



A Center Policy & Practice Brief

Toward a School District Infrastructure that More Effectively Addresses Barriers to Learning and Teaching

(November, 2011, rev.)

Abstract

This brief explores the operational infrastructure problem at the district level and offers a prototype to stimulate discussion of changes that are essential to the development of a comprehensive system of learning supports at every school. It also briefly highlights infrastructure frameworks for schools and school complexes.

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Preface

Much of our Center's ongoing analytic work focuses on clarifying fundamental *systemic* factors that interfere with schools developing a comprehensive, multifaceted, cohesive, and cost-effective approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. The need for such an approach provides one of the lenses through which we analyze prevailing (1) policy, (2) intervention activity, (3) infrastructure at district and school levels, and (4) strategies for accomplishing essential systemic changes in sustainable ways. Such analyses underscore fundamental factors contributing to the marginalization, fragmentation, wasteful redundancy, and counterproductive competition that permeate prevailing efforts to provide student and learning supports.

This brief explores the operational infrastructure problem. The emphasis is on district infrastructure. After exploring the problem, we offer a prototype to stimulate discussion of changes that are essential to the development of a comprehensive system of learning supports at every school. We also highlight infrastructure frameworks for schools and school complexes that are discussed in other Center documents.

In recent years, the Center's work has provided resources for various national initiatives focused on New Directions for Student Support (see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ndannouncement.htm>). These initiatives are dedicated to evolving a unified and comprehensive system of student and learning supports that is fully integrated with school improvement policy and practice. The aim is to enhance equal opportunity for all students to succeed at school.

Howard Adelman & Linda Taylor

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Toward a School District Infrastructure that More Effectively Addresses Barriers to Learning and Teaching

The fundamental principle in developing an organizational and operational infrastructure is that *structure follows function*. That is, the focus should be on establishing an infrastructure that enables accomplishment of major functions and related tasks – hopefully in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

That said, the problem is how to delineate functions in ways that ensure an organization is able to achieve its “big picture” vision.

For school districts, the vision of leaving no child behind has encompassed ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. For purposes of the following analysis, we suggest that pursuing such a vision requires effectively operationalizing three fundamental functions: (1) facilitating learning and development, (2) addressing barriers to learning and teaching in ways that enable learning and development, and (3) governing and managing the district. In pursuing each of these, the major processes involve *systemic* planning, implementation, and evaluation and accountability.

The infrastructure need, then, is to establish an interconnected set of mechanisms to steer and carry out these fundamental functions and processes on a regular basis in keeping with the vision for public education. Such an infrastructure enables leaders to steer together and to empower and work productively with staff on major tasks related to policy and practice.

Examples of tasks include designing and directing activity, planning and implementing specific organizational and program objectives, allocating and monitoring resources with a clear content and outcome focus, facilitating coordination and integration to ensure cohesive implementation, managing communication and information, providing support for capacity building and quality improvement, ensuring accountability, and promoting self-renewal.

In recent years, we have had occasion to work with a representative sample of districts in urban, suburban, and rural localities across the country. From that work, we garnered an appreciation of the many tasks that must be carried out district-wide and by schools. At the same time, we found little consensus about what constitutes best practice infrastructures. And, given our Center’s concern for how schools address barriers to learning and teaching (see list of resources and references at the end of this report), we were particularly disconcerted by the ways in which districts and schools were organized to carry out tasks related to this critical component.

This brief explores the infrastructure problem at the district level and offers a prototype to stimulate discussion of changes that are essential to the development of a comprehensive system of learning supports at every school. It also briefly highlights infrastructure frameworks for schools and school complexes that we have formulated and discussed in other Center documents (cited in the list of resources and references).

How Do Districts Organize to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching?

To assess whether the districts with which we have had direct contact are representative, we initially sampled districts by downloading relevant information from the internet and/or requesting them directly. Among those sampled were major urban districts (e.g., New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, Portland, St. Paul, Sacramento) and several in rural locales. We reviewed district line-authority hierarchy charts, descriptions of unit organization, and, where available, detailed descriptions of infrastructure organizational and operational mechanisms. We then analyzed the prevailing trends to clarify how districts organize to provide interventions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and estimated whether prevailing infrastructure designs are likely to lead to development of comprehensive systems of learning supports.

In general, the tendency is for districts to organize around:

- (a) *levels of schooling* (e.g., elementary, secondary, early education),
- (b) *traditional arenas of activity, discipline affiliations, funding streams, and categorical programs* (e.g., curriculum and instruction; assessment; student supports including counseling and guidance, attendance, psychological and social services, health; specific types of support personnel such as counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses; professional development; special education; specific types of compensatory education such as Title I and English language learners; gifted and talented; safe and drug free schools; athletics, youth development, and after school programs; homeless education; alternative schools; dropout prevention; adult education),
- (c) *operational concerns* (e.g., finances and budget, payroll and business services, facilities, human resources, labor relations, enrollment services, information technology, security, transportation, food, emergency preparedness and response, grants and special programs, legal considerations).

All the school districts we sampled have administrators, managers, and staff who have roles related to the districts' various efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching. However, the programs, services, and initiatives often are divided among several associate or assistant superintendents, their middle managers (e.g., directors or coordinators for specific programs), and a variety of line staff.

