A Center Policy and Practice Report **. . .**

Key Leadership Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Student & Learning Supports

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Preface

In the late 1980s, we began pilot testing a new operational infrastructure mechanism designed to ensure that schools paid more systematic attention to how they used resources for addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development. Early in our work, we called the mechanism a Resource Coordinating Team because we operationalized the mechanism as a team and at first focused it on resource coordination. We soon learned, however, that coordination is too limited an emphasis for enhancing the effectiveness and breadth of impact of student and learning supports. So, we now use the term *Learning Supports Leadership Team.* Properly constituted, such a team works with a school administrative leader to develop a unified and comprehensive system at a school for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students

For those concerned with school improvement, administrative leaders and leadership teams are critical in efforts to transform and restructure daily operations. However, our analyses of schools, districts, and state departments of education indicate the rarity of administrative leaders and leadership teams dedicated to unifying and system building related to what currently are a fragmented and marginalized set of student and learning supports.

In some schools as much as 25-30 percent of the budget may be going to problem prevention and correction. Every school is expending resources to enable learning; few have a mechanism to ensure appropriate use of existing resources and to enhance current efforts related to student and learning supports by developing them into a unified and comprehensive system. Minimally, such a mechanism contributes to cost-efficacy by ensuring all such activity is planned, implemented, and evaluated in a coordinated and increasingly integrated manner. By developing the activity into a unified and comprehensive system of student and learning supports, a Learning Supports Leadership Team also moves to end the marginalization of the work. Creation of such a mechanism is essential for braiding together existing school and community resources, and ensuring programs and services function in increasingly cohesive ways that also resolve related turf and operational problems.

One of the primary tasks a Learning Supports Leadership Team undertakes is that of enumerating school and community programs and services that are in place to support students, families, and staff. A comprehensive "gap" assessment is generated as resources are mapped and compared with surveys of the unmet needs of and desired outcomes for students, their families, and school staff. Analyses of what is available, effective, and needed provide a sound basis for formulating priorities and developing strategies to link with additional resources at other schools, district sites, and in the community in order to enhance resource use and develop a unified and comprehensive system of student and learning supports. This work is fundamental to improving impact and cost-effectiveness.

In a similar fashion, a Learning Supports Leadership *Council* for a complex or family of schools (e.g., a high school and its feeder schools) and a Learning Supports Leadership workgroup at the district level provide mechanisms for analyses on a larger scale. This can lead to strategies for cross-school, community-wide, and district-wide cooperation and integration to enhance intervention effectiveness and garner economies of scale.

This report pulls together our work on leadership mechanisms. We stress the importance of ensuring such mechanisms are a permanent part of the infrastructure at all levels. For this to happen, school improvement planners and reformers must understand their importance and ensure they are included as schools and districts restructure.

And, from a decentralized perspective, it is a good idea to conceive the process of restructuring from the school outward. That is, first the focus is on school level operational infrastructure mechanisms. Then, based on analyses of what is needed to facilitate and enhance school level efforts, mechanisms are conceived that enable groups or "families" of schools to work together where this increases efficiency and effectiveness and achieves economies of scale. Then, system-wide mechanisms can be (re)designed to support what each school and family of schools are trying to develop.

Learning supports leadership mechanisms at a school, multiple school sites, and system-wide are essential for productive system development, oversight, cost-effective resource use, and ongoing capacity building. Such mechanisms provide ways to (a) arrive at decisions about resource allocation, (b) maximize systematic and integrated planning, implementation, maintenance, and evaluation of education support (enabling) activity, (c) outreach to create formal working relationships with community resources to bring some to a school and establish special linkages with others, and (d) upgrade and modernize efforts to reflect the best intervention thinking and use of technology. At each system level, the work requires that staff adopt some new roles and functions and that parents, students, and other representatives from the community enhance their involvement. They also call for redeployment of existing resources, as well as finding new ones.

As we have stressed in much of our work over the years, development of a unified and comprehensive approach to providing student and learning supports is long overdue. An essential facet of moving forward is to establish an effective leadership infrastructure.

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Howard S. Adelman & Linda Taylor
Co-directors

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Key Infrastructure Leadership Mechanisms for Enhancing Student & Learning Supports

Policy makers continuously call for higher standards and greater accountability for instruction, improved curricula, better teaching, increased discipline, reduced school violence, an end to social promotion, and more. At the same time, it is evident that current strategies to accomplish all this are inadequate to the task. This is likely to remain the case as long as so little attention is paid to reforming and restructuring the ways schools address many well-known factors interfering with the performance and learning of so many young people.

The notion of barriers to learning encompasses external and internal factors. It is clear that too many youngsters are growing up and going to school in situations that not only fail to promote healthy development, but are antithetical to the process. Some also bring with them intrinsic conditions that make learning and performing difficult. As a result, youngsters at every grade level come to school unready to meet the setting's demands effectively.

Pioneer initiatives around the country are demonstrating the need to rethink how schools and communities can meet the challenge of addressing persistent barriers to student learning (see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/nind7.htm). As a whole, their work underscores a reality that too few school reformers have acted upon. Namely:

> *If our society truly means to provide the opportunity for all students to succeed at school, fundamental changes are needed so that schools and communities can effectively address barriers to development and learning.*

Addressing barriers is not at odds with the "paradigm shift" that emphasizes strengths, resilience, assets, and protective factors. Efforts to enhance positive development and improve instruction clearly can improve readiness to learn. However, it is frequently the case that preventing problems also requires direct action to remove or at least minimize the impact of barriers, such as hostile environments and intrinsic problems. Without effective, direct interventions, such barriers can continue to get in the way of development and learning.

What are Schools Doing Now?

All schools have some activity focused on specific concerns, such as learning problems, substance abuse, violence, teen pregnancy, school dropouts, and delinquency. Looked at as a whole, one finds in many school districts an extensive range of activity oriented to students' needs and problems. Some programs are provided throughout a school district, others are carried out at or linked to targeted schools. The interventions may be designed to benefit all students in a school, those in specified grades, and/or those identified as having special needs. The activities may be implemented in regular or special education classrooms and may be geared to an entire class, groups, or individuals; or they may be designed as "pull out" programs for designated students. They encompass ecological, curricular, and clinically oriented activities.

