



A Center Report . . .

Restructuring Boards of Education to Enhance Schools' Effectiveness in Addressing Barriers to Student Learning

The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates
under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA.

Center for Mental Health in Schools, Box 951563, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563

Phone: (310) 825-3634 | Fax: (310) 206-8716 | E-mail: smhp@ucla.edu | Website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

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Preface

If the schools in your community have a significant number of students who are not learning and performing well, you will want to read this document.

This document stems from various initiatives whose aim is to improve schools and specifically those designed to improve how schools address factors that interfere with students benefiting from instructional improvements.*

The message contained in the following pages is that school boards need to

- enhance their understanding of why programs and services designed to address barriers to learning and teaching are so fragmented, marginalized, and counterproductively competitive with each other
- rethink how to redeploy existing resources to move toward developing a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive “enabling” or learning supports component at every school.

Such a component must be treated as a high priority so that it is fully integrated as an essential facet of every initiatives to raise student achievement.

To accomplish all this, it is recommended that boards establish a standing committee. As an aid for doing so, this report incorporates lessons learned from a unique standing committee established by the Los Angeles Unified School District’s Board of Education in the mid 1990s. The document reflects many ideas and insights shared by members of that committee, as well as input from many others (too many to name.) We thank them all and accept full responsibility for any points with which they do not agree.

We encourage all who read this report to make copies and give them to members of school boards in their local communities.

If you are interested in discussing this topic further, please feel free to contact us.

Howard Adelman & Linda Taylor, Co-Directors

*A variety of resources related to the various initiatives are available online at no cost from the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

The purpose of this document is to encourage school boards to take another critical step in improving schools, specifically by focusing on how the district and each school addresses barriers to learning and teaching.

The discussion explores

- why school boards need to increase their focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching
- the benefits accrued from doing so
- ways to build an enhanced focus on addressing barriers into a school board's committee structure
- lessons learned from a major district where the board created a committee dedicated to the matter of improving how current resources are expended with respect to addressing barriers to learning.

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Why School Boards Need to Increase Their Focus on Addressing Barriers to Learning

Barriers to learning

Across the country, many students fail to benefit from improved instruction because of a host of interfering factors. The litany is all too familiar to anyone who works in schools. Putting aside internal causes that can lead to learning and behavior problems, a host of external barriers can and do interfere with learning and teaching. Besides language and cultural considerations and frequent school changes, teachers are confronted more than ever before with violence and drug use. School boards, superintendents, principals, and teachers everywhere are eager for ideas on how to address these concerns more effectively (e.g., see Adelman & Taylor, 2002; Lowe, Hantman-Lanphear, & Clemons, 1997; Royer, 1996; Sroka, 1998; Vail, 1996).

How many are affected?

Unfortunately, most districts handle barriers to student learning in a piecemeal and fragmented manner. Even at schools pursuing major reforms, the predominant focus is on improving instruction and school management, with little attention paid to improving the ways barriers are addressed (e.g., see Adelman, Reyna, Collins, Onghai, & Taylor, 1999; Anderson, 1998). As a result, too many students are unable to truly take advantage of instructional improvements. This is a central paradox of school reform. Resolving the paradox is one of the most critical tasks confronting school boards and all others who are concerned with improving student achievement and performance.

Figures vary. Harold Hodgkinson, who is director of the Center for Demographic Policy, estimates that 40% of young people are in very bad educational shape and at risk for failing to fulfill their promise. Obviously, in certain schools the percentage is much smaller, and unfortunately in many urban schools the reality is that over 50% manifest significant learning, behavior, or emotional problems. These problems stem from restricted opportunities associated with poverty, difficult and diverse family circumstances, lack of English language skills, violent neighborhoods, and inadequate health care. Until the barriers hindering the performance and learning of these students are addressed effectively, average achievement test scores for many schools and districts will change little, and efforts to improve instruction will be judged a failure.

What's
needed?

While emphasis on higher standards, higher expectations, assessment, waivers, accountability, and no excuses is important, such demands are not enough to turn around schools where large numbers of students are performing poorly. In such settings, there also is a need for comprehensive, multifaceted approaches for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. However, as stressed in our Center's various policy reports including those from the Summits Initiative for New Directions for Student Support, there is growing concern about serious flaws in prevailing approaches for ameliorating learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems.*

*Missing:
an explicit
policy
framework*

A major trend across the country is to encourage increased *collaboration* within schools, among schools, between schools and community agencies, and among agencies at local, state, and federal levels. The intent is to enhance immediate cooperation and coordination and eventually increase *integrated use of resources*. The hope is that all this will lead to better use of limited resources. Another implicit hope is that collaboration will lead to *comprehensive services*. There is, however, *no explicit policy framework* for a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development. This point is underscored by the current situation at district and school levels where

- little attention is paid to restructuring the education support programs and services that schools own and operate
- little attention is paid to doing more than co-locating a few community health and human services at select school sites
- little attention is paid to weaving school owned resources and community owned resources into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and well-integrated approach.

Thus, *developing comprehensive approaches to address barriers to learning continues to be a low priority* in both policy and practice. Given this state of affairs, the problem is how to elevate the level of priority policy makers assign to establishing and maintaining such approaches. Obviously, school boards play a key role in all this.

*See the various documents available online at no cost from the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

*Marginalized...
Fragmented*

As districts move to enhance their effectiveness in countering factors that interfere with students benefiting from instructional reforms, they must take stock of the current state of affairs. In many districts, a school-by-school analysis will show most sites are addressing a relatively small proportion of students who manifest learning, behavior, and emotional problems. And, most programs and services are directed at severe problems and responding to crises. Early-after-onset interventions are rare. Prevention remains an unfulfilled dream. Moreover, efforts generally are fragmented and, of even greater consequence, are *marginalized* in policy and daily practice. This marginalized status is reflected in the fact that so many of the interventions are discrete and time-limited “soft” money projects.

*Initiatives
focused on
integrated
services and
school-linked
services are
insufficient*

As noted above, recent initiatives mostly focus on (a) developing "integrated services" to counter fragmentation and reduce redundancy, waste, and lack of effectiveness and (b) linking community services to schools in order to increase student/family access. In this context, concerns are raised about piecemeal, categorically funded approaches, such as those created specifically to reduce substance abuse, violence, school dropouts and expulsions, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and so forth. Ironically, initiatives to foster "school-linked services" may increase fragmentation by co-locating community services on campuses without taking steps to integrate them with existing school programs and services. Moreover, with the dearth of services available in poor communities, increased access benefits relatively few youngsters.

*End the
marginalized
status of
efforts to
address
barriers*

Although service fragmentation and access are significant concerns, they are not the most basic ones with respect to addressing barriers to learning. To date, the impact of initiatives for integrated services has been relatively minor. And by concentrating so heavily on fostering integrated school-linked services, policy makers fail to deal with the broader problem. As long as this is the case, reforms to reduce fragmentation and increase access are seriously hampered. Indeed, it is unlikely these concerns can be resolved appropriately without ending the marginalized status of efforts to address barriers to development, learning, and teaching. More to the point, the desired impact on the learning and performance of large numbers of students will not be achieved and desired increases in achievement test score averages will remain elusive.

Needed: A
Policy
Framework for
Addressing
Barriers to
Learning and
Teaching

Given that external factors are primarily responsible for the majority of learning, behavior, and emotional problems encountered each day, why don't schools pay greater attention to factors that create barriers to learning? Mostly because of what's missing in the dominant models for school reform. Analyses of legislative initiatives and guidelines indicate a dearth of focus on *fundamentally restructuring* resources currently allocated to address barriers. School reformers seem content simply to refer in passing to the potential value of integrated health and social services and school-based centers.