The result is that activities related to the function of addressing barriers to learning and teaching are dispersed, often in counterproductive ways, over several divisions or departments. These include units designated “Student Services,” “Teaching and Learning,” “Title I,” “Parent/Community Partnerships,” “Grant and Special Projects,” “Youth Development,” and so forth. Special education may be embedded in a “Student Support” unit, in a “Teaching and Learning” unit, or organized as a separate unit. For instance, in one district, they have an *Office of Student Services* which includes a student placement center, wellness program, and guidance, counseling, and related services and an *Office of Instructional Services* which houses special education, Title I, ESL, and a major demonstration pilot program that features learning supports. Another district has a Division of Education Services that encompasses three departments: *Academic Advancement*, *Learning Supports*, and *Special Assignments*; special education, however, is organized into a separate division. Still another district reports having one assistant superintendent for *Student Support Services* (which includes guidance, social work, teen parenting, dropouts, community involvement, homeless), and an assistant superintendent for *Curriculum and Instruction* who has responsibility for special education, after school programs, social emotional learning. At the same time, this district’s deputy superintendent (who oversees the assistant superintendents) has direct responsibility for all special grant and federal programs, health services, and safe schools.

Exhibit 1 illustrates the type of fragmented unit organization related to activities that address barriers to learning and teaching that is rather common in districts.

Exhibit 1

A Fragmented District Unit Organization for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Information from a major urban school district indicates that it has separate departments focusing on student support services, special education, attendance, child study, alternative schools, bilingual education, character education, and afterschool programs, community services, and community and parent engagement.

The department designated as the *Student Support Services Department* has responsibility for increasing “the child’s capacity to benefit from education by providing high quality health, counseling, psychological, social work, and prevention services that support student achievement, improve the relationship between teacher and child, promote parent involvement and engage the community with the schools. Student Support Services are available to all district students including regular and special education students, LEP and early childhood students.”

This department is divided into four units: (1) Counseling and Guidance (including Elementary and Secondary Counseling and Social Work Services), (2) Psychological Services, (3) Health and Medical Services (nurses), and (4) Student Engagement (focusing specifically on dropout prevention and attendance).

Regardless of the units involved, we find that the work being carried out primarily tends to center around allocating and monitoring resources, assuring compliance and accountability, providing some support for school improvement, generating some ongoing staff development, offering a few district wide programs and services for students, and outreaching to a minimal degree to community agencies.

In general, districts tend not to be organized in ways that emphasize processes that must be pursued if a district is to move toward a comprehensive system of learning supports. Of particular concern is how little attention appears to be given to

- (1) enhancing the *policy* framework for school improvement in ways that incorporate all efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching under a broad and unifying umbrella concept that is established as a primary and essential component of a school's mission,
- (2) reframing *interventions* in ways that are consistent with such a broad, unifying concept,
- (3) rethinking organizational and operational *infrastructure* at a school, for the feeder pattern of schools, and at the district level,
- (4) facilitating major *systemic change* in organizations such as schools and school districts that have well-established institutional cultures.

It is not surprising, then, that there is no formulation of or plans to formulate

- a *system design* focusing on coalescing all learning supports into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated component that is fully integrated with school improvement efforts in ways that not only help students around barriers but also help to reconnect or re-engage them in classroom learning
- a *strategic plan* for implementing such a new design (e.g., capacity building to ensure effective implementation at every school, redeployment and integration of existing resources, professional development of staff at all levels – encompassing leadership/change agent training, developing understanding and motivational readiness for implementation of systemic changes, cross-content and cross-disciplinary training, etc.)

The implications of all this specifically for school improvement planning are delineated in the Center document entitled: *School Improvement Planning: What's Missing* (2006). In that report and various others, we stress the need for policy makers at all levels to end the marginalization, fragmentation, wasteful redundancy, and counterproductive competition resulting from how they address barriers to learning and teaching. To these ends, our research suggests the value of (a) using the need to address barriers to learning and teaching as an umbrella concept (designated as an enabling or a learning supports component or a system of learning supports) and (b) integrating the full continuum of intervention activity with a refined set of major content arenas (e.g., we have identified six intervention arenas). Appendix A briefly highlights all this. It is from this perspective that we focus on developing prototypes for rethinking infrastructure at all levels.

Rethinking Infrastructure for Districts and Schools

Some districts are reexamining how they organize learning supports. One trend is to elevate the focus on learning supports by assigning responsibility and accountability to one high level administrator. While it is good to see districts exploring how to improve their organizational structure, there is a need for doing so with greater attention to the functions, tasks, and content that must be pursued if a district is to move toward a comprehensive system of learning supports. This requires rethinking district infrastructure and doing so in ways that reflect and support a comparable infrastructure at each school.

Developing and institutionalizing a comprehensive component for learning supports requires infrastructure mechanisms that are integrated with each other and are fully integrated into school improvement efforts. Along with unifying various initiatives, projects, programs, and services, the need *at a school* is to rework infrastructure to support efforts to address barriers to learning in a cohesive manner and to integrate the work with efforts to facilitate instruction and promote healthy development. *At the district level*, the need is for administrative leadership and capacity building support that helps maximize development of a comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching at each school. And, it is crucial to establish the district's leadership for this work at a high enough level to ensure the administrator is always an active participant at key planning and decision-making tables.

From our perspective, the infrastructure for a comprehensive system of learning supports should be designed from the school outward. That is, conceptually, the emphasis is first on what an integrated infrastructure should look like at the school level. Then, the focus expands to include the mechanisms needed to connect a family or complex (e.g., feeder pattern) of schools and establish collaborations with surrounding

A Prototype for District Infrastructure

community resources. Ultimately, central district (and community agency) units need to be restructured in ways that best support the work at the school and school complex levels. Indeed, a key guideline in designing district infrastructure is that it must provide leadership and build capacity for (a) establishing and maintaining an effective learning supports infrastructure at every school and (b) a mechanism for connecting a family of schools.

