
Priority: Enhancing the School's Role in Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

As you know, public education is at a crossroads.

One of the most pressing challenges is to improve how schools enhance equity of opportunity. A critical facet of this is improving the role of schools in addressing barriers to learning and teaching. This requires moving school improvement policy and practice in new directions rather than tweaking and tinkering with old ideas. Efforts to expand the use of instructional technology, develop new curriculum standards, make teachers more accountable, and improve teacher preparation and licensing all have merit; but they are insufficient for addressing the many everyday barriers to learning and teaching that interfere with effective student engagement in classroom instruction.

The imperative for moving in new directions is highlighted by such long-standing problems as

- narrowing the achievement gap
- reducing unnecessary referrals for special assistance and special education
- improving school climate and retaining good teachers
- reducing the number of low performing schools
- enhancing graduation rates and successful transitions to post-secondary opportunities.

In some schools, progress related to these concerns is being made. For many, however, substantial and sustainable progress remains elusive. And while the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) offers opportunities, it also continues the piecemeal approach to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students and families.

It is time to make addressing barriers to learning and teaching a high priority in school improvement policy and planning.

As aids in doing so, our Center at UCLA has developed a range of free resources (such as those included in the System Change Toolkit). See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>.