Because the focus on addressing barriers is so marginalized, schools devote relatively little serious attention to restructuring their activity in this arena and do not integrate the activity with school reforms. This neglect is seen in the lack of mapping, analyzing, and rethinking resource allocation related to addressing barriers. It is evident in the lack of attention given this matter in consolidated plans and program quality reviews. It is apparent in the token way these concerns are dealt with in inservice education agendas for administrative and line staff ; and on and on. (Review, for example, issues of *The American School Board Journal*.)

*Policy must
foster a full
continuum of
integrated
systems to
enable
learning*

As a result, schools continue to operate with virtually no comprehensive frameworks to guide thinking about *potent* programs for addressing barriers. Comprehensive frameworks are needed to shape development of a continuum of intervention systems focused on individual, family, and environmental barriers. Such a continuum includes systems of prevention, systems of early intervention to address problems as soon after onset as feasible, and systems of care for those with chronic and severe problems (see Appendix). From this perspective, a policy emphasis on developing these systems and implementing them seamlessly is the key not only to unifying fragmented activity, but to using all available resources in the most productive manner.

District policy and practice must undergo a major transformation to ensure significant reform and restructuring of resources so more students can benefit from instructional improvements. As described in the Appendix, effectively addressing barriers to learning involves adopting a framework for comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approaches. Such a framework must be pursued as a primary and essential component of the reform agenda at the district level and at each school and must be well-integrated with ongoing strategies to improve instruction and management.

Policy also must delineate basic areas for developing school-wide approaches for addressing barriers to learning

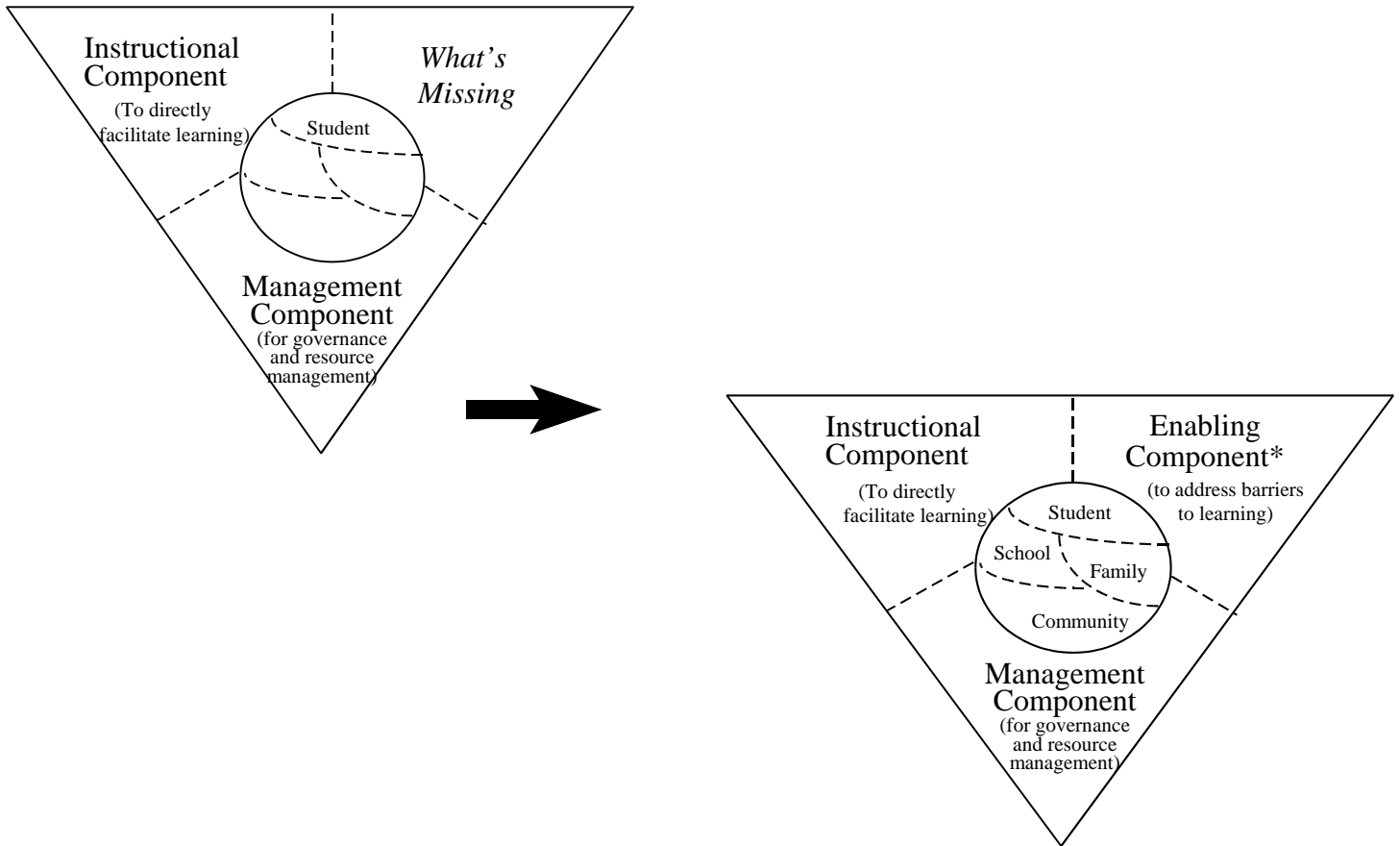
Clearly, the prevailing framework for school reform is too limited. Developing comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approaches requires *more than* outreach to link with community resources (and certainly more than adopting a school-linked services model), *more than* coordinating school-owned services, *more than* coordinating school services with community services, and *more than* creating Family Resource Centers and Full Service Schools. None of these constitute school-wide approaches, and the growing consensus is that school-wide approaches are essential. Unfortunately, when it comes to addressing barriers to learning, schools have no guidelines delineating basic areas around which to develop school-wide approaches. Thus, it is not surprising that current reforms are not generating potent, multifaceted, integrated approaches.

Current policy overrelies on a two component model for improving student learning & performance

Documented failures of prevailing paradigms for educational reform over the last thirty years suggest it is time for a basic policy shift. As highlighted in Figure 1, such a shift should encompass moving from the inadequate two component model that dominates school reform to a three component framework. The three component model outlined calls for elevating efforts to address barriers to development, learning, and teaching to a high level of policy focus.

There is no way to avoid the fact that better achievement requires more than good instruction and well-managed schools. Also essential is an enabling component that comprehensively addresses barriers, and this component must be treated as a fundamental facet of educational reform. When policy and practice are viewed through the lens of this third component, it becomes evident how much is missing in current efforts to enable learning. The concept of an enabling component provides a critical frame of reference for generating reforms that ensure *all* young people *truly* have an equal opportunity to learn at school.

Figure 1. Moving from a two to a three component model for school improvement.



*The third component (an enabling component) is established in policy and practice as primary and essential and is developed into a comprehensive approach by weaving together school and community resources.

The Concept of an Enabling Component

As suggested above, the concept of an enabling component provides a basis for combating marginalization and a focal point for developing a comprehensive policy and practice framework. It can also help counter fragmentation by providing a unifying term to encase the disparate approaches used in dealing with psychosocial concerns. In this respect, it is noted that the concept encompasses models calling for integrated services and full-service schools and *goes well beyond them* by fully merging with school reform. While some service-dominated models describe themselves as comprehensive, services alone cannot enable learning in the ways that are essential to the success of school reform.