All this involves reframing the work of personnel responsible for student/learning supports, establishing new collaborative arrangements, and redistributing authority (power). With this in mind, those who do such restructuring must have appropriate incentives, safeguards, and adequate resources and support for making major systemic changes. (We do recognize all this is easy to say and extremely hard to do.)

Figure 1 lays out a framework to consider in reworking district infrastructure in ways that promote development of a comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching. As indicated, it is essential to have a cabinet level administrative leader (e.g., an associate superintendent, a chief officer) who is responsible and accountable for all resources related to addressing barriers to learning. The resources of concern come from the general fund, compensatory education, special education, and special projects (e.g., student support personnel such as school psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses; compensatory and special education staff; special initiatives, grants, and programs for afterschool, wellness, dropout prevention, attendance, drug abuse prevention, violence prevention, pregnancy prevention, parent/family/ health centers, volunteer assistance, community resource linkages to schools).

As stressed above and in Appendix A, it is important to coalesce all this activity into a comprehensive system of learning supports (e.g., an enabling or learning supports component) that encompasses an integrated and refined set of major content arenas. An example of how this is formulated as policy is seen in legislation that was proposed in California for a *Comprehensive Pupil Learning Supports System*. (See [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ab171\(1-20-05\).pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ab171(1-20-05).pdf)).

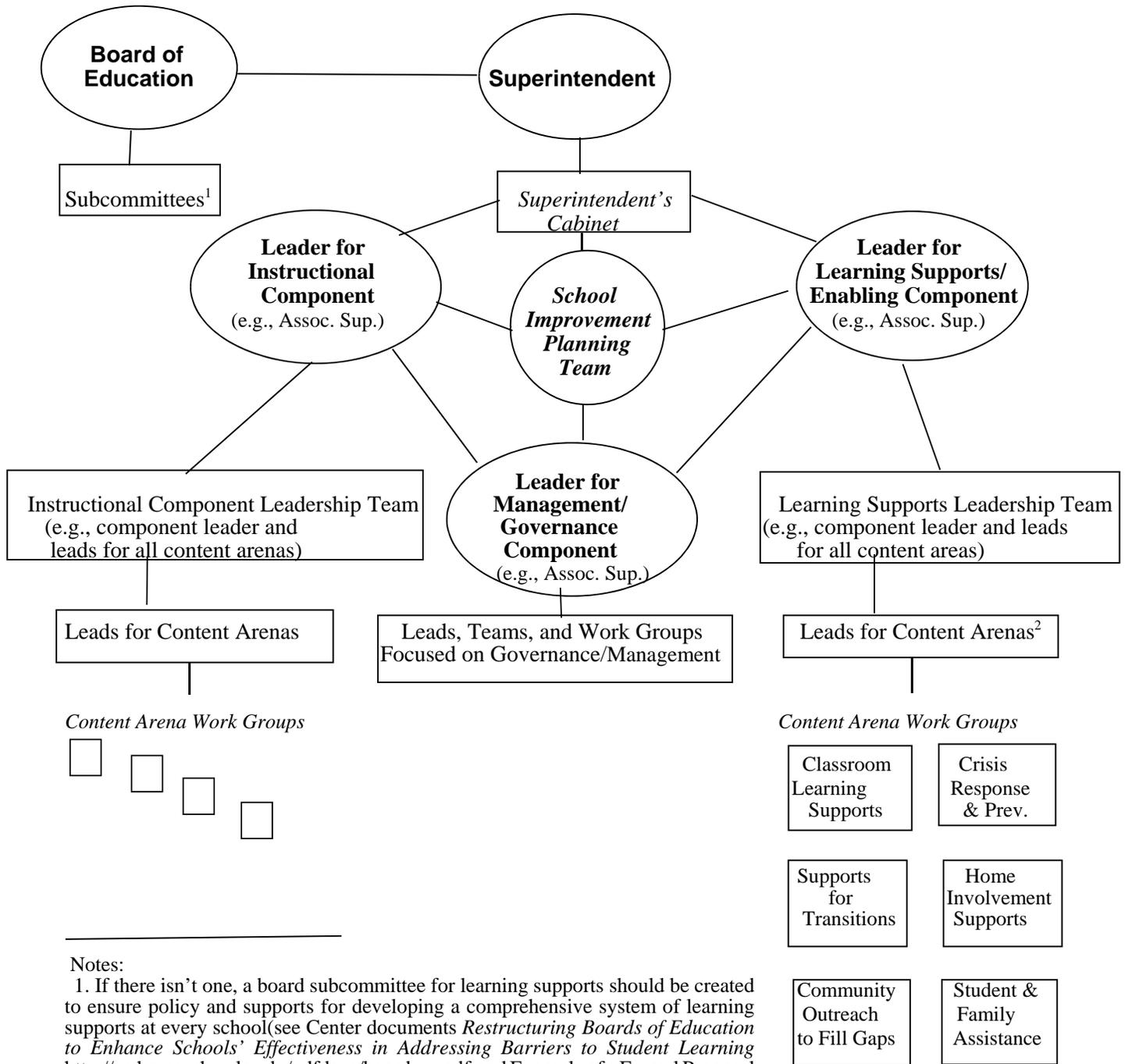
That legislation defines a learning supports system as follows:

Learning supports are the resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports intended to enable all pupils to have an equal opportunity for success at school. To accomplish this goal, a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive learning support system should be integrated with instructional efforts and interventions provided in classrooms and schoolwide to address barriers to learning and teaching.

The legislation then goes on to delineate the six content arenas.