Programs and services are planned, implemented, and evaluated in a fragmented and piecemeal manner.

While schools can use a wide-range of persons to help students, most school-owned and operated services are offered as part of pupil personnel services. Federal and state mandates tend to determine how many pupil services professionals are employed, and states regulate compliance with mandates. Governance of daily practice usually is centralized at the school district level. In large districts, counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other specialists may be organized into separate units. Such units straddle regular, special, and compensatory education. Analyses of the situation find that the result is programs and services that are planned, implemented, and evaluated in a fragmented and piecemeal manner. Service staff at schools tend to function in relative isolation of each other and other stakeholders, with a great deal of the work oriented to discrete problems and with an overreliance on specialized services for individuals and small groups. In some schools, a student identified as at risk for grade retention, dropout, and substance abuse may be assigned to three counseling programs operating independently of each other. Such fragmentation not only is costly, it works against developing cohesiveness and maximizing results.

Similar concerns about fragmented community health and social services has led to increasing interest in school-community collaborations (e.g., school-linked services). A reasonable inference from available data is that such collaborations can be successful and cost effective over the long-run. By placing staff at schools, community agencies make access easier for students and families – especially those who usually are underserved and hard to reach. Such efforts not only provide services, they seem to encourage schools to open their doors in ways that enhance recreational, enrichment, and remedial opportunities and greater family involvement. At the same time, the emphasis on primarily co-locating community services at school sites is producing another form of fragmentation.

Toward Ending Fragmentation

Policymakers have come to appreciate the relationship between limited intervention efficacy and the widespread tendency for complementary programs to operate in isolation. Limited efficacy does seem inevitable as long as interventions are carried out in a piecemeal and often competitive fashion and with little follow through. From this perspective, reformers have directed initiatives toward reducing service fragmentation and increasing access.

The call for "integrated services" clearly is motivated by a desire to reduce redundancy, waste, and ineffectiveness resulting from fragmentation. Special attention is given to the many piecemeal, categorically funded approaches, such as those created to reduce learning and behavior problems, substance abuse, violence, school dropouts, delinquency, and teen pregnancy.

New directions are emerging that reflect fundamental shifts in thinking about current education support programs and services (e.g., Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008). Three major themes have emerged so far: (1) the move *from* fragmentation *to* cohesive intervention, (2) the move *from* narrowly focused, problem specific, and specialist-oriented services *to* comprehensive general programmatic approaches, and (3) the move toward research-based interventions, with higher standards and ongoing accountability emphasized.

To ensure development of essential programs for addressing barriers to learning and teaching, greater attention must be given to developing policy, leadership, and infrastructure and to building capacity (see references at end of this report and on the Center website). The focus in this report is on one facet of the necessary infrastructure – *learning supports leadership mechanisms.*

Learning Supports Leadership Mechanisms

Learning supports leadership operational mechanisms focus specifically on ensuring the development over several years of a unified and comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. In the process, such mechanisms focus on appropriate and effective use of allocated resources by reducing marginalization and fragmentation and enhancing cost-efficacy of student and learning supports through interventions that are coordinated and increasingly integrated.

Creation of learning supports leadership mechanisms also is essential for braiding together existing school and community resources and ensuring the various programs and services function in increasingly cohesive ways. These mechanisms play a critical role in resolving turf and operational problems.

One primary task a Learning Supports Leadership Team undertakes is that of enumerating school and community programs and services that are in place to support students, families, and staff. A comprehensive "gap" assessment is generated as resource mapping is compared with surveys of the unmet needs of and desired outcomes for students, their families, and school staff. Analyses of what is available, effective, and needed, provide a sound basis for formulating strategies to link with additional resources at other schools, district sites, and in the community and enhance use of existing resources. Such analyses guide system building and can improve cost-effectiveness.

In a similar fashion, a Learning Supports Leadership *Council* for a complex or family of schools (e.g., a high school and its feeders) and at the district level provides mechanisms for analyses that can lead to strategies for cross-school, community-wide, and district-wide cooperation and integration to enhance intervention effectiveness and garner economies of scale. For those concerned with school improvement, establishment of such mechanisms are a key facet of efforts designed to restructure student and learning supports.

Below we highlight these mechanisms at the school level, then in terms of a family of schools (e.g., a feeder pattern), and finally at the district level.

At a School Creation of school-site learning supports leadership mechanisms provides a good starting place for enhancing coordination and integration of programs and services and for reaching out to District and community resources to enhance learning supports. And, over time, such mechanisms can be evolved to do much more – eventually transforming student and learning supports into a unified and comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

Early in our work, we emphasized establishing of a new school site team which we designated a "Resource Coordinating Team" because one of its first tasks focused on resource coordination. We soon learned, however, that coordination is too limited an emphasis for enhancing the effectiveness and breadth of impact of student and learning supports. So, we now use the term *Learning Supports Leadership Team*. We initially piloted such teams in the Los Angeles Unified School District and now they are being introduced in schools across the country. Properly constituted, such a team works with a school administrative leader to develop a unified and comprehensive system of student and learning supports.

When we mention a Learning Supports Leadership Team, some school staff quickly respond:

We already have one!

When we explore this with them, we usually find what they have is a *case-oriented team* – that is, a team focused on individual students who are having problems. (Such a team may be called a student study team, student success team, student assistance team, teacher assistance team, and so forth.)

To help clarify the difference, we have developed the following exhibit:

Contrasting Team Functions

A Case-Oriented Team	*A Leadership Team for System Development*
Focuses on specific *individuals* and discrete *services* to address barriers to learning	Focuses on developing a unified & comprehensive system of supports to address barriers to learning for all students
Sometimes called: • Child Study Team • Student Study Team • Student Success Team • Student Assistance Team • Teacher Assistance Team • IEP Team	Possibly called: • Learning Supports Resource Team • Learning Supports Component Team • Learning Supports Component Development Team
EXAMPLES OF FUNCTIONS: >triage >referral >case monitoring/management >case progress review >case reassessment	EXAMPLES OF FUNCTIONS: >aggregating data across students and from teachers to analyze school needs >mapping resources in school and community >analyzing resources >identifying the most pressing program development needs at the school >coordinating and integrating school resources & connecting with community resources >establishing priorities for strengthening programs and developing new ones >planning and facilitating ways to strengthen and develop new programs and systems >recommending how resources should be deployed and redeployed >developing strategies for enhancing resources >social "marketing"

In contrasting the two teams, the intent is to highlight the difference in functions, and the need for mechanisms that focus on both sets of functions

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Another way to help differentiate the two types of mechanisms is by use of two familiar metaphors. A *case-orientation* fits the *starfish* metaphor.