A cohesive framework for weaving resources together

Emergence of a cohesive enabling component requires policy reform and operational restructuring that allow for weaving together what is available at a school, expanding this through integrating school, community, and home resources, and enhancing access to community resources by linking as many as feasible to programs at the school. This involves extensive restructuring of school-owned enabling activity, such as pupil services and special and compensatory education programs, and doing so in ways that truly integrate the enabling, instructional, and management components. In the process, mechanisms must be developed to coordinate and eventually integrate school-owned enabling activity and school and community-owned resources. These include assets in the home and in the business and faith communities, as well as all available resources for enrichment and recreation. And as clusters of schools work together (e.g., high schools and their middle and elementary feeder schools), they create additional opportunities to integrate and expand resources and achieve economies of scale.

The usefulness of the concept of an enabling component as a broad unifying focal point for policy and practice is evidenced in its adoption by the various states and localities that are moving in the direction of a three component approach for school improvement. In doing so, they are adopting different labels for their enabling component. For example, the California Department of Education and districts such as the Los Angeles Unified School District call it a “Learning Supports” component. This is also the terminology used by the New American Schools’ Urban Learning Center comprehensive school reform model (Anderson, 1998; Urban Learning Center Model, 1996). Some states use the term “Supportive Learning Environment.” The Hawai`i Department of Education calls it a “Comprehensive Student Support System” (CSSS). Following Hawai`i’s lead, the Speaker Pro Tem of the

California Assembly introduced legislation for a “Comprehensive Pupil Learning Support System” (see AB 2569 at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ab2569.pdf>)

In each case, policy shifts have recognized that schools must do much more to enable *all* students to learn and *all* teachers to teach effectively. In effect, such shifts recognize that, over time, good schools play a major role in establishing a continuum of interventions ranging from a broad-based emphasis on promoting healthy development and preventing problems, through approaches for responding to problems early-after-onset, and extending on to narrowly focused treatments for severe problems.

Addressing barriers is not a separate agenda from a school’s instructional mission. As illustrated in Figure 2, currently in many schools a significant portion of students encounter barriers that interfere with their benefiting from instruction. Addressing such barriers is a necessary precondition if *all* students are to succeed.

*Six basic areas
for addressing
barriers*

From this perspective, all categorical programs can be integrated, in policy and practice, into a comprehensive component for addressing barriers. Analyses indicate that schools can build such an enabling component by developing programs in six basic areas (see Figure 2 and Exhibit 1). Work carried out in the context of school reform indicates that delineating these six areas for schools can foster comprehensive, integrated, school-wide approaches (Adelman, 1996a, 1996b; Adelman & Taylor, 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 2002; Adelman, Taylor, & Schnieder, 1999; California Department of Education, 1996, 1997; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 1996; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997; Urban Learning Center, 1996).

Figure 2. An enabling component to address barriers to learning and enhance healthy development at a school site.

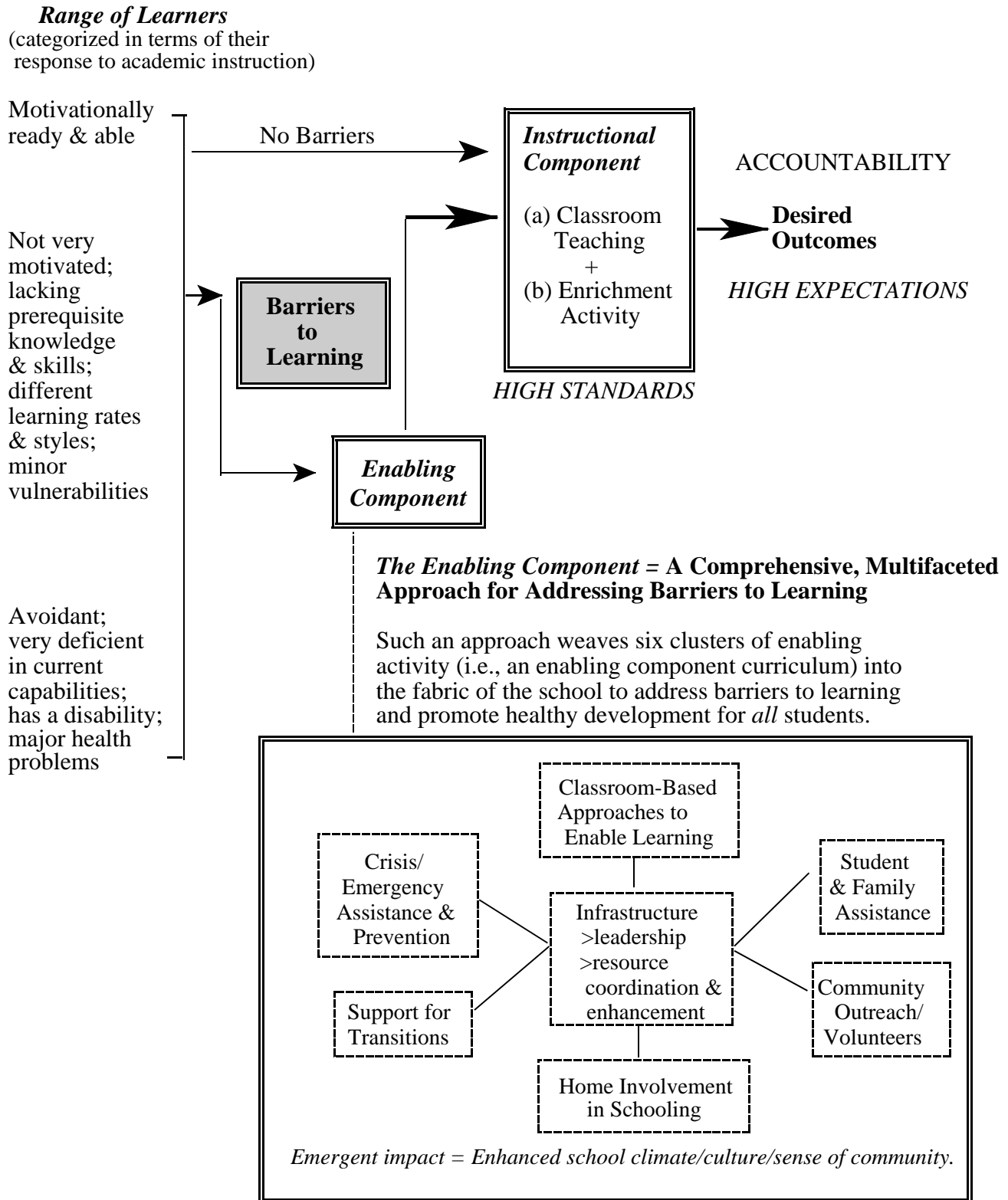


Exhibit 1

“Curriculum” Areas for an Enabling Component

(1) Enhancing teacher capacity for addressing problems and for fostering social, emotional, intellectual and behavioral development (Classroom-focused Enabling). When a classroom teacher encounters difficulty in working with a youngster, the first step is to see whether there are ways to address the problem within the classroom and perhaps with added home involvement. It is essential to equip teachers to respond to garden variety learning, behavior, and emotional problems using more than social control strategies for classroom management. Teachers must be helped to learn many ways to enable the learning of such students, and schools must develop school-wide approaches to assist teachers in doing this fundamental work. The literature offers many relevant practices. A few prominent examples are: prereferral intervention efforts, tutoring (e.g., one-to-one or small group instruction), enhancing protective factors, and assets building (including use of curriculum-based approaches to promoting social emotional development). Outcome data related to such matters indicate that they do make a difference.

