

Policy Notes

THE CHALLENGE

Expanding the School Improvement Agenda to Encompass Development of a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

The focus on improved curriculum, standards, teacher quality, and accountability have all shaped school improvement efforts over the past few years. Each state has worked with all districts on implementing these reforms. While moving some schools forward, the momentum has been limited in many schools. According to a Center on Education Policy Report, half of America's public schools didn't meet federal achievement standards this past year.

So everyone wants change. However, most discussions about reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act are seen by many primarily as recipes for maintaining the unsatisfactory status quo.

What's missing? – The dominant answers to this question usually emphasize a variety of instructional and management concerns. For a relatively small group of educators, the answer goes further. What's fundamentally missing is an in-depth focus on enhancing school improvement policy and practice to move forward in comprehensively addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

There have been marginal discussions about this (especially with respect to the dropout data). Moreover, policy makers like to point to pilots and projects that have focused on specific problems and have had some impact on some students. And, the marginal discussions make it likely that Congress will continue to parse out grants to a few states and districts and provide mega-grants to a few communities.

In 2012, the big challenge is to move out of the margins and expand the school improvement agenda to include development of a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports. In doing so, there are many lessons that have been and are being learned for the many pilots, projects, and other "experiments" designed to enhance the ability of schools to increase equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school and beyond.

See, for example:

- >the current state education agency initiative for a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports in Louisiana –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing2.htm#louisiana>
- >the current district-wide initiative in Gainesville City Schools (GA) –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/aasagainesville.pdf>

**Send your views about this matter to us
(Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu)
we will synthesize and circulate what we receive.**



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