> The day after a great storm had washed up all sorts of sea life far up onto the beach, a youngster set out to throw back as many of the still-living starfish as he could. After watching him toss one after the other into the ocean, an old man approached him and said:
> > *It's no use your doing that, there are too many,*
> > *You're not going to make any difference.*
>
> The boy looked at him in surprise, then bent over, picked up another starfish, tossed it back, and then replied:
> > *It made a difference to that one!*

And, of course, that is the metaphor that reflects all the important individual student and family efforts undertaken by staff alone and when they meet together to work on specific cases.

The *system development* focus is captured by what can be called the *bridge* metaphor.

> In a small town, one weekend a group of school staff went to the river to go fishing. Not long after they got there, a child came floating down the rapids calling for help. One of the group on the shore quickly dived in and pulled the child out. Minutes later another, then another, and then many more children were coming down the river. Soon every one was diving in and dragging children to the shore and then jumping back in to save as many as they could.
>
> In the midst of all this frenzy, one of the group was seen walking away. Her colleagues were irate. How could she leave when there were so many children to save? After long hours, to everyone's relief, the flow of children stopped, and the group could finally catch their breath.
>
> At that moment, their colleague came back. They turned on her and angrily shouted: *How could you walk off when we needed everyone here to save the children?*
>
> She replied: *It occurred to me that someone ought to go upstream and find out why so many kids were falling into the river. What I found is that the old wooden bridge had several planks missing, and when some children tried to jump over the gap, they couldn't make it and fell through into the river. So I got someone to fix the bridge.*

Fixing and building better bridges is a good way to think about prevention work, and it is the way to understand the importance of taking time to focus on improving and enhancing resources, programs, and systems.

Clearly, an emphasis on specific students is warranted. However, as the primary focus associated with student and learning supports, this approach tends to sidetrack development of improvements at schools that can prevent many individual problems and help many more students. As stressed below, critically missing are mechanisms devoted to the functions and tasks necessary for developing a comprehensive, multifaceted, coherent, and cohesive system of student and learning supports.

Examples of currently unattended key functions and tasks:

- aggregating data across students and from teachers to analyze school needs re. addressing barriers to learning
- mapping student and learning supports activity and resources (including personnel) at the school and those working with the school from the community
- analyzing resources and doing a gap analysis using a comprehensive intervention framework that covers prevention and amelioration of problems
- identifying the most pressing program development needs at the school
- coordinating and integrating school resources
- setting priorities and planning for system development (e.g., for strengthening existing efforts, including filling gaps through development and connecting with community resources)
- recommending how resources should be deployed and redeployed (e.g., clarifying which activities warrant continued support and suggesting better uses for nonproductive resources)
- reaching out to connect with and weave together additional resources in a feeder pattern (or family of schools), in the school district, and in the community
- developing strategies for increasing resources and social "marketing"for development of a *comprehensive system* of student and learning supports.
- enhancing processes for information and communication among school staff and with the home
- establishing standing and ad hoc work groups to carry out tasks involved in system development and individual student and family assistance
- performing formative and summative evaluation of system development, capacity building, maintenance, & outcomes (including expanding the school accountability framework to assess how well schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students)

As can be seen, the above set of tasks expands from the current emphasis on a relatively few troubled and troubling individuals to encompass reworking resources to ensure attention is given to the needs of all students. Initially, a leader for an enabling or learning supports component, working with a leadership team, can reduce fragmentation and enhance cost-efficacy by ensuring existing programs and services are coordinated and increasingly integrated. Key tasks for accomplishing this include mapping and analyzing resources (see Appendix A). Over time, the group can provide school improvement leadership to guide stakeholder work groups in evolving the school's vision for student and learning supports. The aims are not only to prevent and correct learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems, but contribute to classroom and schoolwide efforts to foster academic, social, emotional, and physical functioning and promote an increasingly positive school climate.

Where creation of "another team" is seen as a burden, existing teams, such as student or teacher assistance teams and school crisis teams, have demonstrated the ability to focus on system development by augmenting their membership and adding system concerns to the agenda. Of course, in doing so, they must take great care to structure the agenda so that sufficient time is devoted to the additional matters. In small schools where there are so few staff that a large team is not feasible, there still is a need for some form of leadership mechanisms for learning supports system development. Thus, in some instances, the "team" may be just a few persons.

recruit a broad range of stakeholders

Although a Learning Supports Leadership Team might be tempted to concentrate solely on psychosocial programs, it is meant to focus on all major programs and services supporting the instructional component. This means bringing together representatives of all these programs and services. Such teams might include, for example, guidance counselors, school psychologists, nurses, social workers, attendance and dropout counselors, health educators, special education staff, after school program staff, bilingual and Title I program coordinators, health educators, safe and drug free school staff, and union representatives. Beyond these folks, such a team is well-advised to add the energies and expertise of other administrators, regular classroom teachers, non-certificated staff, parents, and older students. It also should include representatives of any community agency that is significantly involved with schools.

The larger the group, of course, the harder it is to find a meeting time and the longer each meeting tends to run. Nevertheless, the value of broad stakeholder representation far outweighs these matters. And, good meeting facilitation that maintains a task-focus and an action orientation can make meetings an invaluable opportunity to develop a potent system (see Appendix B).

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For the team to function well, there must be a core of members who have or will acquire the ability to carry out identified functions and make the mechanism work. They must be committed to the team's mission. (Building team commitment and competence should be a major focus of school management policies and programs. Because various activities at a school require the expertise of the same personnel, some individuals will necessarily have multiple commitments.) The team must have a facilitator who is able to keep the members task-focused and productive. It also needs someone who records decisions and plans and, between meetings, reminds members of tasks they have agreed to do prior to the next meeting. Advanced technology (management systems, electronic bulletin boards and email, clearinghouses) can help facilitate communication, networking, planning, and so forth.

