**Embedding Mental Health into the broad range of supports
teachers expect and want available to them: Moving Forward**

A recent commentary in *U.S. News and World Report* noted:

> "Tracking by Georgetown University's Edunomics Lab finds that while some districts have used all or a good chunk of their Elementary and Secondary School Relief Fund dollars, others still have hundreds of thousands left. Districts must make plans by September to spend the money by Jan. 28, 2025, or lose the funds and a critical opportunity to address their communities' biggest post-pandemic education challenges." ...

> They also note: "Most schools report providing some mental health services. However, many cannot provide the rigorous services and screening today's students need, or they do not meet recommended student-to-counselor and student-to-psychologist ratios."
> https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2024-02-01/dont-leave-covid-relief-dollars-for-education-on-the-table

This last statement recognizes the long standing realities that only will be exacerbated as relief funds are used up and the impending fiscal cliff becomes widespread. (See EdWeek's discussion of the familiar and new financial challenges school districts are facing https://www.edweek.org/leadership/4-financial-headaches-schools-may-not-be-able-to-avoid-this-year/2024/02)

It is evident to most stakeholders that spending any remaining relief funds mainly to "bolster mental health services and supports for students and teachers" will just be a temporary band-aid.

As the *U.S. News and World Report* commentary and many others recognize, such a narrow focus certainly will not help schools develop the "broad range of supports … educators and staff also expect and want to have available to them...." and that are essential to enhancing equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school.

What's Needed?

- It's time to go beyond thinking in terms of adding personnel mainly to provide services to a few more of the many students experiencing emotional (and learning) problems and the many currently disconnected from schooling.

- It's time to focus on system building that goes beyond linking with and collocating agency resources, and enhancing coordination. These efforts have a place, but they do not address how to unify and reconceive ways to better meet the needs of the many rather than just providing traditional services to a relatively few students.

- It is time to fundamentally rethink student and learning supports. The intent is to develop a comprehensive, cohesive, and equitable system. Such a system encompasses a full continuum of interventions and covers a well-defined and delimited set of classroom and schoolwide supports. It also emphasizes how to personalize instruction and special assistance.

Developing a comprehensive, cohesive and equitable system of student/learning supports entails

(1) unifying all direct efforts to address factors interfering with learning and teaching at a school

(2) connecting families of schools (such as feeder patterns) with each other and with a wider range of community resources

(3) weaving together school, home, and community resources in ways that enhance effectiveness and achieve economies of scale.

Starting points include ensuring that the work is fully integrated into school improvement policy and practice, reworking operational infrastructure, setting priorities for system development, and (re)deploying whatever resources are available to pursue priorities. See https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefguide.pdf

Let us know what your thinking is about moving forward.

Best wishes and be well,

Howard & Linda**

*Note that the Center has other recent *in-depth* resources on these matters. For example, see

>*Improving School Improvement*
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5288v1c1

>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/55w7b8x8

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