

## Senate's ESEA Reauthorization Proposal & Equity of Opportunity: Any Concerns?

As the Senate committee marks-up the proposed comprehensive reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), all those concerned about student and learning supports, bullying, dropouts, social emotional learning, the promotion of physical, mental and emotional health, student and staff safety, etc. etc. will be taking a careful look (see <http://harkin.senate.gov/documents/pdf/4e9451f1924d3.pdf> ).

A review of specific sections relevant to these concerns mainly finds tinkering with old ideas. Overall, the changes do too little to solve the fundamental problem of enabling schools to ensure equity of opportunity for all students to succeed.

From a political perspective, we understand why the focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students is spread through so many parts and sections (e.g., of Titles I and IV). The unfortunate consequence, however, is the continued siloing and *fragmentation* of too many programs. Then, recognizing that fragmentation is counterproductive, the tendency is to continue proposing coordination of services as the solution.

Fragmentation is a symptom of the *marginalization* of student and learning supports throughout the legislation. Better coordination, while desirable, has not and will not end the marginalization. Limited grant programs will not lead to widespread adoption of best practices at very many schools.

Assuming that this reauthorization cycle will not promote new directions for student and learning supports, our Center will continue to emphasize that states, districts, and schools can and should move forward in innovative ways to develop comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive systems for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

To do so, however, requires taking steps to end the counterproductive competition that arises from efforts that push separate, narrow agenda for student and learning supports and promoting healthy development. No single program or even a coordinated set of wrap around services can address the range of factors interfering with equity of opportunity to succeed at school for the large number of students affected. Moreover, the competition for resources resulting from separate advocacy for interventions to deal with concerns such as those mentioned above is contributing to the continuing marginalization and resultant fragmentation of essential supports. In turn, this ensures that such supports reach only a small proportion of students.

The bottom line in terms of policy is that it is time to adopt a comprehensive concept (e.g., learning supports) as the umbrella under which those who push for their special programs must learn to embed themselves (see references on next page). Focusing too much on any one facet of learning, behavior, and emotional problems is too narrow an approach to fit into the broad mission of schools in our society and is inadequate for enabling equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school. We can continue to build a few islands of excellence (demonstrations, pilots) and “Cadillac models,” but with over 90,000 schools in the U.S.A., the scale of need calls for moving quickly in fundamentally new directions.

To advance a unifying agenda, our Center has just launched the *District and State Collaborative Network for Developing Comprehensive Systems for Learning Support* (see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/network/network.html> ). All who are eager to share and want to learn from each other about moving student and learning supports in new directions are invited to join this collaborative network. If you have any interest in being part of this collaborative, please let us know.

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## **A Few Recent Center Policy & Practice Briefs of Relevance to this Matter**

*District Superintendents and the School Improvement Problem of Addressing Barriers to Learning* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/supt.pdf>

*Addressing Bullying: State Guidance to Districts and Schools is Both Helpful and a Missed Opportunity* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/bullying.pdf>

*Designing School Improvement to Enhance Classroom Climate for All Students* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schoolclimate.pdf>

*School Improvement: A Functional View of Enabling Equity of Opportunity* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/functions.pdf>

*What Do Principals Say about Their Work? Implications for Addressing Barriers to Learning and School Improvement* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/principalssay.pdf>

*Pursuing Promise Neighborhoods: With or Without the Grant Program* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/purpromneig.pdf>

*Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School: Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf>

*Embedding Mental Health into a Learning Supports Component: An Essential Step for the Field to Take Now* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/embeddingmh.pdf>

**Send your views about this matter to us  
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we will synthesize and circulate what we receive.**



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