

*AASA/UCLA/Scholastic Leadership Initiative for
New Directions for Learning Supports*

*Update on the Learning Supports Lead District Collaboration
(June, 2012)*

**Three Districts Working Together to Build a Unified
and Comprehensive System of Learning Support**

In the Fall 2009, American Association of School Administrators (AASA), Scholastic and UCLA created a Learning Supports Leadership Initiative focused on enhancing development of a comprehensive and unified system of learning supports so that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and beyond. As part of an ongoing partnership between Scholastic and UCLA, a Lead District Collaboration was designed to further support AASA's flagship initiative, Educating the Total Child, which is aimed at advocating for an education approach designed to effect real change by addressing key factors that determine children's academic achievement.

Overall, the leadership initiative is intended to help education leaders transform school improvement efforts by developing a unified and comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students. To meet this goal, AASA, Scholastic and UCLA work together to:

- 1) Identify Lead Districts to participate in the collaborative and move forward in creating and integrating the development of a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports into school improvement planning and implementation.
- 2) Provide full integration of efforts to advance the development of a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports into the AASA Leadership Development Department's efforts.
- 3) Create and promote interest, readiness, and build understanding about the nature and scope of a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports among a broad segment of school administrators.

With respect to this last objective, the collaborative is a stimulus for additional district leaders to learn more about how to pursue a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports. We are disseminating learnings and information through various online and print outreach and professional development channels. The lead districts are also featured participants in UCLA's growing District and State Learning Supports Collaborative Network for Developing Comprehensive Systems for Learning Support, a national network which includes many educators at state and district levels who are working to move their focus on learning supports in new directions and are eager to share and learn from others involved in the work.

Current Lead districts participating in the collaborative include:

- **Gainesville City Schools, Georgia.** Gainesville City Schools has been involved with the initiative since 2009. Through the leadership of Superintendent Dr. Merrienne Dyer and her team, this district quickly moved forward in developing a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports which is fully integrated into their school improvement goals and have begun sharing with others across the country. After only 3 years, they are reporting substantial outcomes including: Increases in student achievement (more students achieving “Exceeding Expectations” on state testing than ever before and at every school); Increases in graduation rates (up from 73.3% to 87.2%) and a decrease in disciplinary tribunals (down by 27%). A case study, by the Education Development Center, documenting their process and initial outcomes was released in February 2012.
- **Grant Parish School District, Louisiana.** In 2009, the Louisiana State Department of Education created a state level design team to help create and lead a strategic plan for systemic change and widespread replication of comprehensive learning supports. Grant Parish Schools was one of the first districts to sign on and, under the leadership of Superintendent Sheila Jackson, the district continues to support the work. Over the past year, the school teams have attended two retreats focused on implementation of learning supports. The assistant principal in each school has direct responsibility for implementation; their teams are focused on building capacity, infrastructure and communication for coming school year. The district team is led by Melanie Lavespere, Federal Programs Director, with assistance from Rebecca Fletcher, Student Services Coordinator. Grant will participate in the lead district collaborative to further strengthen their implementation.
- **Stillwater Area Public School District, Minnesota.** After elementary principals petitioned the school board for assistance in learning supports, Stillwater School District hired licensed Social Workers to serve as Learning Supports Student Advocates. Then district lead, Chris Lennox, Assistant Superintendent, led district policy revision in support of integrating a comprehensive system of learning supports. New Superintendent Corey Lunn has embraced the focus on learning supports; and in a lean budget year, Superintendent Lunn has maintained the Student Advocate positions, hired a Learning Supports Coordinator, Kate Pechacek, and has begun to build local school infrastructure to insure fidelity of implementation. New Student Services Director Paul Lee joins the team this summer and will have direct supervision of Student Advocates. This year, they will participate in the lead district collaborative in an effort to learn from others and further strengthen their implementation.

The three districts participated in a one day session on June 27, 2012 designed for sharing and moving forward. The following is intended to capture key facets of the development of a unified and comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students in each district. For additional information, see *Where’s it Happening? Trailblazing and Pioneer Initiatives* and scroll down to the section on each district -- <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm> .

Gainesville City Schools, Georgia (7,000 students, 8 schools, 78% eligible for free or reduced price lunch)

The January, 2012 case study of the district's progress in implementing a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports provides a fine overview of the what the Gainesville district has accomplished. See

<http://www1.gcstk12.net/images/shared/other/rebuildingforlearning.pdf>

In addition go to "*Where's It Happening? Trailblazing and Pioneer Initiatives* at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm> and see their *Learning Supports Brochure*, *Superintendent's Blog*, and the *Superintendent's power point presentation*.

