

Appendix C

Standards for a Learning Supports Component

School improvement discussions across the country are standards-based and accountability driven. Disconnects are inevitable when curriculum and teaching standards are developed separately. And this is a problem that needs correction.

Beyond this problem, however, is the failure of the current standards movement to deal with the reality that curriculum and teaching standards fall far short of providing a focus on how schools can enhance equity of opportunity for *all*. Such standards continue to give short shrift to factors that *interfere* with successful teaching and pay too little attention to the many students manifesting *moderate-to-severe learning, behavior, and emotional problems*. Establishing standards for student/learning supports is essential to rectifying these short-comings.

Adopting standards for learning supports in no way diminishes the importance of curriculum and teaching standards. Every teacher must have the ability and resources to bring a sound curriculum to life and apply strategies that make learning meaningful and effective, and to these ends, appropriate curriculum and teaching standards are foundational. But, such standards are insufficient for enhancing equity of opportunity to succeed at school and beyond.

None of this argues against the necessity of improving standards for curriculum and instruction. The intent here is to highlight that the current standards movement does little to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. The policy need is for a third component that does so directly and systematically. Standards generated for such a component can then help drive and guide component development and personnel preparation.

Standards for learning supports are long overdue. A start has been made with the standards various student support professional associations have formulated for their individual constituencies. Now it is time to establish a *unified* set of standards for student/learning supports.

The following Exhibit outlines such a set of standards. These standards reflect prototype frameworks for a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports and were developed as part of the national initiative for *New Directions for Student and Learning Supports* and supported by the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports* (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>). The Exhibit is adapted from our Center's resource entitled: *Standards & Quality Indicators for an Enabling or Learning Supports Component* online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/qualityindicators.pdf>.

A cursory reading of the standards underscores how much is not being discussed in the current movement to improve education standards.

Standards for a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*

Area: *Framing and Delineating Intervention Functions*

Standard 1. Establishment of an overall unifying intervention framework for a comprehensive, systemic, and equitable component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching, including re-engaging disconnected students.

A *Learning Supports Component* is a systemic approach that is fully and equitably integrated into the school's strategic improvement plan as a primary and essential component overlapping the instructional and management components. The supports are operationalized into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive intervention framework.¹ One facet of this framework is a continuum of integrated, overlapping subsystems that embrace both school and community resources (e.g., subsystems to promote positive development, prevent problems, respond early after problem onset, and treat severe-chronic problems). Note that this intervention continuum is not well operationalized simply as tiers or levels of school intervention. Rather, the standard is that each level is developed as a subsystem that weaves together school and community resources, and each subsystem covers a delineated set of "content" arenas.

A conceptualization that organizes a delineated set of content arenas for addressing barriers to learning and teaching is the other facet of the framework.¹ To illustrate standards for content arenas, the following uses the six arenas designated in the intervention framework prototype being used by pioneering states and districts.

Standard 1 addendum: Specific standards for the content arenas of a learning supports component

While the number and labels for designated content arenas may differ, as Standard 1 indicates: Schools need a conceptualization that organizes a delineated set of content arenas for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. (As one of the quality performance indicators for Standard 1 indicates, rather than a fragmented, "laundry-list" of programs, services, and activities, the learning supports need to be organized into a concise content or "curriculum" framework that categorizes and captures the essence of the multifaceted ways schools need to address barriers to learning.)

- >**Standard 1a. Continuous enhancement of regular classroom strategies to enable learning** (e.g., improving instruction for students with mild-moderate learning and behavior problems and re-engaging those who have become disengaged from learning at school)
- >**Standard 1b. Continuous enhancement of a programs and systems for a full range of transition supports** (e.g., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes, daily transitions, etc.)
- >**Standard 1c. Continuous enhancement of programs and systems to increase and strengthen home and school connections**
- >**Standard 1d. Continuous enhancement of programs and systems for responding to, and where feasible, preventing school and personal crises** (including creating a caring and safe learning environment)
- >**Standard 1e. Continuous enhancement of programs and systems to increase and strengthen community involvement and support** (e.g., outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
- >**Standard 1f. Continuous enhancement of programs and systems to facilitate student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed.**

(cont.)

*Adapted from: *Standards & Quality Indicators for an Enabling or Learning Supports Component* online at – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/qualityindicators.pdf>

Area: Reworking Operational Infrastructure

Standard 2. Establishment of an integrated operational infrastructure framework for a comprehensive, systemic, and equitable component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

Developing and institutionalizing a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports requires mechanisms that are integrated with each other and are fully integrated into school improvement efforts. The need at all levels is to rework infrastructure to support efforts to address barriers to learning in a cohesive manner and to integrate the work with efforts to promote healthy development and with instruction and with the management/governance mechanisms. This requires dedicated administrative leadership (with leaders involved in system governance, planning and implementation), a learning supports leadership team and work groups (focused on functions such as mapping, analysis, and priority setting for intervention development and resource allocation; integration, communication and information management; capacity building; quality improvement and accountability).

Area: Enhancing Resource Use

Standard 3. Appropriate resource use and allocation for developing, maintaining, and evolving the component.

Appropriate use of resources is based on up-to-date gap and outcome analyses and established priorities for improving the component. Resource allocation involves (re)deployment of available funds to achieve priorities. Cost-efficiencies are achieved through collaborations that, in common purpose, integrate systems and weave together learning support resources within the school, among families of schools, from centralized district assets, and from various community entities.

Area: Continuous Capacity Building

Standard 4. Capacity building for developing, maintaining, and evolving the component.

Capacity building involves enhancing ongoing system and stakeholder development and performance. The work requires allocation of resources to provide effective and efficient mechanisms and personnel to carry out a myriad of capacity building functions.

Area: Continuous Evaluation and Appropriate Accountability

Standard 5. Formative and summative evaluation and accountability are fully integrated into all planning and implementation.

Formative evaluation provides essential data related to progress in improving processes and achieving benchmarks and outcomes. In the initial phase of component development, formative evaluation focuses heavily on feedback and benchmarks related to specific developmental tasks, functioning of processes, and immediate outcomes. Formative evaluation is an ongoing process with an increasing focus on intermediate and then long-range outcomes. Summative data on intermediate outcomes are gathered as soon as the component is operating as an integrated system. Summative data on long-range outcomes are gathered after the component has operated as an integrated system for two years. Accountability indicators should fit the phase of component development. This means the primary focus is on developmental benchmarks in the early phases. When the accountability focus is on student impact, the primary emphasis is on the direct enabling outcomes for students that each arena of the component is designed to accomplish. As these accountability indicators show solid impact, they can be correlated with academic progress to estimate their contribution to academic achievement.