The team meets as needed. Frequency of meetings depends on ambition and time. Initially, this may mean once a week. Later, when meetings are scheduled for every 2-3 weeks, continuity and momentum are maintained through interim tasks performed by workgroups or individuals. Because some participants are at a school on a part-time basis, one of the problems that must be addressed is rescheduling personnel so that there is an overlapping time to meet. Of course, the reality is that not all team members will be able to attend every meeting, but a good approximation can be made, with steps taken to keep others informed as to what was done. Well planned and trained teams can accomplish a great deal through informal communication and short meetings.

Properly constituted, trained, and supported, a Learning Supports Leadership Team complements the work of the site's governance body through providing system development, on-site overview, and advocacy for all activity aimed at addressing barriers to learning and enhancing healthy development. Having the administrative leader for the component on the school's governing and planning bodies ensures the type of infrastructure connections that are essential if programs and services are to be maintained, improved, and increasingly integrated with classroom instruction and schoolwide improvement. And, of course, having an administrator on the team provides the necessary link with the school's administrative "table."

For many support service personnel, their past experiences of working in isolation – and sometimes in competition with others – make this collaborative opportunity unusual and one which requires that they learn new ways of relating and functioning. See Appendix B for some resource aids that can help in establishing a Learning Supports Leadership Team and ensuring it is structured to operate effectively.

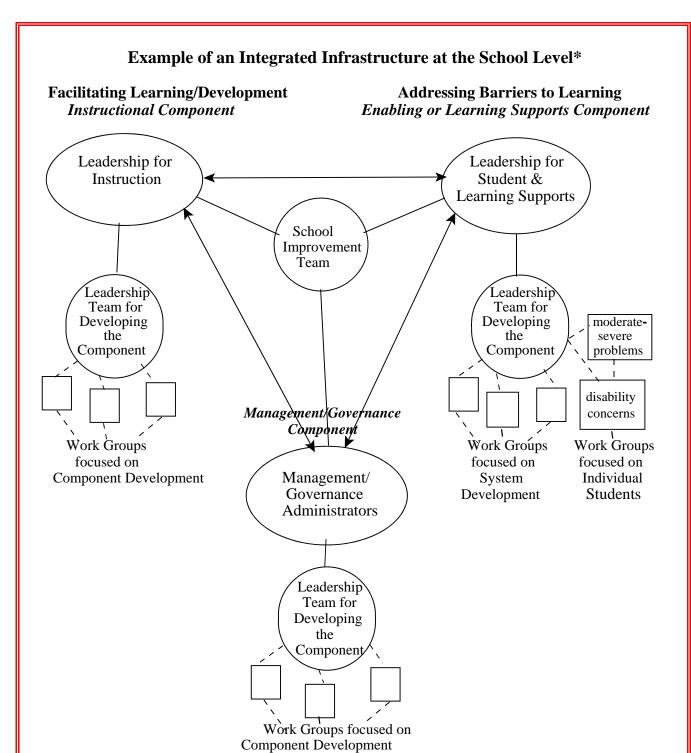**Prototype of an Integrated School Operational Infrastructure**

As illustrated in the figure on the following page, each of the three primary and essential components for school improvement requires (1) administrative leadership, (2) a leadership team to work with the leader on system development, and (3) standing and occasionally ad hoc work groups to accomplish specific tasks. The leaders for the instructional and enabling components are part of the management/governance component to ensure all three components are integrated and that the enabling/learning supports component is not marginalized. If a special team is assigned to work on school improvement planning, implementation, and evaluation, the leaders for all three components must be on that team.

With specific reference to the component to address barriers to learning, the administrative leader has responsibility and accountability for continuous development of a comprehensive and cohesive system of student and learning supports. In regular meetings with a leadership team, the agenda includes guiding and monitoring daily implementation and development of all programs, services, initiatives, and systems intended to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

Standing work groups are established to pursue tasks related to developing and implementing the component's schoolwide and classroom programs. In our work (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, b), we organize them around six major intervention arenas (often with a work group focused on two at a time). The six arenas cover:

(1) in-classroom approaches designed to enhance how teachers enable learning through prevention and intervening as early after problem onset as feasible

(2) home involvement approaches to enhance engagement in schools and schooling

(3) supports for the many transitions experienced by students and their families

(4) outreach programs to enhance community involvement and engagement (e.g., volunteers, businesses, agencies, faith-based organizations, etc.)

(5) crisis response and prevention (encompassing concerns about violence, bullying, substance abuse, etc.)

(6) specialized student and family assistance when necessary – includes two standing work groups that focus on the needs of specific individual students who are manifesting problems. One group (e.g., a student assistance team) focuses on those with moderate-severe problems that are not the result of disabilities; the other (i.e., an IEP team) focuses on disability concerns.

Additional, ad hoc work groups/committees are formed by the leadership team only when absolutely needed.

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Example of an Integrated Infrastructure at the School Level*

