

Five Essential Elements of a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

Developing a *Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System of Learning Supports* is a complex, multi-year process. We have delineated the specific nature and scope of the system and of the processes for getting from a fragmented and marginalized set of student and learning supports to an effective system (see the Center's *System Change Toolkit* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>).

In doing so, we have stressed that such a system needs to be *adapted* to localities.

While reasonable adaptation is wise, care must be taken not to eliminate elements that are essential to a fundamental transformation of how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. A constant problem we encounter in efforts to implement the type of approach our Center has delineated is the tendency for some places to adopt the terminology and not the substance of system transformation.

To counter this tendency, we stress the following as five essential elements that should be evident in any SEA, LEA, and school that indicates it is developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports.

(1) A three component policy for schools

To enable all students to have an equal opportunity to succeed at school, schools must directly address barriers to learning and teaching. This requires elevating such efforts so that they are a third primary and essential component for school improvement. As indicated in Exhibit A, the third component might be called a learning supports component or a component to address barriers to learning and teaching or something comparable.

The policy must be translated into a *design document* and *strategic plan* that ensures learning supports are unified and then developed into a comprehensive system that provides supportive interventions in classrooms and school-wide. The design and strategic plans for the third component must be fully integrated with the strategic plans for improving instruction and management at schools.*

Obviously, it is desirable that the three component policy be adopted at all levels (SEA, LEA, and schools), however, most schools can move forward once the district has enacted such a policy.

*Re. examples of policy statements and design and strategic planning, see Sections A and B of the Center's toolkit – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm> .



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(2) A transformative intervention framework for addressing barriers to learning and teaching

A unified and comprehensive intervention framework combines both a continuum of school and community interventions (delineated as levels)* and an organized set of five to seven content arenas. (See prototype presented in Exhibit B.)

*The continuum is designed to (a) promote positive development and prevent problems, (b) intervene as early after the onset of problems as is feasible, and (c) provide special assistance for severe and chronic problems. This continuum goes well beyond what is typically presented by a simple MTSS framework.

(3) An operational infrastructure dedicated to the third component

To ensure effective daily functioning and continuous development and improvement in keeping with the design and strategic plan, there must be

- an administrative leader (e.g., assoc. superintendent, assistant principal)
- a learning supports leadership team (e.g., a resource-oriented, system development team)
- work groups to carry out specific tasks.

(See prototype presented in Exhibit C.)

The leader's job description must be revised to reflect the new responsibilities and accountabilities and to ensure this leader is at administrative planning and decision making tables so that component development is a regular part of the agenda.

Along with the administrative leader, a learning supports leadership team maps, analyzes, identifies priorities, recommends resource redeployment, and establishes and guides workgroups for developing each facet of the component over a period of several years.

(For job and team descriptions, see Section B of the Center's toolkit – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm> .)

(4) Continuous capacity building (especially professional development)

Capacity building plans and their implementation must include a specific focus on development of the unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports. Professional development must provide on-the-job opportunities and special times focused specifically on enhancing the capability of those directly involved in the learning supports component. Professional development of teachers, administrators, other staff and volunteers, and community stakeholders must also include and emphasize on learning about how best to address barriers to learning and teaching.

(For resources related to capacity building, see Sections B and C of the Center's toolkit – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm> .)

(5) Monitoring for improvement and accountability

Essential facets of the ongoing development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports involve (a) continuous monitoring all factors that facilitate and hinder progress and then (b) ensuring actions are taken to deal with interfering factors and to enhance facilitation.

As significant progress is made in developing the system, the monitoring expands to evaluate the impact on student outcomes with specific reference to direct indicators of the effectiveness of learning supports (e.g., increased attendance, reduced misbehavior, improved learning).

(See *Standards for a Learning Supports Component* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/commcore.pdf> . This resource includes indicators for monitoring, evaluation, and accountability).



