

Policy Notes

Teachers Can't Do it Alone!

From the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* (11/17/12): “Louisiana teachers have all but lost the tenure rules that once protected their jobs. Beginning this year, they will be evaluated and ranked on an annual basis, often with test scores factoring in heavily. Consistently ‘ineffective’ teachers will no longer be welcome in the classroom. Louisiana also made significant changes to its new evaluation system between testing it in a few districts and pushing it statewide this year.”¹

The Myth

Louisiana is just one of the states where new policies aimed at revamping how teachers are evaluated reflect the myth that teachers alone are responsible for closing the achievement gap, increasing graduate rates, and ensuring students are career and college ready. This convenient mythology takes a whole lot of folks off the hook when it comes to enhancing equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school and beyond. It also contributes to the undermining of public education.

The irony in Louisiana is that, under state Superintendent Paul Pastorek, the state department of education recognized the need for ensuring teachers had better daily student and learning supports from others in their school, across a family of schools, from the district, and from the community. To enhance such essential learning supports, the department developed a *Comprehensive Learning Supports System Design* to directly address internal and external barriers to learning and teaching.² Previously, Iowa also designed such a system.³

As too often happens, a superintendency change caused these two designs to become side-lined. But the imperative for establishing a unified and comprehensive system that provides teachers with essential learning supports doesn't go away just because it is marginalized in school improvement policy and in the movement for Common Core State Standards for curriculum.

If public education in this country is to survive, every policy that addresses teacher evaluation and prescribes narrow approaches to improving instruction must also ensure teachers are effectively backed up by a learning supports system.

The Good News

Trailblazing states, districts, and schools are taking steps to develop and put into practice designs for a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers and re-engage disconnected students. Currently, for instance, such work is underway at the state department level in Alabama, Illinois, and Ohio.⁴ A good example at the district level is seen in the Gainesville City Schools in Georgia.⁵

These trailblazers all recognize that many teachers are confronted with a large proportion of students who are not motivated and ready to learn what is on the teaching agenda for the day. Moreover, they understand the wide range of factors that interfere with such students connecting with a well-designed curriculum and what needs to be done.⁶

We Can Help

To support the pioneering work across the country, our Center at UCLA has established a collaboration with Scholastic and with the American Association of School Administrators.⁷ We also are facilitating the *District and State Collaborative Network for Developing Comprehensive Systems for Learning Support*.⁸

If you want more information about any of this or if you want to share the work being done at state and district levels to develop a unified, comprehensive, and systemic approach to addressing barriers and re-engaging disconnected students, please contact us at Ltaylor@ucla.edu .

¹ http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2012/11/louisianas_educators_enter_a_n.html

² <http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/15044.pdf>

³ <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/iowasystemofsupport.pdf>

⁴Where's it Happening? Trailblazing and Pioneering Initiatives (and lessons learned)

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>

⁵ <http://www1.gcssk12.net/images/shared/other/rebuildingforlearning.pdf>

⁶See *Toward Next Steps in School Improvement: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/towardnextstep.pdf> ;

Common Core Standards for a Learning Supports Component, with related quality indicators appended

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

⁷See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/rebuilding.htm> & <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/aasa.htm>

⁸ <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/network/network.html>

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