From the Center for MH & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA

Why Schools Need to Transform Student/Learning Supports and How to Move Forward

We are pleased to see all the renewed activity focused on school redesign.

One major component of this involves improving how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students and families. The emphasis on these concerns includes

- rethinking student and learning supports and the roles and functions of staff providing such supports

- approaching learning, behavior, and emotional problems as interrelated concerns

- using an umbrella concept, such as addressing barriers to learning, to unify the laundry list of programs and initiatives currently being implemented for that purpose (e.g., MTSS, Community Schools, integrated services, social emotional learning as a response to problems, response to intervention, trauma informed practices, suicide and substance use prevention, crisis response, special efforts to close the opportunity and achievement gaps, etc., etc., etc....).

For many years, we have received a steady stream of frustrated comments about the situation at schools related to all this. And the situation has been exacerbated as a result of COVID-19. (Considerable concern has been expressed about the capability of schools to deal with the increasing number of students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems.)

We know that folks have to address immediate problems as best they can (and will continue to be frustrated, upset, and overwhelmed).

Given the constant demand to respond to pressing problems, the primary tendency has been to argue for hiring more staff. And clearly some of the temporary relief funds are being used to add some student/learning support personnel. However, it is also evident that when the relief funds end most schools will not have sufficient funds to maintain the added personnel.

The bottom line: *Schools cannot continue to spend all the time of student and learning support staff responding to the culture of crisis that dominates efforts to address barriers to teaching and learning and reengage disconnected students and their families.* To do so means maintaining the marginalization, fragmentation, counterproductive competition, redundancy, and limited outcomes that characterize most schools' approach to providing student and learning supports efforts.

The challenge at this time is to escape old ways of thinking about these matters. ***New directions are essential.***

MOVING FORWARD

Here's a way to start improving a school's student/learning supports.

(1) Establish a Learning Supports Leadership Team(See *What is a learning supports leadership team?* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf)

(2) Have the team
 (a) map existing resources for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students (see *Mapping & Analyzing Learning Supports*
 http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf
 and *An Aid for Initial Listing of Current Resources Used at a School for Addressing Barriers Learning and Teaching* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/listingresources.pdf)

(b) analyze what's working and what needs strengthening and identify critical gaps

(c) develop a set of prioritized recommendations for moving toward a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports

(d) present the recommendations for approval.

(3) As soon as a set of proposed improvements are approved, establish a workgroup to develop a strategic action plan that details the who, what, and when of the steps for moving forward.

(4) Assign the *Learning Supports Leadership Team* to guide implementation of the strategic plan.

Some resources from the Center to aid in moving forward:

>*Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*
>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
>*Improving School Improvement*
   All three can be accessed from our Center's website. Go to:
       http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

>*2021-22: Addressing Learning, Behavior, and Emotional Problems Through Better Use of Student and Learning Support Staff* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/supports.pdf

>*Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports*
   http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/evolvecomm.pdf

A host of other free resources to aid in the transformation process are available on the Center's website http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/ – for example, the *System Change Toolkit* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm

And we offer free technical assistance and coaching if you need it – see
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/coach.pdf