Exhibit A

A Three Component Policy Framework for Schools

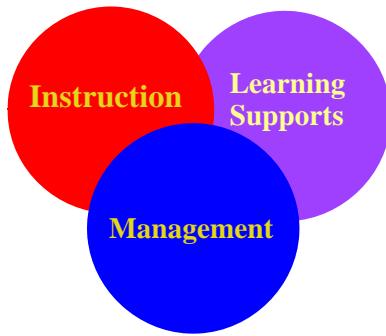


Exhibit B

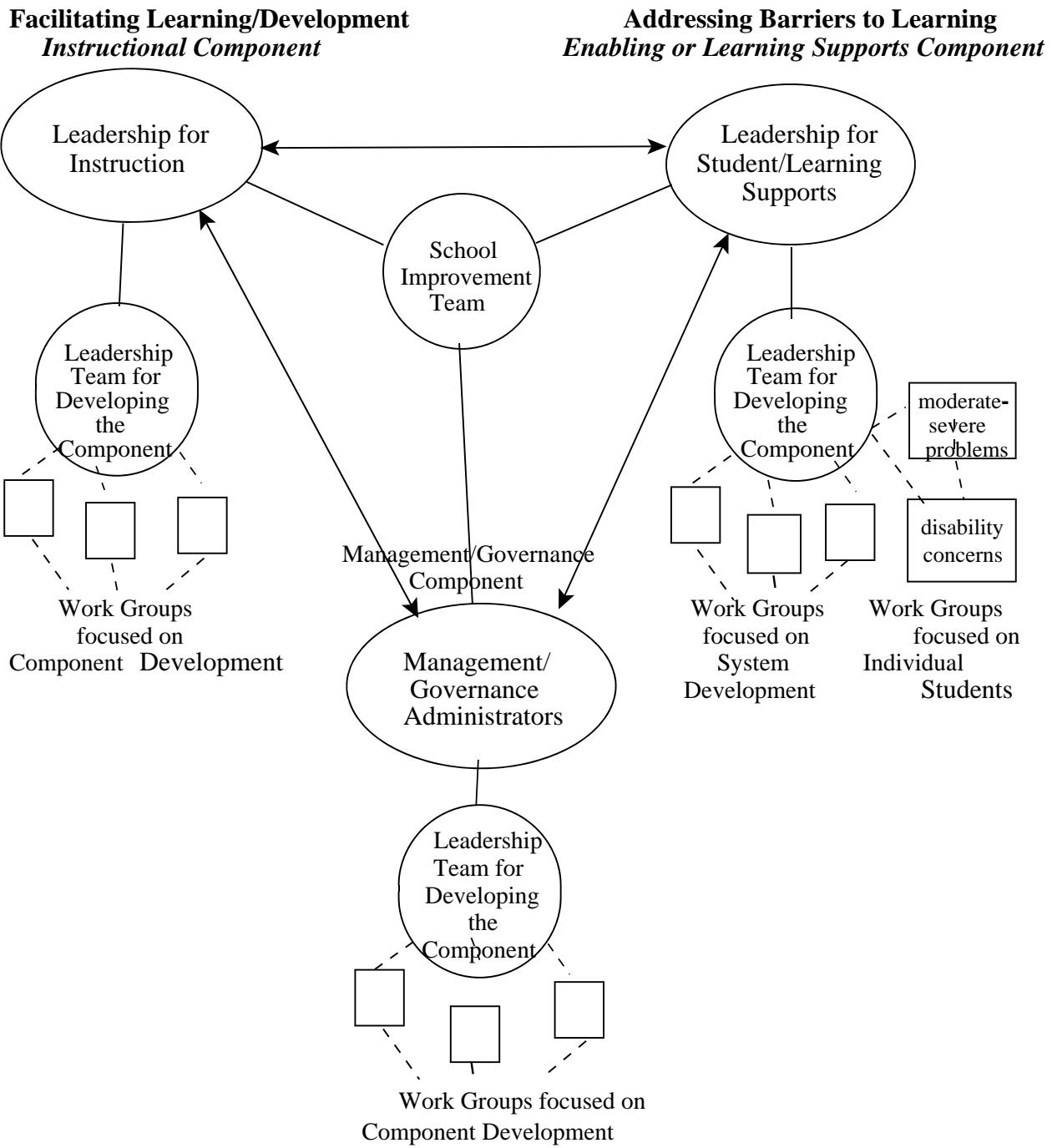
Combined Continuum and Content Arenas: Framework for a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

Learning Supports Content Areas	Levels of Intervention		
	Subsystems for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems	Subsystem for Early Intervention	Subsystem of Care (Early after problem onset)
Classroom-based approaches to enable learning			
Crisis assistance & prevention			
Support for transitions			
Home Involvement & Engagement in Schooling			
Community Engagement with Schools			
Student and Family Assistance			

* For a more details, see the self-study surveys online at
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/surveys/set1.pdf>

Exhibit C

Prototype of an Integrated Leadership Infrastructure at the School Level*



*Conceptually, the infrastructure for a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports should be designed from the school outward. That is, first consider 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.