(2) Enhancing school capacity to handle the variety of transition concerns confronting students and their families (Support for Transitions). It has taken a long time for schools to face up to the importance of establishing transition programs. In recent years a beginning has been made. Transition programs are an essential facet of reducing levels of alienation and increasing levels of positive attitudes toward and involvement at school and learning activity. Thus, schools must plan, develop, and maintain a focus on transition concerns confronting students and their families. Examples of relevant practices are readiness to learn programs, before, during, and after school programs to enrich learning and provide safe recreation, articulation programs (for each new step in formal education, vocational and college counseling, support in moving to and from special education, support in moving to post school living and work), welcoming and social support programs, to and from special education programs, and school-to-career programs. Enabling successful transitions has made a significant difference in how motivationally ready and able students are to benefit from schooling.

(3) Responding to minimizing impact, and preventing crises (Crisis Assistance and Prevention). The need for crisis response and prevention is constant in many schools. Such efforts ensure assistance is provided when emergencies arise and follow-up care is provided when necessary and appropriate so that students are able to resume learning without undue delays. Prevention activity stresses creation of a safe and productive environment and the development of student and family attitudes about and capacities for dealing with violence and other threats to safety. Examples of school efforts include (1) systems and programs for emergency/crisis response at a site, throughout a complex/family of schools, and community-wide (including a program to ensure follow-up care) and (2) prevention programs for school and community to address safety and violence reduction, child abuse and suicide prevention, and so forth. Examples of relevant practices are establishment of a crisis team to ensure crisis response and aftermath interventions are planned and implemented, school environment changes and safety strategies, and curriculum approaches to preventing crisis events (violence, suicide, and physical/ sexual abuse prevention). Current trends stress school- and community-wide prevention programs.

(cont.)

Exhibit 1 (cont). “Curriculum” Areas for an Enabling Component

(4) Enhancing home involvement. In recent years, the trend has been to expand the nature and scope of the school’s focus on enhancing home involvement. Intervention practices encompass efforts to (1) address specific learning and support needs of adults in the home (e.g., classes to enhance literacy, job skills, ESL, mutual support groups), (2) help those in the home meet their basic obligations to their children, (3) improve systems to communicate about matters essential to student and family, (4) enhance the home-school connection and sense of community, (5) enhance participation in making decisions that are essential to the student, (6) enhance home support related to the student’s basic learning and development, (7) mobilize those at home to problem solve related to student needs, and (8) elicit help (support, collaborations, and partnerships) from those at home with respect to meeting classroom, school, and community needs. The context for some of this activity may be a parent center (which may be part of the Family and Community Service Center Facility if one has been established at the site).

(5) Outreaching to the community to build linkages and collaborations. The aim of outreach to the community is to develop greater involvement in schooling and enhance support for efforts to enable learning. Outreach may be made to (a) public and private community agencies, colleges, organizations, and facilities, (b) businesses and professional organizations and groups, and (c) volunteer service programs, organizations and clubs. Efforts in this area might include 1) programs to recruit and enhance community involvement and support (e.g., linkages and integration with community health and social services; cadres of volunteers, mentors, and others with special expertise and resources; local businesses to adopt-a-school and provide resources, awards, incentives, and jobs; formal partnership arrangements), 2) systems and programs specifically designed to train, screen, and maintain volunteers (e.g., parents, college students, senior citizens, peer and cross-age tutors/counselors, and professionals-in-training to provide direct help for staff and students--especially targeted students), 3) outreach programs to hard-to-involve students and families (those who don’t come to school regularly--including truants and dropouts), and 4) programs to enhance community-school connections and sense of community (e.g., orientations, open houses, performances and cultural and sports events, festivals and celebrations, workshops and fairs). A Family and Community Service Center Facility might be a context for some of this activity. (Note: When there is an emphasis on bringing community services to school sites, care must be taken to avoid creating a new form of fragmentation where community and school professionals engage in a form of parallel play at school sites.)

(6) Providing special assistance for students and families. Some problems cannot be handled without a few special interventions; thus the need for student and family assistance. The emphasis is on providing special services in a personalized way to assist with a broad range of needs. School-owned, -based, and -linked interventions clearly provide better access for many youngsters and their families. Moreover, as a result of initiatives that enhance school-owned support programs and those fostering school-linked services and school-community partnerships (e.g., full service schools, family resource centers, etc.), more schools have more to offer in the way of student and family assistance. In current practice, available social, physical and mental health programs in the school and community are used. Special attention is paid to enhancing systems for prereferral intervention, triage, case and resource management, direct services to meet immediate needs, and referral for special services and special education resources and placements as appropriate. A growing body of data indicates the current contribution and future promise of work in this area.

Note about resource “coordination” at a school site: Just as a school board needs a mechanism to focus on policy and practice related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching, so does every school. Such a mechanism involves a site administrator and key staff in carrying out such functions as mapping and analyzing resources and transofrming them into an effective school-wide enabling (or learning supports) component.

What Are the Benefits of Enhancing the Focus on Addressing Barriers to Learning?

The most fundamental benefits to be accrued from school boards increasing their focus on these concerns are enhanced educational results

...and there are other benefits as well

As with all school reform, the first and foremost concern for school boards is improving student academic performance and achievement. The reality is that the best instructional reforms cannot produce the desired results for a large number of students as long as schools do not have comprehensive approaches for addressing external and internal barriers to learning and teaching. And, it is evident that schools are not developing such approaches because current policy marginalizes and fragments the emphasis on these matters.

In reviewing the value of their board committee for enhancing a focus on addressing barriers to learning, committee members in the Los Angeles Unified School District stressed that their work contributed to

- formulation of a major policy framework and specific recommendations for ways to improve district efforts to address barriers to student learning and enhance healthy development
- ongoing monitoring of and pressure for progress related to district reforms for addressing barriers (e.g., early intervention as a key aspect for dealing with the problems of social promotion, expulsion, dropout, and growing numbers referred for special education)
- provision of a morale-boosting open forum for line staff and community to hear about proposed changes, offer ideas, and raise concerns
- connecting community agency resources to the district and sensitizing agency staff to district concerns in ways that contribute to improved networking among all concerned
- regular access by board members and district staff, *without fees*, to an array of invaluable expertise from the community to explore how the district should handle complex problems arising from health and welfare reforms and the ways schools should provide learning supports
- expanding the informed cadre of influential advocates supporting district reforms

All these benefits were seen by the committee members as important reasons for carrying on the work.

Rethinking a School Board's Current Committee Structure

Most school boards do not have a standing committee that gives full attention to the problem of how schools address barriers to learning and teaching. This is not to suggest that boards are ignoring such matters. Indeed, items related to these concerns appear regularly on every school board's agenda. The problem is that each item tends to be handled in an ad hoc manner, without sufficient attention to the “Big Picture.” One result is that the administrative structure in most districts is not organized in ways that coalesce its various functions (programs, services) for addressing barriers. The piecemeal structure reflects the marginalized status of such functions and both creates and maintains the fragmented policies and practices that characterize efforts to address barriers to student learning.

Analyzing How the Board's Committee Structure Handles Functions Related to Addressing Barriers

Given that every school endeavors to address barriers to learning and teaching, school boards should carefully analyze how their committee structure deals with these functions. Because boards already have a full agenda, such an analysis probably will require use of an ad hoc committee. This committee should be charged with clarifying whether the board's structure, time allotted at meetings, and the way the budget and central administration are organized allow for a thorough and cohesive overview of all functions schools pursue to enable learning and teaching. In carrying out this charge, committee members should consider work done by pupil services staff (e.g., psychologists, counselors, social workers, attendance workers, nurses), compensatory and special education, safe and drug free schools programs, dropout prevention, aspects of school readiness and early intervention, district health and human service activities, initiatives for linking with community services, and more. Most boards will find (1) they don't have a big picture perspective of how all these functions relate to each other, (2) the current board structure and processes for reviewing these functions do not engender a thorough, cohesive approach to policy, and (3) functions related to addressing barriers to learning are distributed among administrative staff in ways that foster fragmentation.

