

***ACTION STEPS for Improving How Schools  
Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching – including mental health concerns***

Everyday our Center hears from teachers who are feeling overwhelmed. Clearly, part of the problem is the stress of contending personally and professionally with challenges stemming from the pandemic. But an even greater stressor is the inadequate support they are receiving as they try to teach the increasing numbers of students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

While all schools devote resources to coping with pervasive student problems, what is available usually covers relatively few students. When additional resources are provided, such as the pandemic relief funds, the first tendency is simply to add more student support personnel (e.g., counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses). Some schools also are trying to meet the needs of more students by expanding and integrating services in the context of the community school initiative; some are enhancing their focus on social and emotional learning. Such improvements are relevant, but they fall far short of significantly reducing the problems teachers encounter every day.

***Addressing the pervasive and complex barriers that impede effective teaching and student learning requires a systemwide approach that comprehensively and equitably supports whole-child development and learning.***

Obviously schools must respond on a daily basis to the problems confronting them as best they can. At the same time, school improvement calls for *proactive action*.

Moving forward proactively to plan and develop a more effective system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching requires a mechanism that is dedicated to making it happen.

- So a first proactive step is to ***Establish a Learning Supports Leadership Team*** (See *What is a learning supports leadership team?* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resource%20coord%20team.pdf> )
- The teams first actions involve
  - (a) mapping existing resources for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students (see *Mapping & Analyzing Learning Supports* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf> ; also see *An Aid for Initial Listing of Current Resources Used at a School for Addressing Barriers Learning and Teaching* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/listingresources.pdf> )
  - (b) analyzing what's working, what needs strengthening, and critical gaps
  - (c) developing a set of prioritized recommendations for moving toward a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports
  - (d) presenting the recommendations for approval.
- After a set of proposed improvements are approved, the next step is to establish a workgroup to develop a strategic action plan that details the who, what, and when of the steps forward.
- Then, assign the Learning Supports Leadership Team to guide implementation of the strategic plan.

The following page lists some other online (free) resources the Center has developed that can aid in planning and developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system.

## Resources from the Center

- > *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*
- > *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
- > *Improving School Improvement*

all three can be accessed from our Center's website. Go to:

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

- > *2021-22: Addressing Learning, Behavior, and Emotional Problems Through Better Use of Student and Learning Support Staff*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/supports.pdf>

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

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

And look at our new policy brief prepared at the request of PACE:

- > *Restructuring California Schools to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching in the COVID 19 Context and Beyond*

<https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/restructuring-california-schools-address-barriers-learning-and-teaching-covid-19>

A host of other free resources to aid in the transformation process are available on the Center's website <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/> – for example, the

- > *System Change Toolkit* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

And we offer free technical assistance and coaching if a district needs it. See

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/coach.pdf>