Figure 1

Prototype for an Integrated Infrastructure at the District Level with Mechanisms for Learning Supports That Are Comparable to Those for Instruction



Notes:

1. If there isn't one, a board subcommittee for learning supports should be created to ensure policy and supports for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports at every school (see Center documents *Restructuring Boards of Education to Enhance Schools' Effectiveness in Addressing Barriers to Student Learning* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/boardrep.pdf> and *Example of a Formal Proposal for Moving in New Directions for Student Support* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newdirections/exampleproposal.pdf>)

2. All resources related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., student support personnel, compensatory and special education staff and interventions, special initiatives, grants, and programs) are integrated into a refined set of major content arenas such as those indicated here. Leads are assigned for each arena and work groups are established.

It also should be stressed that a comprehensive system of learning supports is meant not only to help students around barriers but also to intervene in ways that reconnect or re-engage students in classroom learning.

As Figure 1 illustrates, once a learning supports' administrator is appointed, that leader should establish mechanisms for accomplishing the unit's work. These should be comparable to content and process mechanisms established for the instructional component. Specifically, we suggest establishing a "cabinet" for learning supports consisting of leaders for major content arenas. (Appendix A delineates the six arenas cited in Figure 1.) Organizing in this way moves student/learning supports away from the marginalization, fragmentation, unnecessary redundancy, and counterproductive competition that has resulted from organizing around traditional programs and/or in terms of specific disciplines. The intent is for personnel to have accountability for advancing a specific arena *and* for ensuring a systemic and integrated approach to all learning supports. This, of course, requires cross-content and cross-disciplinary training so that all personnel are prepared to pursue new directions (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2001).

A formal infrastructure link also is needed to ensure the learning supports system is fully integrated with school improvement efforts (e.g., in the classroom and school-wide). This means the leader and some of the cabinet for learning supports must be included at district planning and decision making tables with their counterparts working on improving instruction and management/governance. (In Figure 1 we designate the district mechanism for this as the "Schools' Improvement *Planning* Team;" most such team, of course, also establish guidelines, monitor progress, and so forth.)

**Full
Integration
into School
Improvement
Planning and
Decision
Making**

Well-designed, compatible, and interconnected infrastructures at schools, for school complexes, and at the district level are essential for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching. Each level plays a key role in weaving together existing school and community resources and developing a full continuum of interventions over time. Moreover, content and resource-oriented leadership mechanisms enable programs and services to function in an increasingly cohesive, cost-efficient, and equitable way.

Every school is expending resources on student support to enable learning. In some schools, as much as 25 percent of the budget may be going to problem prevention and correction. Few schools have mechanisms to ensure appropriate use of existing resources and enhance current efforts. Content and resource-oriented leadership mechanisms contribute to cost-efficacy of student support activity by ensuring all such activity is planned implemented, and evaluated in a coordinated and increasingly integrated manner. Creation of such mechanisms is essential

for braiding together existing school and community resources and, encouraging services and programs to perform in an increasingly cohesive way. Although content and resource-oriented mechanisms might be created solely around psychosocial programs, they are meant to focus on all major student support activity. And, when the mechanisms include a Learning Supports Leadership Team (see Figure 2 and Exhibit 2), a new means is created for enhancing working relationships and solving turf and operational problems.

One of the primary and essential tasks a Learning Supports Leadership Team undertakes is that of delineating school and community resources (e.g., programs, services, personnel, facilities) that are in place to support students, families, and staff. A comprehensive "gap" assessment is generated as resource mapping is aligned with unmet needs and desired outcomes. Analyses of what is available, effective, and needed provide a sound basis for formulating priorities, redeploying resources, and developing strategies to link with additional resources at other schools, district sites, and in the community (see list of resources and references). Such analyses guide efforts to improve cost-effectiveness and enhance resources.

Figure 2 illustrates an school infrastructure prototype. Exhibit 2 briefly underscores the use of school-based leadership teams.

Finally, we stress that it can be invaluable to link a family of schools together to maximize use of limited resources and achieve economies of scale. Schools in the same geographic or catchment area have a number of shared concerns. Furthermore, some programs and personnel already are or can be shared by several neighboring schools, thereby minimizing redundancy, reducing costs, and enhancing equity. Exhibit 3 outlines a mechanism connecting schools in a feeder pattern with each other and with the district and the community.

(See the reference list for resources that discuss school and complex infrastructure concerns in greater detail.)