If this is the case, the board should consider establishing a standing committee that focuses in depth and consistently on the topic of how schools in the district can enhance their efforts to improve instruction by addressing barriers in more cohesive and effective ways.

What a Standing Committee Needs to Do

The primary assignment for the committee is to develop a comprehensive policy framework to guide reforms and restructuring so that *every school* can make major improvements in how it addresses barriers interfering with the performance and learning of its students. Developing such a framework requires revisiting existing policy with a view to making it more cohesive and, as gaps are identified, taking steps to fill them.

Mapping

Current policies, practices, and resources must be well-understood. This requires using the lens of addressing barriers to learning to do a complete mapping of all district owned programs, services, personnel, space, material resources, cooperative ventures with community agencies, and so forth. The mapping process should differentiate between (a) regular, long-term programs and short-term projects, (b) those that have the potential to produce major results and those likely to produce superficial outcomes, and (c) those designed to benefit all or most students at every school site and those designed to serve a small segment of the district's students. In looking at income, in-kind contributions, and expenditures, it is essential to distinguish between "hard" and "soft" money (e.g., the general funds budget, categorical and special project funds, other sources that currently or potentially can help underwrite programs). It is also useful to differentiate between long- and short-term soft money. It has been speculated that when the various sources of support are totaled in certain schools as much as 30% of the resources may be going to addressing barriers to learning. Reviewing the budget through this lens is essential in moving beyond speculation about such key matters.

Analysis

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 analysis is how to reduce fragmentation and fill gaps in ways that increase effectiveness and efficiency. Another aspect of the analysis 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.

Formulation of a policy framework and specific proposals for systemic reforms

A framework offering a picture of the district's total approach for addressing barriers to learning should be formulated to guide long-term strategic planning. A well-developed framework is an essential tool for evaluating all proposals in ways that minimize fragmented and piecemeal approaches. It also provides guidance in outreaching to link with community resources in ways that fill gaps and complement school programs and services. That is, it helps avoid creating a new type of fragmentation by clarifying cohesive ways to weave school and community resources together.

Formulate specific proposals to ensure the success of systemic reforms

The above tasks are not simple ones. And even when they are accomplished, they are insufficient. The committee must also develop policy and restructuring proposals that enable substantive systemic changes. These include essential capacity building strategies (e.g., administrative restructuring, leadership development, budget reorganization, developing stakeholder readiness for changes, well-trained change agents, strategies for dealing with resistance to change, initial and ongoing staff development, monitoring and accountability). To achieve economies of scale, proposals can capitalize on the natural connections between a high school and its feeders (or a “family” of schools). Centralized functions should be redefined and restructured to ensure that central offices/units support what each school and family of schools is trying to accomplish.

Committee Composition

The nature and scope of the work call for a committee that encompasses

- one or more board members who chair the committee (all board members are welcome and specific ones are invited to particular sessions as relevant)
- district administrator(s) in charge of relevant programs (e.g., student support services, Title I, special education)
- several key district staff members who can represent the perspectives of principals, union members, and various other stakeholders
- nondistrict members whose jobs and expertise (e.g., public health, mental health, social services, recreation, juvenile justice, post secondary institutions) make them invaluable contributors to the tasks at hand .

To be more specific:

>It helps if more than one board member sits on the committee to minimize proposals being contested as the personal/political agenda of a particular board member.

>Critical information about current activity can be readily elicited through the active participation of a district administrator (e.g., an associate/assistant superintendent) responsible for “student support programs” or other major district’s programs that address barriers to learning.

>Similarly, a few other district staff usually are needed to clarify how efforts are playing out at schools across the district and to ensure that site administrators, line staff, and union considerations are discussed. Also, consideration should be given to including representatives of district parents and students.

>Finally, the board should reach out to include members on the standing committee from outside the district who have special expertise and who represent agencies that are or might become partners with the district in addressing barriers to learning. For example, in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the committee included key professionals from post secondary institutions, county departments for health, and social services, public and private youth development and recreation organizations, and the United Way. The organizations all saw the work as highly related to their mission and were pleased to donate staff time to the committee.

Ensuring the
Committee's
Efforts
Bear Fruit

The committee's efforts will be for naught if the focus of their work is not a regular topic on the board's agenda and a coherent section of the budget. Moreover, the board's commitment must be to addressing barriers to learning in powerful ways that enable teachers to be more effective -- as contrasted to a more limited commitment to providing a few mandated services or simply increasing access to community services through developing coordinated/integrated school-linked services.

Given the nature and scope of necessary changes and the limited resources available, the board probably will have to ask for significant restructuring of the district bureaucracy. (Obviously, the aim is not to create a larger central bureaucracy.) It also must adopt a realistic time frame for fully accomplishing the changes.

Lessons Learned

Based on work in this area, it seems worth underscoring a few key problems that should be anticipated. In doing so, we also suggest some strategies to counter them. Not surprisingly, the problems are rather common ones associated with committee and team endeavors. Since most could be minimized, it is somewhat surprising how often no plans are made to reduce their impact.

Agreement about the committee's goals and timeline

Although a statement of general purpose usually accompanies its creation, such committees tend to flounder after a few meetings if specific steps for getting from here to there are not carefully planned and articulated. In the longer run, the committee is undermined if *realistic* timelines are not attached to expectations regarding task accomplishments.

Possible strategy: Prior to the first meeting a subgroup could draft a statement of long-term aims, goals for the year, and immediate objectives for the first few meetings. Then, they could delineate steps and timelines for achieving the immediate objectives and goals for the year. This "strategic plan" could then be circulated to members for amendment and ratification.

Agenda setting

Those who set the agenda control what is accomplished. Often such agendas do not reflect a strategic approach for major policy and systemic reforms. The more ambitious the goals, the more difficult it is to work in a systematic manner. Committees have difficulty doing first things first. For example, the first step is to establish a big picture policy framework; then specifics can be fleshed out. In fleshing out specifics, the first emphasis is on restructuring and redeploying poorly used resources; this work provides the context for exploring how to enhance resources.

Possible strategy: The committee could delegate agenda setting to a small subgroup who are perceived as having a comprehensive understanding of the strategic process necessary for achieving the committee's desired ends.

Keeping on task

It is very easy to bog the committee's work down by introducing distractions and through poor meeting facilitation. Boggling things down can kill members' enthusiasm; conversely, well-run and productive meetings can generate long-term commitment and exceptional participation. Matters that can make the process drag along include the fact that committee members have a great deal to learn before they can contribute effectively. Nondistrict members often require an introductory "course" on schools and school culture. District members usually require a similar introduction to the ABCs of community agencies and resources. Staff asked to describe a program are inclined to make lengthy presentations. Also, there are a variety of immediate concerns that come to the board that fall under the purview and expertise of such a standing committee (e.g., ongoing proposals for programs and resource allocation, sudden crises).

Possible strategy: The key to appropriately balancing demands is careful agenda setting. The key to meetings that effectively move the agenda forward is firm facilitation that is implemented gently, flexibly, and with good humor. This requires assigning meeting facilitation to a committee member with proven facilitation skills or, if necessary, recruiting a non committee member who has such skills.

When committees meet only once a month or less often, it is unlikely that proposals for major policy and systemic reforms will be forthcoming in a timely and well-formulated manner.

Working between meetings

Possible strategy: Subgroups of the committee can be formed to work between meetings. These work groups can accomplish specific tasks and bring the products to the full committee for amendment and ratification. Using such a format, the agenda for scheduled committee meetings can be streamlined to focus on refining work group products and developing guidelines for future work group activity.

