and make the mechanism work (others are auxiliary members). All are committed to the team's mission. (Building team commitment and competence should be a major focus of school management policies and programs. Because various teams at a school require the expertise of the same personnel, some individuals will necessarily be on more than one team.)

6. ___ Team has a dedicated facilitator who is able to keep the group task-focused and productive.

7. ___ Team has someone who records decisions and plans and reminds members of planned activity and products.

8. ___ Team uses advanced technology (management systems, electronic bulletin boards and E-mail, resource clearinghouses) to facilitate communication, networking, program planning and implementation, linking activity, and a variety of budgeting, scheduling, and other management concerns.

Exhibit

Examples of Initial and Ongoing Process Tasks for the Team

- Orientation for representatives to introduce each to the other and provide further clarity of group's purposes and processes

- Review membership to determine if any major stakeholder is not represented; take steps to assure proper representation

- Share and map information regarding what exists (programs, services, systems for triage, referral, case management, etc. – at a site; at each site; in the district and community)

- Analyze information on resources to identify important needs at specific sites and for the complex/family of schools as a whole

- Establish priorities for efforts to enhance resources and systems

- Formulate plans for pursuing priorities

- Each site discusses need for coordinating crisis response across the complex and for sharing complex resources for site specific crises and then explores conclusions and plans at Council meeting

- Discussion of staff (and other stakeholder) development activity with a view to combining certain training across sites

- Discussion of quality improvement and longer-term planning (e.g., efficacy, pooling of resources)

General Meeting format

- Updating on and introduction of membership

- Reports from those who had between meeting assignments

- Current topic for discussion and planning

- Decision regarding between meeting assignments

- Ideas for next agenda

Forming a Working Group

- There should be a clear statement about the group's mission.
- Be certain that members agree to pursue the stated mission and, for the most part, share a vision.
- Pick someone who the group will respect and who either already has good facilitation skills or will commit to learning those that are needed.
- Provide training for members so they understand their role in keeping a meeting on track and turning talk into effective action..
- Designate processes (a) for sending members information before a meeting regarding what is to be accomplished, specific agenda items, and individual assignments and (b) for maintaining and circulating record of decisions and planned actions (what, who, when).

Meeting Format

- Be certain there is a written agenda and that it clearly states the purpose of the meeting, specific topics, and desired outcomes for the session.
- Begin the meeting by reviewing purpose, topics, desired outcomes, eta. Until the group is functioning well, it may be necessary to review meeting ground rules.
- Facilitate the involvement of all members, and do so in ways that encourage them to focus specifically on the task. The facilitator remains neutral in discussion of issues.
- Try to maintain a comfortable pace (neither too rushed, nor too slow; try to start on time and end on time but don't be a slave to the clock).
- Periodically review what has been accomplished and move on the next item.
- Leave time to sum up and celebrate accomplishment of outcomes and end by enumerating specific follow up activity (what, who, when). End with a plan for the next meeting (date, time, tentative agenda). For a series of meetings, set the dates well in advance so members can plan their calendars.

Some Group Dynamics to Anticipate

- _Hidden Agendas_ – All members should agree to help keep hidden agendas in check and, when such items cannot be avoided, facilitate the rapid presentation of a point and indicate where the concern needs to be redirected.
- _A Need for Validation_ – When members make the same point over and over, it usually indicates they feel an important point is not being validated. To counter such disruptive repetition, account for the item in a visible way so that members feel their contributions have been acknowledged. When the item warrants discussion at a later time, assign it to a future agenda.
- _Members are at an Impasse_ – Two major reasons groups get stuck are: (a) some new ideas are needed to "get out of a box" and (b) differences in perspective need to be aired and resolved. The former problem usually can be dealt with through brainstorming or by bringing in someone with new ideas to offer; to deal with conflicts that arise over process, content, and power relationships employ problem solving and conflict management strategies (e.g., accommodation, negotiation, mediation).
- _Interpersonal Conflict and Inappropriate Competition_ – These problems may be corrected by repeatedly bringing the focus back to the goal – improving outcomes for students/families; when this doesn't work; restructuring group membership may be necessary.
- _Ain't It Awful!_ – Daily frustrations experienced by staff often lead them to turn meetings into gripe sessions. Outside team members (parents, agency staff, business and/or university partners) can influence school staff to exhibit their best behavior.

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Also see the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on:
Collaboration - School, Community, Interagency at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1201_01.htm