Facilitating Learning/Development
Instructional Component

Addressing Barriers to Learning
Enabling or Learning Supports Component

Leadership for Instruction

Leadership for Student & Learning Supports

School Improvement Team

Leadership Team for Developing the Component

Leadership Team for Developing the Component

moderate-severe problems

disability concerns

Work Groups focused on Component Development

Work Groups focused on System Development

Work Groups focused on Individual Students

Management/Governance Component

Management/ Governance Administrators

Leadership Team for Developing the Component

Work Groups focused on Component Development

*The infrastructure for a comprehensive system of learning supports should be designed from the school outward. That is, conceptually, the first emphasis is on what an integrated infrastructure should look like at the school level. Then, the focus expands to include the mechanisms needed to connect a family or complex (e.g., feeder pattern) of schools and establish collaborations with surrounding community resources. Ultimately, central district units need to be restructured in ways that best support the work at the school and school complex levels.
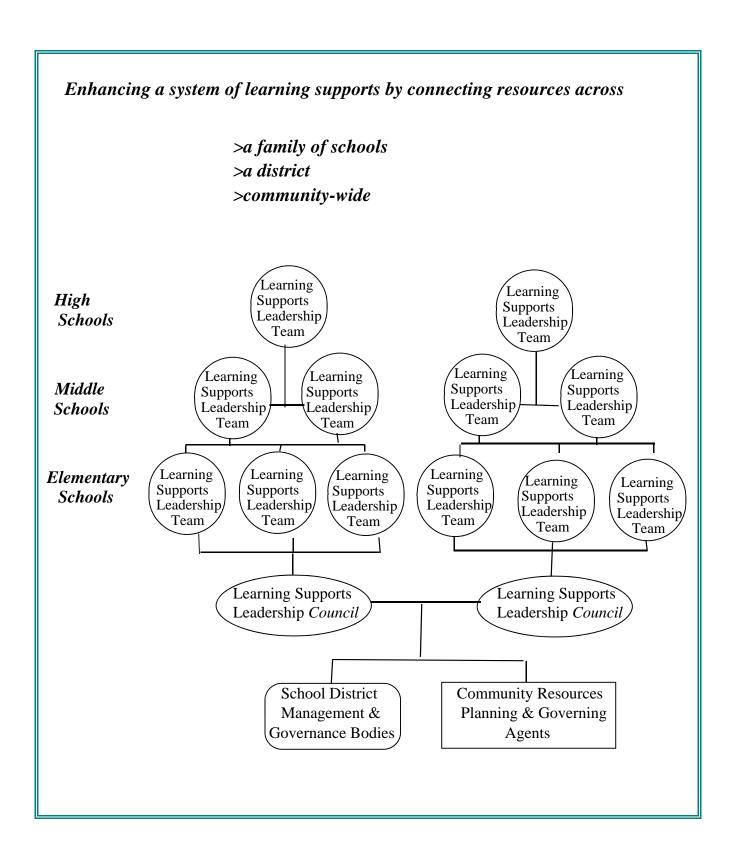
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For a Complex or"Family" of Schools

Schools in the same geographic (catchment) area have a number of shared concerns, and feeder schools often are interacting with students from the same family. Furthermore, some programs and personnel are (or can be) shared by several neighboring schools, thus minimizing redundancy and reducing costs. A multi-site team can provide a mechanism to help ensure cohesive and equitable deployment of resources and also can enhance the pooling of resources to reduce costs. Such a mechanism can be particularly useful for integrating the efforts of high schools and their feeder middle and elementary schools. (This clearly is important in addressing barriers with those families who have youngsters attending more than one level of schooling in the same cluster. It is neither cost-effective nor good intervention for each school to contact a family separately in instances where several children from a family are in need of special attention.)

A multi-site team can resource use, achieve economies of scale, and improve outcomes

With respect to linking with community resources, multi-school teams are especially attractive to community agencies who often don't have the time or personnel to link with individual schools. In general, a group of schools can benefit from a multi-site resource mechanism designed to provide leadership, facilitate communication and connection, and ensure quality improvement across sites. For example, a multi-site body, or what we call a *Learning Supports Leadership Council*, might consist of a high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools. It brings together one-two representatives from each school's Learning Supports Leadership *Team* (see illustration on next page).

A Council meets about once a month to help (a) coordinate and integrate programs serving multiple schools, (b) identify and meet common needs with respect to guidelines and staff development, and (c) create linkages and collaborations among schools and with community agencies. In this last regard, it can play a special role in community outreach both to create formal working relationships and ensure that all participating schools have access to such resources.

More generally, the council provides a useful mechanism for leadership, communication, maintenance, quality improvement, and ongoing development of a component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. Natural starting points for councils are the sharing of needs assessment, resource mapping, analyses, and recommendations for reform and restructuring. Specific areas of initial focus may be on such matters as addressing community-school violence and developing prevention programs and safe school plans.

Enhancing a system of learning supports by connecting resources across

>*a family of schools*
>*a district*
>*community-wide*

High Schools

Middle Schools

Elementary Schools

Learning Supports Leadership Team

Learning Supports Leadership Team

Learning Supports Leadership Team

Learning Supports Leadership Team

Learning Supports Leadership Team

Learning Supports Leadership Team

Learning Supports Leadership Team

Learning Supports Leadership Team

Learning Supports Leadership Team

Learning Supports Leadership Team

Learning Supports Leadership *Council*

Learning Supports Leadership *Council*

School District Management & Governance Bodies

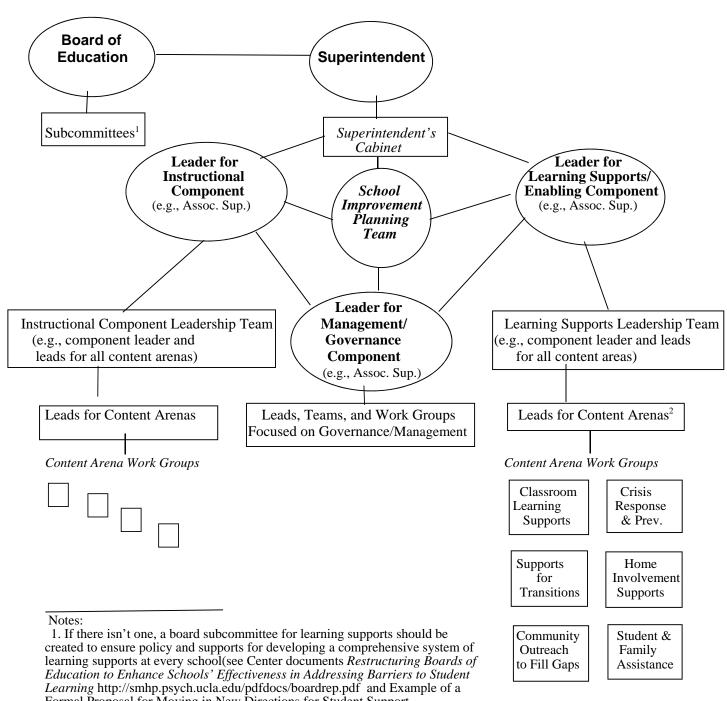Community Resources Planning & Governing Agents

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From our perspective, the infrastructure for a comprehensive system of learning supports should be designed from the school outward. That is, *conceptually*, the emphasis is first on what an integrated infrastructure should look like at the school level. Then, the focus expands to include the mechanisms needed to connect a family or complex (e.g., feeder pattern) of schools and establish collaborations with surrounding community resources. Ultimately, central district (and community agency) units need to be restructured in ways that best support the work at the school and school complex levels. Indeed, a key guideline in designing district infrastructure is that it must provide leadership and build capacity for (a) establishing and maintaining an effective learning supports infrastructure at every school and (b) a mechanism for connecting a family of schools.