Avoiding Fragmentation

As Figure 3 highlights, the functions with which the committee is concerned overlap the work of board committees focusing on instruction and the governance and management of resources. Unless there are effective linkages between committees, fragmentation is inevitable.

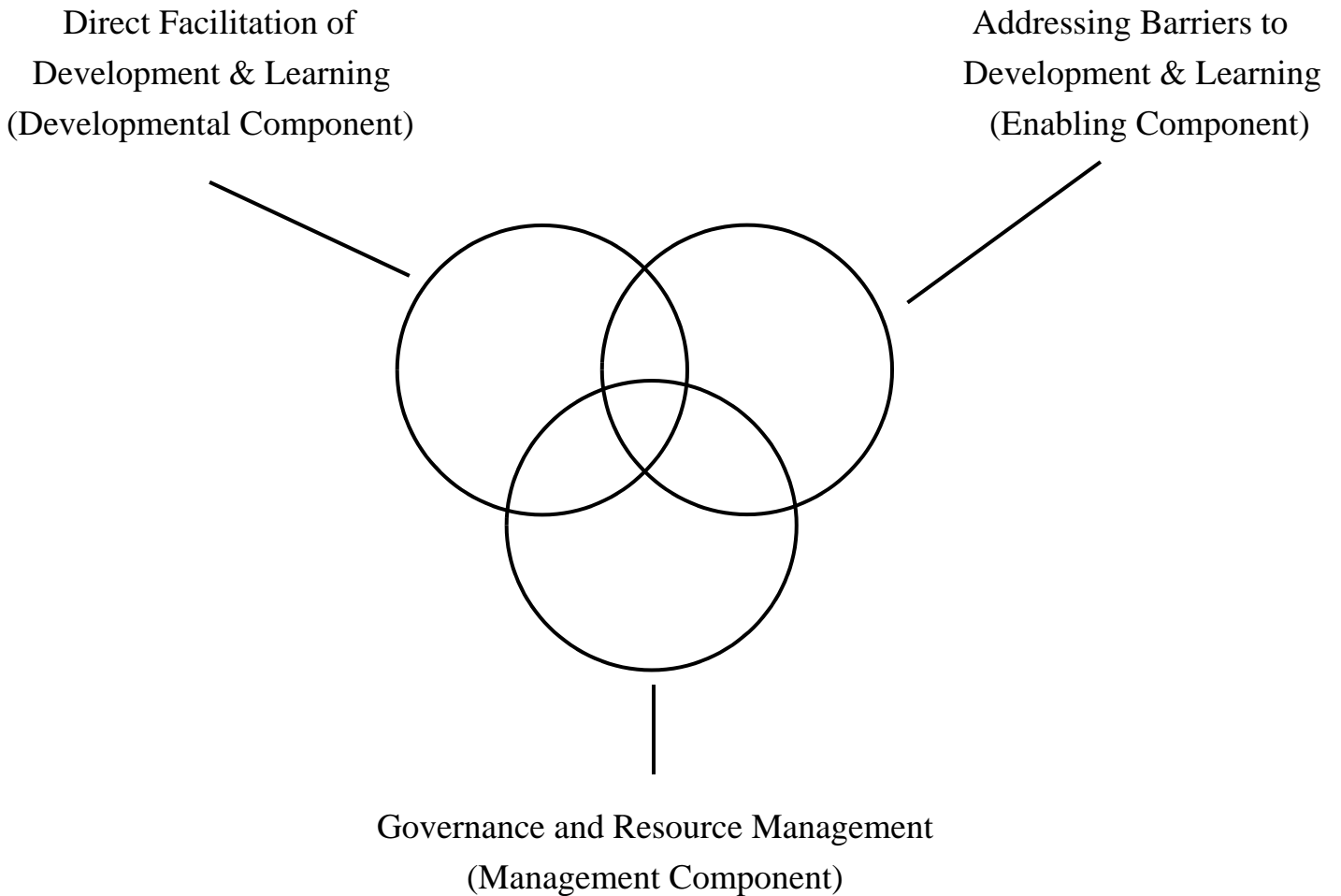
Possible strategy: Circulating all committee agendas and minutes; cross-committee participation or joint meetings when overlapping interests are on the agenda.

Minimizing political and interpersonal machinations

Obviously, school boards are political entities. Therefore, besides common interpersonal conflicts that arise in most groups, differences in ideology and constituent representation can interfere with a committee accomplishing its goals.

Possible strategy: At the outset, it is wise to identify political and interpersonal factors that might undermine acceptance of the committee's proposals. Then steps can be taken to negotiate agreements with key individuals in order to maximize the possibility that proposals are formulated and evaluated in a nonpartisan manner.

Figure 3. Functional Focus for Reform and Restructuring



Concluding Comments

As school boards strive to improve schools, the primary emphasis is on high standards, high expectations, assessment, accountability, and no excuses. These are all laudable guidelines for reform. They are simply not sufficient.

It is time for school boards to deal more effectively with the reality that, by themselves, the best instructional reforms cannot produce desired results when large numbers of students are not performing well. It is essential to enhance the way every school site addresses barriers to learning and teaching. Each school needs policy support to help evolve a comprehensive, multifaceted, and well-integrated approach for addressing barriers and for doing so in ways that weave the work seamlessly with the school's efforts to enhance instruction and school management.

Progress along these lines is hampered by the marginalized status of programs and personnel whose primary focus is on enabling learning by effectively addressing barriers. Most school boards do not have a standing committee that focuses exclusively on this arena of policy and practice. The absence of such a structural mechanism makes it difficult to focus powerfully and cohesively on improving the way current resources are used and hinders exploring the best ways to evolve the type of comprehensive and multifaceted approaches that are needed to produce major gains in student achievement.

Appendix

Needed: A Comprehensive, Multifaceted Continuum of Intervention

Policy-oriented discussions increasingly recognize the importance of multifaceted approaches that account for social, economic, political, and cultural factors that can interfere with development, learning, and teaching (Adelman & Taylor, 1993, 2002; California Department of Education, 1997; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 1996, 1997; Dryfoos, 1998; Schorr, 1997). As portrayed in Figure A-1, major policies and practices for addressing such barriers can be categorized into five areas: (1) measures to abate economic inequities/restricted opportunities, (2) primary prevention and early age interventions, (3) identification and amelioration of learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems as early as feasible, (4) ongoing amelioration of mild-moderate learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems, and (5) ongoing treatment of and support for chronic/severe/ pervasive problems.

As also illustrated in Figure A-1 and elaborated in Figures A-2 and A-3, the range of interventions can be appreciated by grouping them on a continuum from broadly focused primary prevention and approaches for treating problems early-after-onset through to narrowly focused treatments for severe/chronic problems. Such a continuum should encompass a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated continuum of community and school programs serving local geographical or catchment areas. Furthermore, it should reflect a holistic and developmental emphasis. The range of interventions focus on individuals, families, and the contexts in which they live, work, and play. A basic assumption is that the least restrictive and nonintrusive forms of intervention required to address problems and accommodate diversity should be used. Another assumption is that many problems are not discrete, and therefore, interventions that address root causes can minimize the trend to develop separate programs for every observed problem.

The potential array of preventive and treatment programs is extensive and promising. Figure A-3 provides examples of relevant interventions (all of which imply systemic changes). These are grouped under six types of activities along the prevention to treatment continuum: (1) primary prevention to promote and maintain safety and physical and mental health, (2) preschool programs, (3) early school adjustment programs, (4) improvement and augmentation of regular support, (5) specialized staff development and interventions prior to referral for special help, and (6) intensive treatments. Included are programs designed to promote and maintain safety and wellness at home and at school, programs for economic enhancement,

quality day care and early education, a wide range of supports to enable students to learn and teachers to teach, prereferral interventions, and systems of care for those with severe and chronic problems. Gaps in the continuum of programs can be clarified through analyses of social, economic, political, and cultural factors associated with the problems of youth and from needs assessments and reviews of promising practices.