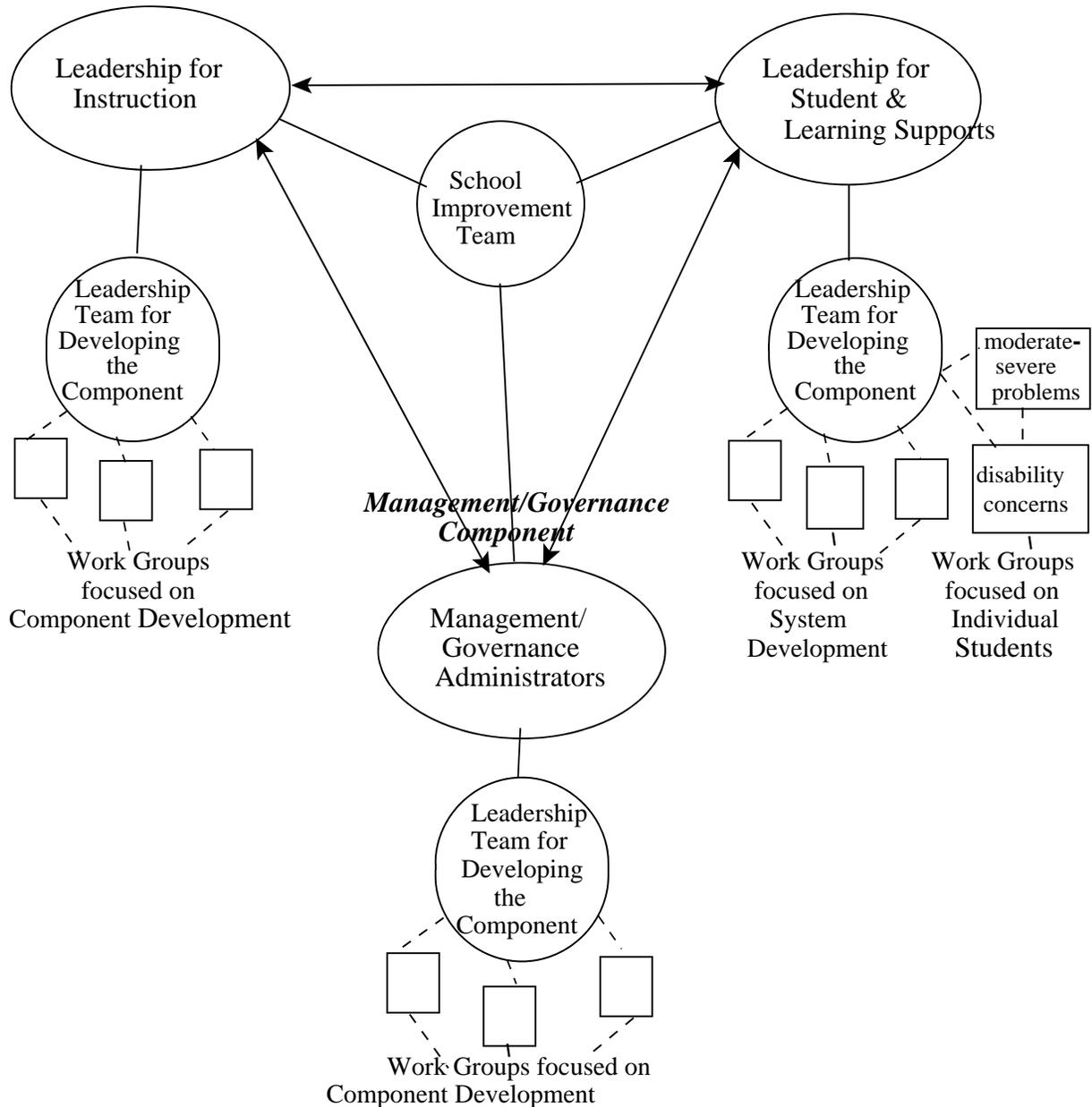
Mechanisms for developing and maintaining a comprehensive system of learning supports cannot be isolated entities. As illustrated in the various Figures and Exhibits, the intent is for them to be part of an integrated infrastructure at a school, for a complex of schools, and at the district and to be interconnected at each level. Such infrastructure connections are essential if student and learning supports are to be developed, maintained, improved, and increasingly integrated into classrooms and provided on a school- and district-wide basis. And, having an administrator for learning supports and a leadership team at district and school levels provides essential links with governance and administrative decision making and planning (e.g., related to program advocacy and development, allocation of budget, space, staff development time, etc.).

Figure 2.

Example of an Integrated Infrastructure at the School Level*

Facilitating Learning/Development
Instructional Component

Addressing Barriers to Learning
Enabling or Learning Supports Component



*The infrastructure for a comprehensive system of learning supports should be designed from the school outward. That is, conceptually, the first emphasis is on what an integrated infrastructure should look like at the school level. Then, the focus expands to include the mechanisms needed to connect a family or complex (e.g., feeder pattern) of schools and establish collaborations with surrounding community resources. Ultimately, central district units need to be restructured in ways that best support the work at the school and school complex levels.

Additional Notes for the Example

As illustrated in the figure, each of the three primary and essential components for school improvement requires (1) administrative leadership, (2) a leadership team to work with the leader on system development, and (3) standing and occasionally ad hoc work groups to accomplish specific tasks. The administrative leaders for the instructional and enabling components are part of the management/governance component to ensure all three components are integrated and that the enabling/learning component is not marginalized. If a special team is assigned to work on school improvement planning, implementation, and evaluation, the leaders for all three components must be on that team.

With specific reference to the component to address barriers to learning, the administrative leader has responsibility and accountability for continuous development of a comprehensive and cohesive system of student and learning supports. In regular meetings with a leadership team, the agenda includes guiding and monitoring daily implementation and development of all programs, services, initiatives, and systems intended to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

Standing work groups are established to pursue tasks related to developing and implementing the component's schoolwide and classroom programs. In our work, we organize them around six major intervention arenas (often with a work group focused on two at a time). The six arenas cover:

- (1) in-classroom approaches designed to enhance how teachers enable learning through prevention and intervening as early after problem onset as feasible
- (2) home involvement approaches to enhance engagement in schools and schooling
- (3) supports for the many transitions experienced by students and their families
- (4) outreach programs to enhance community involvement and engagement (e.g., volunteers, businesses, agencies, faith-based organizations, etc.)
- (5) crisis response and prevention (encompassing concerns about violence, bullying, substance abuse, etc.)
- (6) specialized student and family assistance when necessary – includes two standing work groups that focus on the needs of specific individual students who are manifesting problems. One group (e.g., a student assistance team) focuses on those with moderate-severe problems that are not the result of disabilities; the other (i.e., an IEP team) focuses on disability concerns.

Additional, ad hoc work groups/committees are formed by the leadership team only when absolutely needed to deal with exceptional matters (e.g., formulating a set of guidelines, developing a specific resource aid). Tasks for ad hoc groups always are clearly defined and the work is time limited.

Small schools, obviously, have less staff and other resources than most larger schools. Thus, in a small school, a leadership team and work groups will consist of fewer members. Nevertheless, the three major components necessary for school improvement remain the same in all schools. The challenge in any school is to pursue all three components in an integrated and effective manner. The added challenge in a small school is how to do it with so few personnel.