A Prototype for District Infrastructure

At the district level, the need is for administrative leadership and capacity building support that helps maximize development of a comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching at each school. And, it is crucial to establish the district's leadership for this work at a high enough level to ensure the administrator is always an active participant at key planning and decision-making tables.

The figure on the next page lays out a framework to consider in reworking district infrastructure in ways that promote development of a comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching. As indicated, it is essential to have a cabinet level administrative leader (e.g., an associate superintendent, a chief officer) who is responsible and accountable for all resources related to addressing barriers to learning. The resources of concern come from the general fund, compensatory education, special education, and special projects (e.g., student support personnel such as school psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses; compensatory and special education staff; special initiatives, grants, and programs for afterschool, wellness, dropout prevention, attendance, drug abuse prevention, violence prevention, pregnancy prevention, parent/family/ health centers, volunteer assistance, community resource linkages to schools).

Prototype for an Integrated Infrastructure at the District Level with Mechanisms for Learning Supports That Are Comparable to Those for Instruction

Board of Education

Superintendent

Subcommittees[1]

Superintendent's Cabinet

Leader for Instructional Component
(e.g., Assoc. Sup.)

School Improvement Planning Team

Leader for Learning Supports/ Enabling Component
(e.g., Assoc. Sup.)

Instructional Component Leadership Team
(e.g., component leader and leads for all content arenas)

Leader for Management/ Governance Component
(e.g., Assoc. Sup.)

Learning Supports Leadership Team
(e.g., component leader and leads for all content areas)

Leads for Content Arenas

Leads, Teams, and Work Groups Focused on Governance/Management

Leads for Content Arenas[2]

Content Arena Work Groups

Content Arena Work Groups

Classroom Learning Supports

Crisis Response & Prev.

Supports for Transitions

Home Involvement Supports

Community Outreach to Fill Gaps

Student & Family Assistance

Notes:

1. If there isn't one, a board subcommittee for learning supports should be created to ensure policy and supports for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports at every school(see Center documents *Restructuring Boards of Education to Enhance Schools' Effectiveness in Addressing Barriers to Student Learning* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/boardrep.pdf and Example of a Formal Proposal for Moving in New Directions for Student Support http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newdirections/exampleproposal.pdf

2. All resources related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., student support personnel, compensatory and special education staff and interventions, special initiatives, grants, and programs) are integrated into a refined set of major content arenas such as those indicated here. Leads are assigned for each arena and work groups are established.

Change Agents to Facilitate Phasing-in the System

Building on what is known about organizational change, our Center staff for many years has been working on a change model for use in establishing, sustaining, and scaling-up school and community reforms (e.g., Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2006a). In this context, we have developed a position called an *Organization Facilitator* to aid with major restructuring (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2006b). This specially trained change agent embodies the necessary expertise to help school sites and complexes implement and institutionalize substantively new approaches, such as the establishment of leadership teams and councils.

School Steering Body for a Learning Supports Component

All initiatives need a team of "champions" who agree to steer the process. Thus, initially at each level it helps not only to have a Learning Supports Leadership mechanism, but also an advisory/steering group. Such a group guides and monitors progress to ensure development of a unified and comprehensive system of student and learning supports. These advocates must be highly motivated not just to help get things underway, but to ensure full implementations and sustainability over time.

The group's first focus is on assuring that capacity is built to accomplish the desired systemic changes. This includes ensuring an adequate policy and leadership base. If such a base is not already in place, the group needs to focus on getting one in place. Capacity building also includes special training for change agents. Over time, the main functions of a steering group are to ensure that staff assigned to facilitate changes (a) maintain a big picture perspective and appropriate movement toward long-term goals and (b) have sufficient support and guidance.

Steering groups should not be too large. For example, at a school level, membership might include key change agents, one or two other key school leaders, perhaps someone from a local institution of higher education, perhaps a key agency person or two, and a few well-connected "champions." Such a group can meet monthly (more often if major problems arise) to review progress, problem solve, decide on mid-course corrections. To work against the perception that it is a closed, elite group, it can host "focus groups" to elicit input and feedback and provide information.

Concluding Comments

Most of us know how hard it is to work effectively with a group. Many staff members at a school site have jobs that allow them to carry out their duties each day in relative isolation of other staff. And despite various frustrations they encounter in doing so, they can see little to be gained through joining up with others. In fact, they often can point to many committees and teams that drained their time and energy to little avail.

Despite all this, the fact remains that no organization can be truly effective if everyone works in isolation. And it is a simple truth that there is no way for schools to play their role in addressing barriers to learning and teaching if a critical mass of stakeholders do not work together towards a shared vision. There are policies to advocate for, decisions to make, problems to solve, and interventions to plan, implement. and evaluate.

Obviously, true collaboration involves more than meeting and talking. The point is to work together in ways that produce the type of actions that result in effective programs.

The danger in creating new mechanisms is that they can become just another task, another meeting – busy work. Infrastructure must be designed in keeping with the major functions to be carried out, and all functions must be carried out in the service of a vital vision. Learning supports leadership is valuable only if it is driven by and helps advance an important vision. Leaders and facilitators must be able to instill that vision in others and help them hold on to it even when the initial excitement of "newness" wanes.

The vision, of course, is to enhance equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school. Achieving the vision requires effectively addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students – not just for the few but for the many in need. The nature and scope of need calls for every school to move quickly to develop a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports.

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For some resource aids for developing a leadership team for an enabling or learning supports component, see the following appended material and the Center's toolkit for *Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm .

Appendix A

About Mapping, Analyzing, & Deploying Resources

It has been speculated that when the various sources of support are totaled in certain schools, as much as 25-30% of the resources may be going to addressing barriers to learning. Whatever the actual percentage, the fact is that in too many locales the resources are being expended in rather ad hoc, piecemeal, and fragmented ways. This is why mapping, analyzing, and (re)deploying resources are such important functions for a leadership team to pursue.

Mapping can be carried out in various ways. For example, in mapping a school's resources for addressing barriers to learning, some teams begin simply by developing a list of names and brief descriptions of the work performed by staff and those from the community who are at the school at various times (see Adelman & Taylor, 2006c; 2008; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2006 rev). This probably is a good starting point since so few schools seem to have done even this simple form of mapping, and everyone at or otherwise connected to a school should have easy access to such basic information. Eventually, all resources should be mapped (e.g., all programs, services, personnel, space, material resources and equipment, cooperative ventures, budgetary allocations). Moreover, to facilitate subsequent analyses, efforts should be made to differentiate among (a) regular, long-term programs and short-term projects and activities, (b) those that have potential to produce major results and those likely to produce superficial outcomes, and (c) those designed to benefit many students and those designed to serve a few.

Because of the fragmented way policies and practices have been established, there tends to be inefficiency and redundancy, as well as major gaps in efforts to address barriers to learning. Thus, a logical focus for *analyses is* how to reduce fragmentation and fill gaps in ways that increase effectiveness and efficiency. Another aspect of the analyses involves identifying activities that have little or no effects; these represent resources that can be redeployed to help underwrite the costs of filling major gaps.

Below we describe how all this can be done using the framework developed for operationalizing an enabling component. Use of a well-conceived framework avoids the tendency to create laundry-lists of the various programs and services offered at a school. Such lists communicate a fragmented picture rather than a comprehensive, multifaceted, cohesive approach and provide insufficient information for analyzing how well resources are being used.

Step 1: School-Focused Mapping

The matrix below provides a framework for the school-based resource mechanism (e.g., a Learning Supports Leadership Team) to begin mapping.

AREAS OF CONCERN FOR MAPPING

	Classroom-Focused Enabling Activity	Crisis Response & Prevention	Support for Transitions	Home Involvement in Schooling	Community Outreach (including volunteers)	Student & Family Assistance	System Change Activity
Systems for Promoting Healthy Develop. & Preventing Problems							
Systems to Respond Early-After-Onset							
Systems of Care to treat Severe Problems							

As aids for mapping, our Center has developed a set of tools that outlines the types of activities schools might have in these various areas. (See Center online toolkit to access / download these tools.)

The mapping should include all district-level and community resources that have had some direct connection with the work of the school. As noted above, the mapping should also include efforts to differentiate (a) regular, long-term programs and short-term projects and activities, (b) those that have potential to produce major results and those likely to produce superficial outcomes, and (c) those designed to benefit many students and those designed to serve a few.

After mapping each arena, the products can be used immediately to communicate in an organized manner what the school is currently doing to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development. With relatively little effort, the products can be an important step forward in "social marketing" the school's efforts to meet the needs of all students. Examples of summaries related to such mapping are online. After developing such summaries, they can be copied as a set and circulated to all stakeholders, and can even be condensed into a brochure, newsletter, and other formats that will be useful to stakeholders. They also can be mounted as a set on poster board and displayed prominently in the staff lounge, the main hallway, and anywhere else in the school where the presentation will be widely seen. The point is to make certain that everyone begins to understand what already exists and that work is underway to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted, cohesive approach.

Step 2: Mapping the "Family" of chools

Once individual schools have done their initial mapping, the schools in a feeder pattern (or an other-wise designated "family" of schools) can meet together to pool the information. At this juncture, efforts should also be made to identify other district-level and community resources that could be brought to the family of schools.

Here, again, the products of the expanded mapping engender a significant opportunity for social marketing.

In anticipating the analyses of resources, it is important at the family of schools level to designate whether the resources currently are deployed at elementary, middle, high school, or at all levels.

Step 3: Analyses

With the initial mapping done, the focus turns to analyzing how resources are currently used. The aim is to develop specific recommendations for improving the work at each school through enhancing use of the resources currently at a school and enhancing resources through collaboration among the family of schools and with neighborhood resources.

Essentially, the process involves conducting a gap analysis. That is, existing resources are laid out in the context of the vision schools have for a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach to addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development. From that perspective, the analysis focuses on (1) what parts are in place, (2) what's still missing, and (3) what needs to be done to improve matters.

(1) *What's in place?* Discussion focuses on how effective and efficient current efforts are. Special attention is given to identifying redundant efforts, inefficient use of resources, and ineffective activities. With respect to what is seen as ineffective, the analyses should differentiate between activities that might be effective if they were better supported and those that are not worth continuing because they have not made a significant impact or because they are not well-conceived. This facilitates generating recommendations about what should be discontinued so that resources can be redeployed to enhance current efforts and fill gaps.

(2) *What's still missing?* Every school has a wish list of programs and services it needs. The analyses put these into perspective of the school's vision for a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach to addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development. By doing this, the analyses provide an appreciation of major gaps. Thus, rather than making ad hoc choices from a laundry-list of wishes, recommendations can be based on a systematic analysis of current efforts that require enhancement and gaps that need to be filled.

(3) How can resources be used better? Analyses of how resources might be used better first focus on identifying wasteful uses (i.e., redundancies, ineffective activity, programs where costs far out-weigh benefits, lack of coordination). Then, the emphasis is on promising programs that are under-supported. Finally, discussion turns to exploring which gaps should be filled first (e.g., new activity that is as or even more important than existing efforts).

Step 4: Recommendations for Deploying & Enhancing Resources

No school or family of schools can do everything at once – especially when there is a great deal to do. Based on the analyses, recommendations first must stress combining some efforts to reduce redundancy at each school and for the family of schools and discontinuing ineffective activity. A second set of recommendations focus on redeploying freed-up resources to strengthen promising efforts. Finally, recommendations are made about priorities for filling gaps and for strategies to expand the pool of resources.