Unfortunately, implementation of the full continuum of programs with an extensive range of activities does not occur in most communities that must rely on underwriting from public funds and private organizations supported by charitable donations. Moreover, what programs are in place tend to be fragmented. And this means there is not the type of systemic collaboration that is essential to establishing interprogram connections on a daily basis and over time. Ultimately, such a continuum must include *systems of prevention*, *systems of early intervention* to address problems as soon after onset as feasible, and *systems of care* for those with chronic and severe problems (again see Figure A-2). And each of these systems must be connected effectively. For example, the range of programs cited in Figure A-3 can be seen as integrally related, and it seems likely that the impact of each could be exponentially increased through integration and coordination. Such connections may involve horizontal and vertical restructuring (a) between jurisdictions, school and community agencies, public and private sectors; among schools; among community agencies; and (b) within jurisdictions, school districts, and community agencies (e.g., among departments, divisions, units, schools, clusters of schools)

In recent years, policy makers have been concerned about the relationship between limited intervention efficacy and the widespread tendency for complementary programs to operate in isolation. For instance, physical and mental health programs generally are not coordinated with educational programs, and programs are not coordinated over time. A youngster identified and treated in early education programs who still requires special support may or may not receive systematic help in the primary grades; and so forth. Failure to coordinate and follow through, of course, can be counterproductive (e.g., undermining immediate benefits and working against efforts to reduce subsequent demand for costly treatment programs). Limited efficacy seems inevitable as long as interventions are carried out in a piecemeal fashion. Indeed, a major breakthrough in the battle against learning, behavior, and emotional problems may result only when the full range of programs are implemented in a comprehensive and integrated fashion. Thus, there is increasing interest in moving beyond piecemeal strategies to provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated programmatic thrust (e.g., Adelman, 1993, 1996a, 1996b; Adelman & Taylor, 1997a, 2002; Adelman, Reyna, Collins, Onghai, & Taylor, 1999; Adelman, Taylor, & Schnieder, 1999; Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Hodgkinson, 1989; Kagan, 1990; Sailor & Skrtic, 1996).

Figure A-1. Addressing barriers to development, learning, and teaching: A continuum of five fundamental areas for analyzing policy and practice.

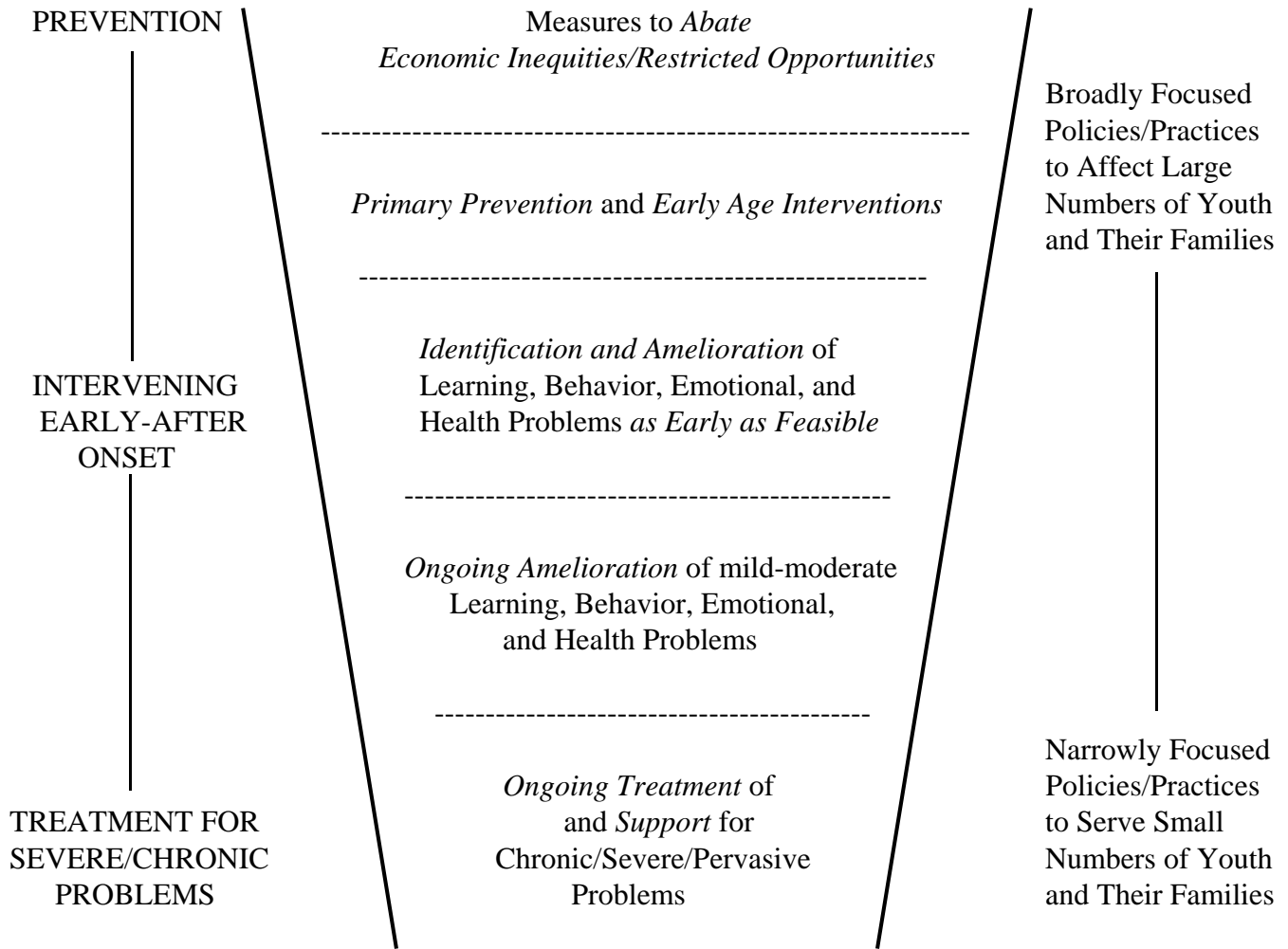
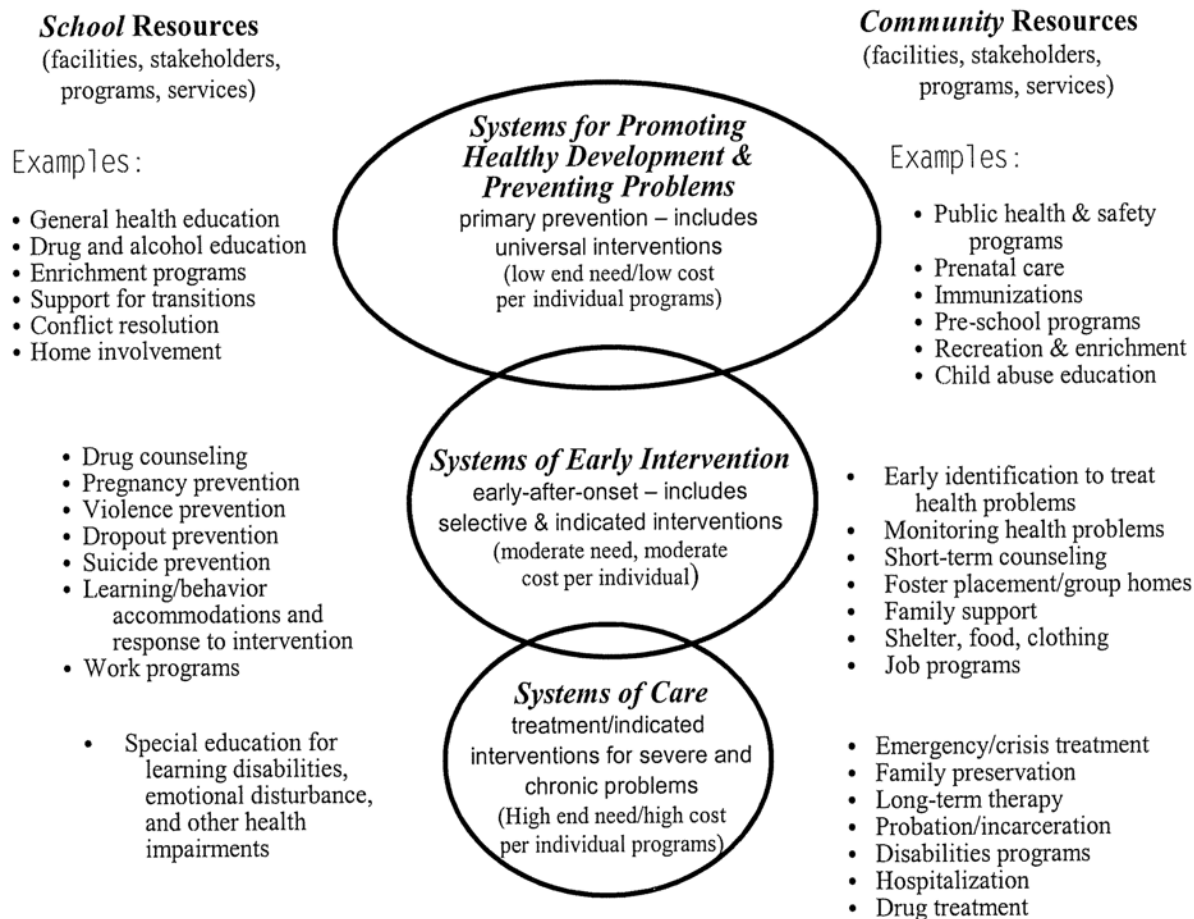