In a small school, the principal (and whoever else is part of the governance leadership team) will need to ensure that someone is assigned leadership for each of the three components. For the enabling/learning supports component, this may be someone already on the leadership team or someone in the school who has major involvement with student supports (e.g. a pupil services professional, a Title I coordinator, a special education resource specialist). If not already in an administrator's role, the newly designated component leader needs to become part of the administrative team, assigned responsibility and accountability for ensuring the vision for the component is not lost, and provided additional training for the tasks involved in the new leadership assignment.

Exhibit 2

About Learning Supports Leadership Teams for Schools

Obviously administrative leadership is key to ending marginalization of efforts to address behavior, learning, and emotional problems. Another key is establishment of a leadership team that focuses specifically on the development of a comprehensive system of learning supports.

We initially demonstrated the feasibility of such teams in the Los Angeles Unified School District, and now they are being introduced in many schools across the country (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2005a; Lim & Adelman, 1997; Rosenblum, DiCecco, Taylor, & Adelman, 1995). Properly constituted at the school level, such a team provides on-site leadership for efforts to address barriers comprehensively and ensures development, maintenance, and improvement of a unified and systemic approach (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, b, c).

A Learning Supports Leadership Team exemplifies the type of mechanism needed to pursue overall cohesion and ongoing development of school support programs and systems. Minimally, it can reduce fragmentation and enhance cost-efficacy by guiding programs to perform in a coordinated and increasingly integrated way. More generally, the group can provide leadership in guiding school personnel and other stakeholders in evolving the school's vision, priorities, and practices for student and learning supports.

In pursuing its work, the team provides what often is a missing link for managing and enhancing programs and systems in ways that integrate, strengthen, and stimulate new and improved interventions. For example, such a mechanism can be used to (a) map and analyze activity and resources to improve their use in preventing and ameliorating problems, (b) build effective referral, case management, and quality assurance systems, (c) enhance procedures for management of programs and information and for communication among school staff and with the home, and (d) explore ways to redeploy and enhance resources – such as clarifying which activities are nonproductive, suggesting better uses for resources, and establishing priorities for developing new interventions, as well as reaching out to connect with additional resources in the school district and community.

To these ends, efforts are made to bring together representatives of all relevant programs and services. This might include, for example, school counselors, psychologists, nurses, social workers, attendance and dropout counselors, health educators, special education staff, after school program staff, bilingual and Title I program coordinators, safe and drug free school staff, and union reps. Such a team also should include representatives of any community agency that is significantly involved with a school. Beyond these stakeholders, it is advisable to add the energies and expertise of classroom teachers, non-certificated staff, parents, and older students.

Where creation of "another team" is seen as a burden, existing teams, such as student or teacher assistance teams and school crisis teams, have demonstrated the ability to perform system development functions and tasks. In adding such tasks to another team's work, great care must be taken to structure the agenda so sufficient time is devoted to the additional tasks. For small schools, a large team usually is not feasible, but a small team can still do the job.

For related Center resources, see the toolkit for *Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* – especially Section B on Reworking Infrastructure – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

Exhibit 3

Developing and Connecting Mechanisms at Schools Sites, among Families of Schools, and District and Community-wide

A multi-site team can provide a mechanism to help ensure cohesive and equitable deployment of resources and also can enhance the pooling of resources to reduce costs. Such a mechanism can be particularly useful for integrating the efforts of high schools and their feeder middle and elementary schools. This clearly is important in addressing barriers with those families who have youngsters attending more than one level of schooling in the same cluster. It is neither cost-effective nor good intervention for each school to contact a family separately in instances where several children from a family are in need of special attention. With respect to linking with community resources, multi-school teams are especially attractive to community agencies who often don't have the time or personnel to make independent arrangements with every school.

In general, a group of schools can benefit from a multi-site resource mechanism designed to provide leadership, facilitate communication and connection, and ensure quality improvement across sites. For example, a multi-site body, or what we call a *Learning Supports Leadership Council*, might consist of a high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools. It brings together one-two representatives from each school's Learning Supports Leadership *Team* (see illustration on next page).

The Council meets about once a month to help (a) coordinate and integrate programs serving multiple schools, (b) identify and meet common needs with respect to guidelines and staff development, and (c) create linkages and collaborations among schools and with community agencies. In this last regard, it can play a special role in community outreach both to create formal working relationships and ensure that all participating schools have access to such resources.

More generally, the Council provides a useful mechanism for leadership, communication, maintenance, quality improvement, and ongoing development of a comprehensive continuum of programs and services. Natural starting points for councils are the sharing of needs assessments, resource maps, analyses, and recommendations for reform and restructuring. Specific areas of initial focus would be on local, high priority concerns, such as addressing violence and developing prevention programs and safe school and neighborhood plans.

Representatives from Learning Supports Leadership Councils would be invaluable members of planning groups (e.g., Service Planning Area Councils, Local Management Boards). They bring info about specific schools, clusters of schools, and local neighborhoods and do so in ways that reflect the importance of school-community partnerships.