Here are some highlights to underscore the innovative leadership the district provides:

Getting started

The district was introduced to the frameworks of the comprehensive system of learning supports in December, 2009, at the first meeting of the AASA/UCLA/Scholastic lead district collaborative. With the vision and leadership of the superintendent and her administrative team, they have integrated learning supports into their strategic planning through organizing personnel, programs, and resources around three primary and essential components: instruction, management, and learning supports.

The position of a Director of Learning Supports and the creation of school-based learning support leadership teams moved the work ahead. These teams are subgroups of the school leadership teams. At the district level, collaboration with community resources has been integrated to fill gaps in the schools resources.

Some benchmarks from the academic year 2011-2012

- On site and distance coaching for the district focused on alignment of instruction, management and learning supports; prioritized strategies based on the district shift to common core standards and inquiry based learning. School consultation with principals and leadership teams to develop strategic school improvement plans incorporating learning supports. A follow-up site visit was used to facilitate progress.
- Discussion of learning supports was placed on the agenda for district leadership meetings, school leadership meetings, board meetings, community meetings.
- A learning supports brochure produced.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/gainesvillebroch.pdf>
- Transition plans continue to be strengthened to support students as they move from elementary to middle and on to high school.
- A trainer of trainers was developed for district staff to carry out programs for family engagement and literacy readiness for preschoolers in city housing complexes. (The state director of preschool education attended the kick off.)

Plans for 2012-2013

- Continue to monitor data to identify problems/barriers and strengthen intervention programs to address them; continue to use data to show impact
- Encourage schools to work together on common problems (e.g., share strategies and resources)
- The Superintendent will continue to integrate learning support into each of the state initiatives and mandates (e.g., school improvement plans, teacher assessment of performance),
- Continue to provide capacity building for classroom teachers. Including them in the review of mapping school resources may be a part of this.
- All staff asked to take the online leadership institute Rebuilding for Learning either over the summer on their own or on a professional development day set aside for this during the fall – <http://rebuildingforlearning.scholastic.com/>

Sharing their successes in developing a unified and comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students

The intent of the lead district collaboration is to develop demonstrations that can be used to inform and aid others in establishing similar approaches. Because Gainesville has been at it longer than the other two districts and has outcomes to show for their work, it is rapidly becoming a focal point of interest across the country. A few examples:

- A team of principals and staff from Newark, NJ school district working with New York University and the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education initiative visited to learn more about the implementation of learning supports.
- The Superintendent was asked to provide a blog to the Atlanta Constitution newspaper site in order to initiate a dialogue and raise awareness about learning support with other districts.
- The Superintendent is part of the Coalition for Community Schools superintendents' initiative and shares information on learning supports for others in that initiative.
- The Superintendent works with the National Dropout Prevention Center and shares information with them.
- The Superintendent provided a session at the GA School Superintendents meeting.
- The district's Director of Learning Supports will join Rhonda Neal Waltman in co-facilitating work in LaCrosse, WI in August. This will include a half day county wide collaborative of organizations working with children and youth (including multiple school districts) and a full day with the district administrative staff to focus on how to get started developing a comprehensive system of learning supports

Grant Parish, Louisiana (3,200 students, 9 schools, 500 employees, rural)

See: <http://gpsbtech.ipower.com/cls.htm>

Focus on resource mapping and analysis to introduce learning supports and create readiness:

- Initial mapping took place in the Spring 2011 with Louisiana Department of Education Assistance (Tavia Crumpler and Rhonda Waltman, coaching the process). Each school participated with a team that included principal and/or assistant principal, teacher leaders, counselor.
- At an end of year Retreat (May/June 2011) the resource map was a major discussion focus. Each school team analyzed the gaps they had and planned for 2011-2012 implementation of learning supports. Schools were especially interested what resources other schools had in place.
- In the 2011-12 school year, David Sikes, Regional Facilitator from the state's DOE, worked with school teams to analyze how well resources fit with the school's priorities to determine next steps. Each school completed the survey of the content areas and school-community connections. Each team identified roles and goals.
- Analyses used the following discussion prompts to focus on barriers to learning:
 - >What are the major barriers to student learning?
 - >How will we adjust our data wall to identify barriers and progress?
 - >What is our plan of action using the district's logic model?
- In analyzing resource use, the following prompts were used:
 - >What resources do we currently have (including human capital)?
 - >What do we currently do (school programs/activities)?
 - >What community resources are available (surrounding communities)?
 - >What are common data concerns (individual student information, discipline data, academic data)?