Figure A-2. Interconnected systems for meeting the needs of all children.

■ Providing a *Continuum of School-community Programs & Services*

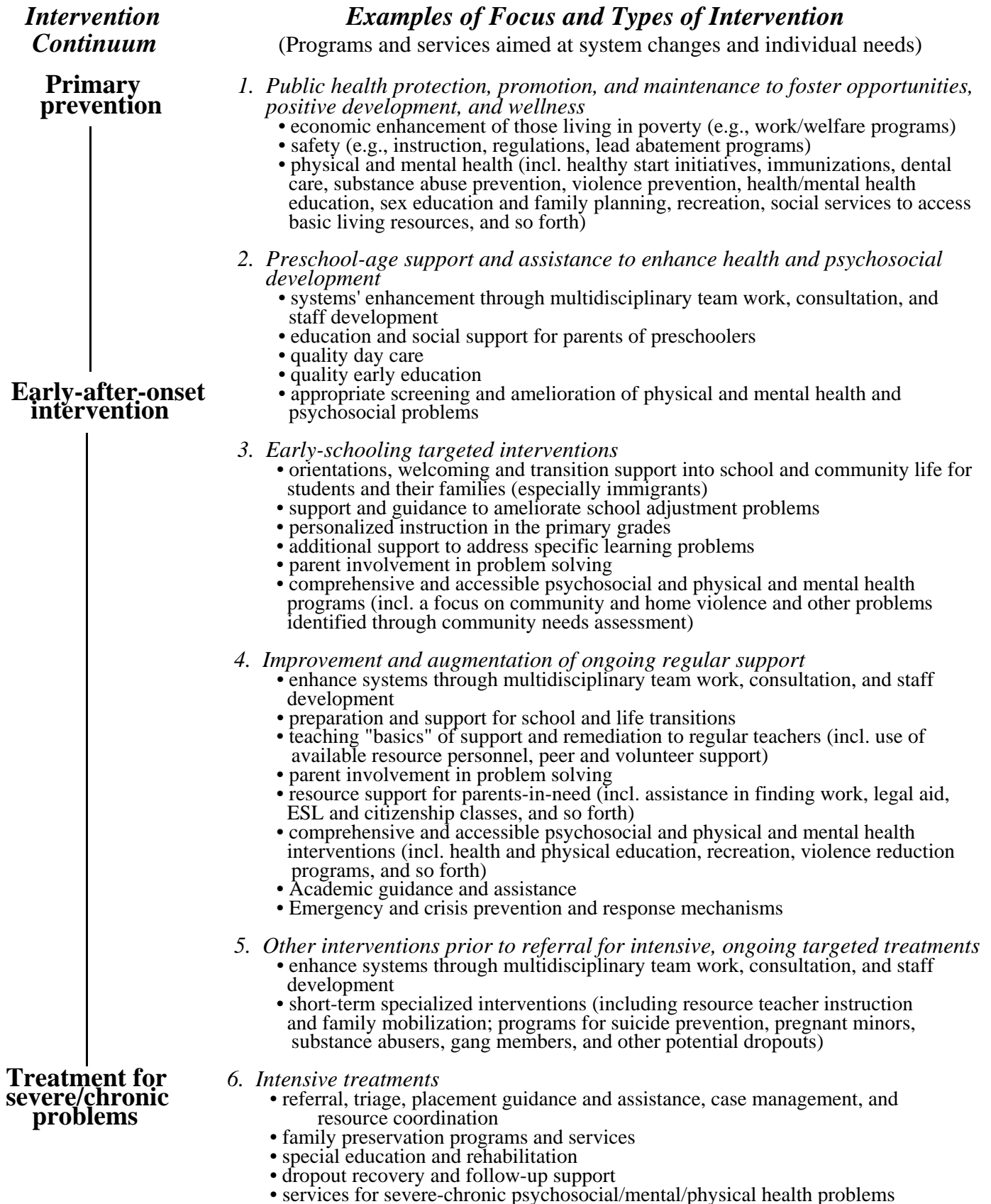
■ Ensuring use of the *Least Intervention Needed*



Systemic collaboration* is essential to establish interprogram connections on a daily basis and over time to ensure seamless intervention within each system and among *systems of prevention, systems of early intervention, and systems of care.*

*Such collaboration involves horizontal and vertical restructuring of programs and services
 (a) within jurisdictions, school districts, and community agencies (e.g., among departments, divisions, units, schools, clusters of schools)
 (b) between jurisdictions, school and community agencies, public and private sectors; among schools; among community agencies

**Figure A-3. From Primary Prevention to Treatment of Serious Problems:
A Continuum of Community-School Programs**



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Additional Center Resources

Addressing What's Missing in School Improvement Planning: Expanding Standards and Accountability to Encompass an Enabling or Learning Supports Component

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

Data Related to the Need for New Directions for School Improvement

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

For Consideration in Reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act . . . Promoting a Systematic Focus on Learning Supports to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/promotingsystem.htm>

Frameworks For Systemic Transformation of Student and Learning Supports

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

Legislation in Need of Improvement: Reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act to Better Address Barriers to Learning

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

Moving Toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports: The Next Evolutionary Stage in School Improvement Policy and Practice

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

Steps and Tools to Guide Planning and Implementation of a Comprehensive System to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

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

Talking Points - Five Frequently Asked Questions About: Why Address What's Missing in School Improvement Planning?

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/q&aschoolimprove.pdf>

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

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