Enhancing a system of learning supports by connecting resources across

>a family of schools

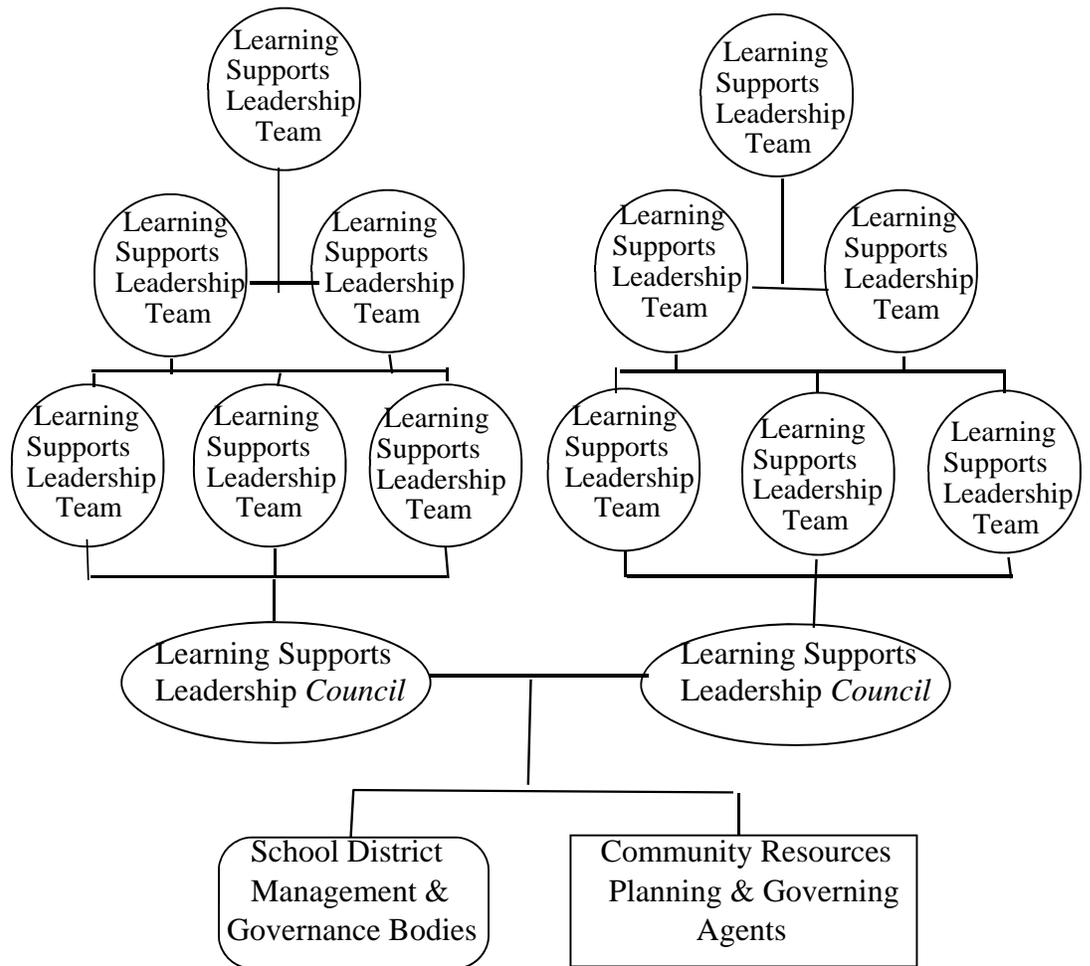
>a district

>community-wide

*High
Schools*

*Middle
Schools*

*Elementary
Schools*



Concluding Comments

In the absence of a comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching, it is unlikely that schools can ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed. Without such a system, schools are handicapped in their efforts to minimize the achievement gap and reduce dropout rates.

Unfortunately, prevailing school approaches to addressing barriers to learning and teaching are marginalized in policy and practice and have yielded activity that is fragmented and needlessly redundant. Moving in new directions involves reframing school policy, intervention activity, and infrastructure, and will require strategies for accomplishing essential systemic changes in sustainable ways on a large scale.

With specific respect to infrastructure, this report has highlighted deficiencies in the way school districts tend to organize divisions and departments responsible for activities that address barriers to learning and teaching. It is time to rethink organizational and operational unit infrastructure and develop a well-designed, compatible, interconnected, and appropriately supported set of mechanisms at district, complex, and school levels. Such an infrastructure is essential for effectively integrating student and learning supports into classrooms and for providing such supports school- and district-wide. And, providing such supports to enable student learning is essential to leaving no child behind.

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http://humanresources.about.com/od/involvementteams/a/twelve_tip_team.htm

Also see www.buzzle.com/articles/teamwork

For some resource aids for developing a leadership team for an enabling or learning supports component, see the Center’s toolkit for *Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*

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

Appendix A

A Unifying Intervention Framework for Schools and Districts to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Schools are constantly confronted with another project, another program, another initiative to address students' learning, behavior, and emotional problems, make school safe, and/or promote healthy development. This raises concerns about: *How does it all fit together?*

Because so many programs have evolved in a piece meal manner, across the country it is not unusual for staff in a district and at a school to be involved in "parallel play." This contributes to widespread counterproductive competition and wasteful redundancy. Effectiveness is compromised. So are efforts to take projects, pilots, and demonstration programs to scale. This raises concerns about: *What systemic changes are needed?*

One response to all this has been the call to enhance coordination among the many overlapping programs, services, and initiatives. Clearly, a more unified and cohesive approach is needed. However, the emphasis on enhancing coordination is insufficient for addressing the core problem which is *marginalization* in school policy, planning, and practices of the whole enterprise devoted to addressing barriers to learning.

Below we delineate a unifying intervention framework and an integrated infrastructure for the many initiatives, projects, programs, and services schools pursue in addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development.

A Unifying Concept for Ending Marginalization & Fragmentation of Learning Supports

The unifying concept of an *Enabling or Learning Supports Component* is presented as an umbrella under which the many fragmented initiatives, projects, programs, and services can be pulled together. That is, such a Component can house all efforts to prevent and minimize the impact of the many problems interfering with learning and teaching and can do so in ways that maximize engagement in productive learning and positive development. For the school and community as a whole, the intent is to produce a safe, healthy, nurturing environment characterized by respect for differences, trust, caring, and support.

