

Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School: Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff

Schools, districts, and state departments across the country are moving in new directions to address barriers to learning and teaching and to re-engage disconnected students. The intent is to design and develop a comprehensive system of student and learning supports and to fully integrate it into school improvement policy and practice.

Interested schools frequently ask us for an outline of first steps for developing such a system.

The following seven steps are a response to that request. In addition to this overview, we have prepared a set of detailed guidance notes focusing on each step. These include easily accessed links to free resource aids and tools. These are online at – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf> Besides the free resources available through the UCLA Center’s website, the Center staff provides no-fee technical assistance via email and phone.

Step 1: *Create Readiness and School Site Commitment.* Work with key stakeholders to build commitment to unifying student and learning supports into a Learning Supports Component (i.e., a component that systematically and comprehensively enables learning by addressing barriers to learning & teaching). Clarify why the component is essential and ensure that the commitment to its development is fully and realistically integrated into school improvement and other strategic operational planning. Keep in mind that building readiness and commitment is an ongoing process.

Step 2: *Appoint a Lead for System Development.* Assign an administrative-level *Learning Supports Lead* to begin development of the component (e.g., an assistant principal, a student support staff member). Be sure the leader’s job description is revised to reflect the new responsibilities and accountabilities; provide appropriate personnel development. Be sure this leader is at administrative planning and decision making tables and component development is a regular part of the agenda.

Step 3: *Establish a Development Team to Work with the Administrative Lead.* Assign key staff to a component development team (i.e., a *Learning Supports Resource Team*) to work with the leader to clarify, analyze, identify priorities, recommend resource redeployment, and establish and guide workgroups for developing each facet of the component over a period of several years.



ABOUT THE CENTER at UCLA

The national Center for Mental Health in Schools is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project at UCLA.

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Step 4. *Conduct Indepth and Ongoing Analyses to Determine Gaps, Priorities, and Resource Deployment.* Build on initial listings of current personnel and activities by doing an indepth and structured mapping of all resources the school currently uses to address barriers to learning and teaching. Then, (a) do a gap analysis with respect to available needs assessments, (b) identify immediate priorities for moving forward with improvement and system development, and (c) recommend (re)deployment of resources to meet priorities in a cost-effective manner. Be certain the decisions are reflected in all school improvement plans.

Step 5. *Form and Facilitate Needed Workgroups.* Elicit volunteers for workgroups and provide them with relevant professional development and support for pursuing the work. While the component development team will guide and support movement forward in establishing a comprehensive system of learning supports, the work requires the efforts of smaller workgroups to carry out specific tasks.

Step 6: *Provide Ongoing Professional and Other Stakeholder Development.* Include a focus on a comprehensive system of learning supports in all planning for continuous learning at the school. Provide on-the-job opportunities and special times for such learning. Delineate what those assigned to develop the component need to learn over time; ensure all others (teachers, student support staff, other staff and volunteers, community stakeholders) are included in learning about how best to address barriers to learning and teaching. Use the free resources available through the UCLA Center's website and technical assistance support.

Step 7. *Use Formative Evaluation to Support Progress.* Ensure that a formative evaluation process is established. Such a process should encompass data on and analyses of all facets of planning and implementation related to developing a comprehensive system of learning supports. Moreover, the process should be designed to provide guidance and support to foster progress. This means monitoring all factors that facilitate and hinder progress and then ensuring actions are taken to deal with interfering factors and to enhance facilitation. As significant progress is made in developing the system, the monitoring can expand to evaluate the impact on student outcomes that are direct indicators of the effectiveness of learning supports (e.g., increased attendance, reduced misbehavior, improved learning).

Establishing a comprehensive system of learning supports at a school involves four overlapping phases: creating readiness, initial implementation, institutionalization, and ongoing evolution and creative renewal. *The seven steps we have delineated here focus mainly on the first three phases.*

If you have any questions, comments, or specific matters to share, contact Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu or smhp@ucla.edu

Want to Learn More Right Now?

The set of Guidance Notes on *Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School: Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff* (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf>) is based on an extensive body of work. The following four online resources can be used for individual or group study to enhance understanding of how developing a comprehensive system of learning supports can strengthen school improvement efforts in fundamental ways.

(1) Free Online Institute. To respond to the increasing interest in learning more about developing a comprehensive system of learning supports we have collaborated with Scholastic Inc. to create a free online Leadership Institute consisting of a series of six webinar sessions. These are easily accessed at - <http://rebuildingforlearning.scholastic.com/>

The modules include discussion of:

- o Why new directions for student and learning supports is an imperative for school improvement.
- o Framing a comprehensive intervention system to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.
- o Reworking school and district operational infrastructure and policy to effectively build such a system.
- o Expanding professional development related to engagement and re-engagement to include an enhanced understanding of intrinsic motivation.
- o School transformation in terms of systemic change phases and tasks.
- o Planning and strategically pursuing implementation of a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports as an integrated part of school improvement.

See the Institute description at -

http://rebuildingforlearning.scholastic.com/site/institute_description

(2) Examples of What Others Already are Doing. Learn from the experiences of those who are designing Comprehensive Systems of Learning Supports and embedding them in school improvement plans. Take time to look at the following examples:

BROCHURES & PAMPHLETS

- > Hawaii - Comprehensive Student Support System (CSSS)
http://doe.k12.hi.us/programs/csss/csss_pamphlet.pdf
- > Louisiana - Overview of the state's Comprehensive Learning Supports System -
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/1alearningsupport.pdf>
- > Ohio - Student Success: A Comprehensive System of Learning Supports
<http://education.ohio.gov/GD/DocumentManagement/DocumentDownload.aspx?DocumentID=54970>
- > Tucson Unified School District - Learning Supports System
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/tusdbrochure.pdf>
- > Indian River County Public School District (FL) - Learning Supports Collaborative
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/irlsc.pdf>
- > Learning Supports logo prototype
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/scholastic/LearningSupportlogo3.jpg>

MAJOR DESIGN DOCUMENTS

> Louisiana Department of Education
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing2.htm#louisiana>

> Iowa Department of Education
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing2.htm#iowa>

(For some data related to Iowa's work on developing a comprehensive system of learning supports, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/iaaireval.pdf>)

> Gainesville City Schools
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/aasagainesville.pdf>

(3) One Hour Introductory Webinar. Our Center developed this introduction in collaboration with the American Association of School Administrators and Scholastic. It is entitled: *Strengthening School Improvement: Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching*
<https://scholastic.webex.com/scholastic/lrs.php?AT=pb&SP=TC&rID=48915112&rKey=09f14db0881f5159&act=pb>

(4) Toolkit of Resources. Includes many resources for Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ANY OF THIS?

Contact Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu



Please forward this to anyone you think might be interested.

If this was forwarded to you, you can receive future resources from the Center at UCLA directly by sending an email to smhp@ucla.edu to provide us with your contact information.