With respect to expanding the pool of resources, the first strategy can involve braiding together the resources of the family of schools to achieve economies of scale and to accomplish overlapping activity. Then, the focus is on enhancing connections with community resources in order to enhance existing programs and services and fill specific gaps. Recommendations should clarify how the limited community resources can be added in integrated and equitable ways across the family of schools. Finally, recommendations can be made about seeking additional funds. (See Center resources on blended funding.)

Appendix B

Resource Aids for Developing a Leadership Team for an Enabling or Learning Supports Component

- Checklist for Establishing the School-Site Leadership Team

- Examples of Initial and Ongoing Process Tasks for the Team

- Planning and Facilitating Effective Meetings

Checklist for Establishing the School-Site Leadership Team

1. ___ Job descriptions/evaluations reflect a policy for working in a coordinated and increasingly integrated way to maximize resource use and enhance effectiveness (this includes allocation of time and resources so that team members can build capacity and work effectively together to maximize resource coordination and enhancement). See Center toolkit for prototype job descriptions -- http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkitb4.htm .

2. ___ Every interested staff member is encouraged to participate.

3. ___ Team include key stakeholders (e.g., guidance counselors, school psychologists, nurses, social workers, attendance and dropout counselors, health educators, special education staff, after school program staff, bilingual and Title I program coordinators, health educators, safe and drug free school staff, representatives of any community agency significantly involved with the site, administrator, regular classroom teachers, non-certificated staff, parents, older students).

4. ___ The size of teams reflects current needs, interests, and factors associated with efficient and effective functioning. (The larger the group, the harder it is to find a meeting time and the longer each meeting tends to run. Frequency of meetings depends on the group's functions, time availability, and ambitions. Properly designed and trained teams can accomplish a great deal through informal communication and short meetings).

5. ___ There is a nucleus of team members who have or will acquire the ability to carry out identified functions and make the mechanism work (others are auxiliary members). All are committed to the team's mission. (Building team commitment and competence should be a major focus of school management policies and programs. Because various teams at a school require the expertise of the same personnel, some individuals will necessarily be on more than one team.)

6. ___ Team has a dedicated facilitator who is able to keep the group task-focused and productive.

7. ___ Team has someone who records decisions and plans and reminds members of planned activity and products.

8. ___ Team uses advanced technology (management systems, electronic bulletin boards and E-mail, resource clearinghouses) to facilitate communication, networking, program planning and implementation, linking activity, and a variety of budgeting, scheduling, and other management concerns.

Exhibit

Examples of Initial and Ongoing Process Tasks for the Team

- Orientation for representatives to introduce each to the other and provide further clarity of group's purposes and processes

- Review membership to determine if any major stakeholder is not represented; take steps to assure proper representation

- Share and map information regarding what exists (programs, services, systems for triage, referral, case management, etc. – at a site; at each site; in the district and community)

- Analyze information on resources to identify important needs at specific sites and for the complex/family of schools as a whole

- Establish priorities for efforts to enhance resources and systems

- Formulate plans for pursuing priorities

- Each site discusses need for coordinating crisis response across the complex and for sharing complex resources for site specific crises and then explores conclusions and plans at Council meeting

- Discussion of staff (and other stakeholder) development activity with a view to combining certain training across sites

- Discussion of quality improvement and longer-term planning (e.g., efficacy, pooling of resources)

General Meeting format

- Updating on and introduction of membership

- Reports from those who had between meeting assignments

- Current topic for discussion and planning

- Decision regarding between meeting assignments

- Ideas for next agenda

Forming a Working Group

- There should be a clear statement about the group's mission.
- Be certain that members agree to pursue the stated mission and, for the most part, share a vision.
- Pick someone who the group will respect and who either already has good facilitation skills or will commit to learning those that are needed.
- Provide training for members so they understand their role in keeping a meeting on track and turning talk into effective action..
- Designate processes (a) for sending members information before a meeting regarding what is to be accomplished, specific agenda items, and individual assignments and (b) for maintaining and circulating record of decisions and planned actions (what, who, when).

Meeting Format

- Be certain there is a written agenda and that it clearly states the purpose of the meeting, specific topics, and desired outcomes for the session.
- Begin the meeting by reviewing purpose, topics, desired outcomes, eta. Until the group is functioning well, it may be necessary to review meeting ground rules.
- Facilitate the involvement of all members, and do so in ways that encourage them to focus specifically on the task. The facilitator remains neutral in discussion of issues.
- Try to maintain a comfortable pace (neither too rushed, nor too slow; try to start on time and end on time but don't be a slave to the clock).
- Periodically review what has been accomplished and move on the next item.
- Leave time to sum up and celebrate accomplishment of outcomes and end by enumerating specific follow up activity (what, who, when). End with a plan for the next meeting (date, time, tentative agenda). For a series of meetings, set the dates well in advance so members can plan their calendars.

Some Group Dynamics to Anticipate

- _Hidden Agendas_ – All members should agree to help keep hidden agendas in check and, when such items cannot be avoided, facilitate the rapid presentation of a point and indicate where the concern needs to be redirected.
- _A Need for Validation_ – When members make the same point over and over, it usually indicates they feel an important point is not being validated. To counter such disruptive repetition, account for the item in a visible way so that members feel their contributions have been acknowledged. When the item warrants discussion at a later time, assign it to a future agenda.
- _Members are at an Impasse_ – Two major reasons groups get stuck are: (a) some new ideas are needed to "get out of a box" and (b) differences in perspective need to be aired and resolved. The former problem usually can be dealt with through brainstorming or by bringing in someone with new ideas to offer; to deal with conflicts that arise over process, content, and power relationships employ problem solving and conflict management strategies (e.g., accommodation, negotiation, mediation).
- _Interpersonal Conflict and Inappropriate Competition_ – These problems may be corrected by repeatedly bringing the focus back to the goal – improving outcomes for students/families; when this doesn't work; restructuring group membership may be necessary.
- _Ain't It Awful!_ – Daily frustrations experienced by staff often lead them to turn meetings into gripe sessions. Outside team members (parents, agency staff, business and/or university partners) can influence school staff to exhibit their best behavior.