More about Integrating Student and Learning Supports

Integrating Supports, a Useful Step, *but Not the Main Point*

Last week we cautioned that, while discussion of integration of learning supports is useful and seems like a common sense goal, *just focusing on integration is a trap.* Our message has precipitated considerable discussion and requests that we further clarify the problem.

We have worked on this problem continuously for the last 25 years. Our most recent report discussing concerns was circulated a year ago; see *Integrated Student Supports and Equity: What's Not Being Discussed?* (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/integpolicy.pdf). That report highlights the history of reform tinkering that has been guided by integration of services efforts and the failure to produce substantive and sustainable system transformation when the focus has been *mainly* on such integration.

Because of the importance of the matter, we have just made it the focus of a Hot Topic discussion on the Center website; see *About Integrating* Student and Learning Supports: *Integrating* is Not the Main Point (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/hottopic.htm).

Among the matters stressed:

"Limiting the focus to integrating student/learning supports has little chance of enhancing equity of opportunity for students across a country. Moreover, as practiced, such a minimal emphasis on systemic change can have serious unintended negative consequences. Of particular concern is that focusing *primarily* on integration maintains the fragmentation of interventions and does little to reduce the counterproductive competition among those personnel responsible for the various discrete programs and services. And it risks maintaining the marginalization of school/home/community efforts to address learning, behavior, and emotional problems."

As the 2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports* stresses: The point of moving from a two- to a three-component framework for school improvement is to bring fundamental coherence and end the marginalization of endeavors to address barriers to learning and teaching. That is, adding a learning supports component to the instructional and management components enables (a) unifying all interventions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students and (b) unifying the three components of school improvement.

In this context, the first steps are to unify what a school and district currently is doing; this can start with integrating existing resources, but the goal is to transform student and learning supports into a unified system and then develop them into a comprehensive and equitable approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. As part of the process, the aim is to weave in community and home resources to fill critical gaps, but "integrating" needed community services into school settings, while helpful, is not the main goal.

So our caution to schools and districts is: *Don't make integration seem like the goal and don't let it be the main focus.* From our perspective, efforts to better integrate resources should be viewed as just a step in moving toward a fundamental transformation in how schools and communities work together to promote healthy development and address barriers that interfere with development, learning, parenting, and teaching.

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* The goal of the 2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports is to guide every school toward unifying and then developing a comprehensive and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. This requires fully implanting a unified learning supports component into school improvement policy and planning.

The ultimate aims: Enhance equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school and beyond and foster the type of climate that makes schools the heart of their community.

Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
enabling equity of opportunity and promoting whole child development.

Making it Happen in Transformative and Sustainable Ways

If you are moving toward transforming student and learning supports, we encourage you to

(1) take some time to go over the resource -- *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System.* (To download it, go to

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf .)

(2) then email us with your questions and let us know whenever you need some TA and coaching.
(We have learned a lot of lessons about what to do and not to do in developing a sustainable transformation.)

We want to be helpful and what our Center offers can make a big difference.

Feel free to contact either of us at: adelman@psych.ucla.edu or Ltaylor@ucla.edu .