Implementation of comprehensive learning support system:

- The Assistant Principal in each school is the lead for learning supports.
- The superintendent asked each school to focus on classroom based approaches to learning supports as an initial priority.
- Each school chose a second content arena based on school needs (e.g., transitions, home involvement, transitions, community outreach, student/family assistance, crisis prevention/response).

A Key Implementation Challenge and Opportunity to be addressed:

Expansion of existing student referral meetings (focused on individual students) into a learning supports leadership team (focused on common *types* of barriers to learning and prevention/early intervention to address them).

Moving Forward: Plans for 2012-13

- The Superintendent recommended revising mapping at the beginning of the new school year.
- New position for learning supports lead, part of the federal programs office.
- Superintendent will focus on learning supports at the monthly meeting of Assistant Principals

Other possible next steps:

- Include a comprehensive learning support focus into school improvement plans (e.g. three component in guidelines and planning)
- Work with School Board to establish policy for a comprehensive system of learning support.
- School by school data to show impact of a learning support systems (e.g., increase in attendance, decrease in discipline referrals and suspensions, increase in graduation rates).
- Each school leadership team to guide learning supports and integrate with instruction and management (school learning support group is a subgroup of the leadership team at each school).
- Build learning supports into Advisory and other existing structures.
- Continue working with initiative coach Rhonda Neal Waltman to strengthen implementation of learning supports (at specific schools, with teachers, etc.).

Stillwater Area Public School District, Minnesota (8,800 students, 14 schools and an early family childhood center, over 1,000 employees, encompasses 18 communities)

Creating readiness for a comprehensive system of learning supports:

The District's *Vision 2014*, *Student Advocate Working Group* included concepts from the Comprehensive Learning Support System framework in their 3/10/11 report to the School Board. They recommended hiring student advocates to address barriers to learning and to analyze student support in elementary schools. They also recommended a district wide analysis of how well the current learning supports fit the district's priorities.

Members of the group contacted UCLA in 5/11 regarding support and assistance as they moved to implement their plans. Initiative coach Rhonda Neal Waltman provided a series of onsite capacity building sessions.

Initial steps in implementation

- Meeting with district leadership and principals (6/11) to provide an overview of learning supports and to plan strategic steps for implementation.
- Five Student Advocates hired for the nine elementary schools. Rhonda met with them 8/25/11 to provide an orientation and support for this new role.
- Orientation to learning supports with the Division of Teaching and Learning (9/11) (includes curriculum and instruction, student support services, special education, and community education). Began mapping resources from a district perspective. Student advocates share school mapping.
- School Board approval of a Learning Support Coordinator (hired in 6/12)
- Learning Supports Implementation and Sustainability Manual drafted by the Learning Supports Design Team (5/12) . Includes initial mapping resources (see draft at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/stillwaterplan.pdf>)
- Common training (4/12) for all students support staff on a comprehensive system of learning support (including the infrastructure of a learning support team at a school). Student advocates and school psychologists will co-lead the Learning Supports meetings.

Challenges and Opportunities

- New Superintendent began in 7/11; faced with budget cutting, retained learning supports
- Transition of key leaders of learning support

Moving Forward: Plans for 2012-13

- Support will be provided for new learning supports leadership (phone, email, conference calls, onsite visits).

- A District Learning Supports Leadership Team (including representations for all school teams) will be formed to insure continuity and sustainability.
- Moving from student focused teams to learning support teams (focused on common *types* of problems, best interventions for prevention and early intervention of common problems, best use of resources) may require additional onsite support and capacity building for teams and for principals.
- Expand Learning Supports to secondary schools.
- Using 2011-2012 data on attendance, discipline, special ed referrals, etc. as baseline, school and districts will use this year's data to monitor progress and impact of learning supports.
- Revisit mapping at all school and from district perspective.
- Continue to focus on classroom based learning supports and integrate with Response to Intervention.
- Schools will choose a second content area that fits their priorities.

Other possible next steps:

- Integrate learning supports into guidelines and implementation in school strategic plans.
- Share information on learning supports with the board in anticipation of policy proposals.

About Sustaining the Work and Social Marketing

A continuous focus for the work is on ensuring that what is developed is sustained. This involves a carefully crafted and strategically planned focus on social marketing and a plan for minimizing the impact of leadership changes. The Center shared some thoughts about all this at the June 27th session and provided the following two brief documents designed to aid planning.

>*Social Marketing as a Spiraling Facet of Program and Systemic Change*

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

>*Leadership Changes: Minimizing the Downside*

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