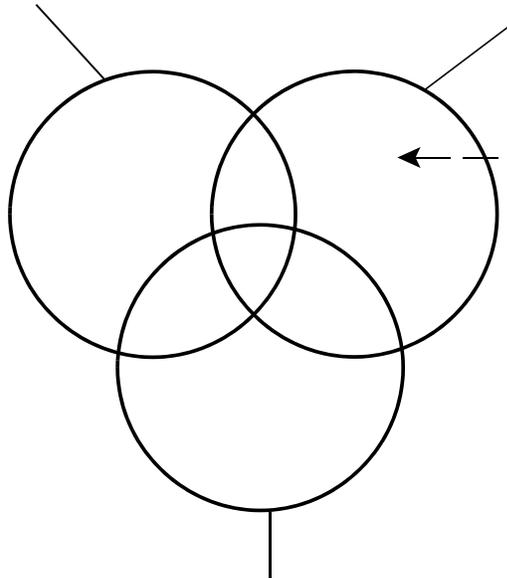
An Enabling or Learning Supports Component focuses on enhancing policy and strategic collaboration to develop comprehensive approaches that maximize learning and in the process strengthen the well-being of students, families, schools, and neighborhoods. This is accomplished by fully integrating the enterprise into a school's efforts to improve instruction (see Figure on next page).

Given the current state of school resources, efforts to establish and institutionalize an Enabling or Learning Supports Component clearly must be accomplished by rethinking and redeploying how existing resources are used. The work requires weaving school owned resources and community owned resources together to develop comprehensive and cohesive approaches. The work also must take advantage of the natural opportunities at schools for addressing learning, behavior, and emotional problems and promoting personal and social growth.

Needed: Revised Policy to Establish an Umbrella for School Improvement Planning Related to Addressing Barriers to Learning and Promoting Healthy Development

Direct Facilitation of Learning
(Instructional Component)

Addressing Barriers to Learning & Teaching
(Enabling or Learning Supports Component –
an umbrella for ending marginalization by unifying
the many fragmented efforts and evolving a
comprehensive approach)



Examples of initiatives, programs, and services

- >positive behavioral supports
- >programs for safe and drug free schools
- >full service community schools & Family Resource Ctrs
- >Safe Schools/Healthy Students
- >School Based Health Center movement
- >Coordinated School Health Program
- >bi-lingual, cultural, and other diversity programs
- >compensatory education programs
- >special education programs
- >mandates stemming from the No Child Left Behind Act
- >And many more activities by student support staff

Governance and Resource Management
(Management Component)

A Continuum of Interventions to Meet the Needs of All Children and Youth

An Enabling or Learning Supports Component is operationalized into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive framework that incorporates two frameworks. One is the continuum framing the scope of desired intervention; the other is a conceptualization that organizes the “content” of efforts for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and does so with appreciation of the role played by efforts to promote healthy development.

By viewing programs, services, projects, and initiatives along a continuum of student needs, schools and communities are more likely to provide the right interventions for the right students at the right time. Such a continuum encompasses efforts to positively affect a full spectrum of learning, physical, social-emotional, and behavioral problems in every school and community by

- promoting healthy development and preventing problems
- intervening as early after the onset of problems as is feasible
- providing special assistance for severe and chronic problems.

Such a continuum encompasses efforts to enable academic, social, emotional, and physical development and address learning, behavior, and emotional problems at every school. Most schools have some programs and services that fit along the entire continuum. However, the tendency to focus mostly on the most severe problems has skewed things so that too little is done to prevent and intervene early after the onset of a problem. As a result, the whole enterprise has been characterized as a “waiting for failure” approach.

Framing the Content of Learning Supports

Pioneering efforts have operationalized the content of an Enabling or Learning Supports Component into six programmatic arenas. In effect, they have moved from a “laundry-list” of programs, services, and activities to a defined content or “curriculum” framework that categorizes and captures the essence of the multifaceted ways schools need to address barriers to learning.

The six content arenas organize learning supports into programs for

- *enhancing 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)
- *supporting transitions* (e.g., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes, daily transitions, etc.)
- *increasing home and school connections*
- *responding to, and where feasible, preventing school and personal crises*
- *increasing community involvement and support* (e.g., outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
- *facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed.*

Combining the continuum of interventions with the six content arenas provides a “big picture” of a *comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach*.

The resulting matrix (see the next page) creates a unifying umbrella framework to guide rethinking and restructuring of the daily work of all staff who provide learning supports at a school. When it is used as a tool for mapping and analysis of resources and identifying gaps and redundancies, it helps increase effectiveness and efficiency of the supports for learning.

For more on this, see the list of resources and references.

Matrix for reviewing scope and content of a component to address barriers to learning.*

		Scope of Intervention		
		Systems for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems	Systems for Early Intervention (Early after problem onset)	Systems of Care
Organizing around the Content/ "curriculum" (for addressing barriers to learning & promoting healthy development)	Classroom-Focused Enabling			
	Crisis/ Emergency Assistance & Prevention			
	Support for transitions			
	Home Involvement in Schooling			
	Community Outreach/ Volunteers			
	Student and Family Assistance			
		Accommodations for differences & disabilities	Specialized assistance & other intensified interventions (e.g., Special Education & School-Based Behavioral Health)	

*Note that specific school-wide and classroom-based activities related to positive behavior support, “prereferral” interventions, and the eight components of Center for Prevention and Disease Control’s Coordinated School Health Program are embedded into the six content (“curriculum”) areas.