

About Opportunities to Prevent Child Maltreatment

We recently were contacted by the Research-to-Policy Collaboration about responding to a staffer who works for a member of the Ways and Means Committee, who “wants to learn more about opportunities to prevent child maltreatment. The staffer is particularly interested in understanding which programs are effective and identifying opportunities to support evidence-based solutions. This is a priority for the office in anticipation of working on program authorizations via Title IV-B this session.”

Our response:

The stated purpose of Title IV-B is to “promote State flexibility in the development and expansion of a coordinated child and family services program that utilizes community-based agencies and ensures all children are raised in safe, loving families ...”

The reauthorization of Title IV-B provides a major opportunity for Congress to take a step in moving beyond the current piecemeal, ad hoc, and much too limited approach to addressing child and adolescent problems.

Problems such as child maltreatment happen at home, school, and in the neighborhood, and those affected usually are experiencing multiple problems. The reality is that families, schools, and neighborhoods are confronted daily with interrelated learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Researchers consistently report that alienation, bullying, harassment, substance abuse, academic failure, and more are widespread problems. Diverse populations are particularly vulnerable (e.g., those living in poverty, those in foster care, those in immigrant families, those who are homeless, those diagnosed with disabilities).

To address the problems, the main proposals tend to call for more funding to enhance the quantity, quality, and availability of services (e.g., adding personnel, providing professional development and support). This certainly has been the trend in using pandemic temporary relief funds.

The trouble is the number of individuals in need far outstrips appropriations, and this is unlikely to change. So adding a few more staff, improving training, and offering just a bit more of the same limited approaches can only help a few more of the many in need.

We understand there is always immediate pressure for *doing something* about child welfare problems, particularly those that are well-publicized. However, the long-range need is not just to do a bit more of something but to correct the long-standing failure of prevailing policy and practices in ways that significantly enhance well-being, reduce problems such as child maltreatment, and address opportunity and achievement gaps. With all this in mind,

Title IV-B’s reauthorization needs to emphasize development of *mechanisms that can stimulate and facilitate* transformative and sustainable systemic changes in how schools, communities, and families work collaboratively to address the wide-ranging problems too many young people continue to experience.

One such mechanism = well designed local home-school-community collaboratives that pursue an agenda to enhance supports that increase equity of opportunity for *all* youngsters. (Current neighborhood councils and formal school-community connections including the community school movement provide a foundation for building such collaboratives.) With a relatively small amount of incentive funding, such collaboratives can be established and charged with facilitating transformative thinking and systemic changes with respect to how schools, students, families, and neighborhoods work together in providing essential supports for young people.

At the same time, the reauthorization of Title IV-B needs to consider ways to

- address child maltreatment and many other specific problems not as discrete concerns but as overlapping matters
- counter the prevailing legislative trend to pursue related problems separately and in an ad hoc manner
- enable planning and implementation to braid together existing resources from different funding streams in order to end the fragmentation of interventions and move toward a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of supportive interventions.

Note: A unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of supportive interventions involves clear domains of intervention and takes place across a continuum that includes promoting healthy development, preventing problems, responding quickly after problem onset, and providing for severe and chronic problems.

For a discussion of local home-school-community collaboratives, see

>***Fostering School, Family, and Community Involvement***

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/44%20guide%207%20fostering%20school%20family%20and%20community%20involvement.pdf>

>***Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports***

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

NOTE about Congressional calls for State Plans: Title IV-B of the Social Securities Act calls for a state plan that promotes “State flexibility in the development and expansion of a coordinated child and family services program that utilizes community-based agencies and ensures all children are raised in safe, loving families ...”

Title IV of the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA), the last amendment of ESEA, calls for a state plan that assures that the SEA will modify or eliminate state fiscal and accounting barriers so that the schools can easily consolidate funds from other federal, state and local sources to improve educational opportunities and reduce unnecessary fiscal and accounting requirements.*

Such state plans need to be integrated since they deal with mutual concerns. A particular focus must be on promoting the braiding of various fragmented and overlapping federal, state, and local resources and initiatives aimed at addressing the multiple problems experienced by youngsters, their families, their schools and neighborhoods.

Braiding funds is an imperative opportunity not to be ignored, and it is essential in pursuing transformative thinking and system change with respect to how schools, students, families, and neighborhoods work together to provide essential supports for young people.

For more on ***Integrating Funding Streams*** <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fundinginteg.pdf>

*In calling for eliminating state fiscal and accounting barriers so that the schools can easily consolidate funds from other federal, state and local sources, the ESSA lists the following examples:

- >The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.)
- >The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (20 U.S.C. 701 et seq.)
- >The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.)
- >The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3101 et seq.)
- >The Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9831 et seq.)
- >The Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 9858 et seq.)
- >The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (20 U.S.C. 9501 et seq.)
- >The Education Technical Assistance Act of 2002 (20 U.S.C. 9601 et seq.)
- >The National Assessment of Educational Progress Authorization Act (20 U.S.C. 9621 et seq.)
- >The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11301 et seq.)
- >The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (29 U.S.C. 3271 et seq.)

And, of course, there are the acts to support specific initiatives such as Full-Service Community School Expansion Act, the Safer Communities Act to Support Mental Health and Student Wellness, School Based Health Centers, and more.