

## **Just talking about equity won't reduce the opportunity gap**

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

### ***How schools can play a much more proactive role in reducing the opportunity gap***

For a long time, most of us have been quite aware of and vocal about the number of students who are not doing well at local schools, especially schools in large urban and poor rural settings (*And we know that many more students are manifesting learning, behavior, and emotional problems than before the pandemic*).

At the same time, ask yourself: *How clear are you about what schools actually are doing to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students?*

If you don't have good information about this, take a few minutes to map the student/learning supports at a school about which you have concerns.

(If you want to do this systematically, use the mapping resource aids at

><https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/listingresources.pdf>

><https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf> )

The results will show that, despite all the emergency band-aid approaches being added to cope with the increases in student problems, the schools are nowhere near responding in ways that can significantly reduce the *opportunity gap*. And, of course, as long as so many students lack equity of opportunity to succeed at a school, the school cannot significantly reduce the *achievement gap*.

***Efforts mainly focused on improving instruction are insufficient.***

***So is adding a few more student/learning supports  
(especially if the additions are affordable only on a temporary basis).***

***Student/learning supports are essential to school efforts to  
enhance equity of opportunity for student success at school and beyond;***

***but current approaches are poorly conceived and organized.***

It is time to go beyond problem-naming and problem-analyses to do some major problem-solving.

It is time to *rethink and rebuild* student/learning supports at schools. The need is to unify and then develop such supports into a comprehensive and equitable system. Such a system is fundamental to all efforts to reduce the equity and achievement gaps and effectively promote whole child development, advance social justice, and enhance a positive school climate.

The Center has online many resources focusing on these matters that can be used for staff discussion, continuing education, and planning. As a start, see, the following brief resources:

>*Rethinking Student and Learning Supports*  
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fall22.pdf>

>*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*  
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefguide.pdf>

For more in depth presentations, see the following free resources:

>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*

>*Improving School Improvement*

>*Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

all three can be accessed at

[https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving\\_school\\_improvement.html](https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)

As always, send all comments and questions, as well as requests for resources, TA, and coaching to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu) .