

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

It is clear that developing a *Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports* is a complex, multi-year process. We have delineated the specifics nature and scope of the system and of the processes for getting from a fragmented and marginalized set of student and learning supports to a unified and comprehensive 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, here are five essential elements that should be the focus of any place that indicates it is developing a unified and comprehensive 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 need to be able to 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> .



Note: The center is co-directed by Howard Adelman & Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA.

Phone: (310) 825-3634 email: smhp@ucla.edu website – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

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

A unified and comprehensive intervention framework combines both an integrated and systemic continuum of school and community intervention (delineated as levels)* and is organized into a multifaceted and cohesive 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 must not be presented as identical to the tiers or pyramid currently emphasized in relation to Response to Intervention (RTI) and behavioral initiatives.

(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 clarifies, 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 and comprehensive 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 emphasis 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 and comprehensive 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 that are direct indicators of the effectiveness of learning supports (e.g., increased attendance, reduced misbehavior, improved learning).

(See *Common Core 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

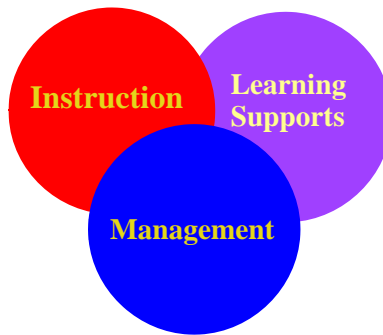


Exhibit B

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

		Levels of Intervention		
		Systems for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems	Systems for Early Intervention (Early after problem onset)	Systems of Care
Learning Supports Content Areas	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			

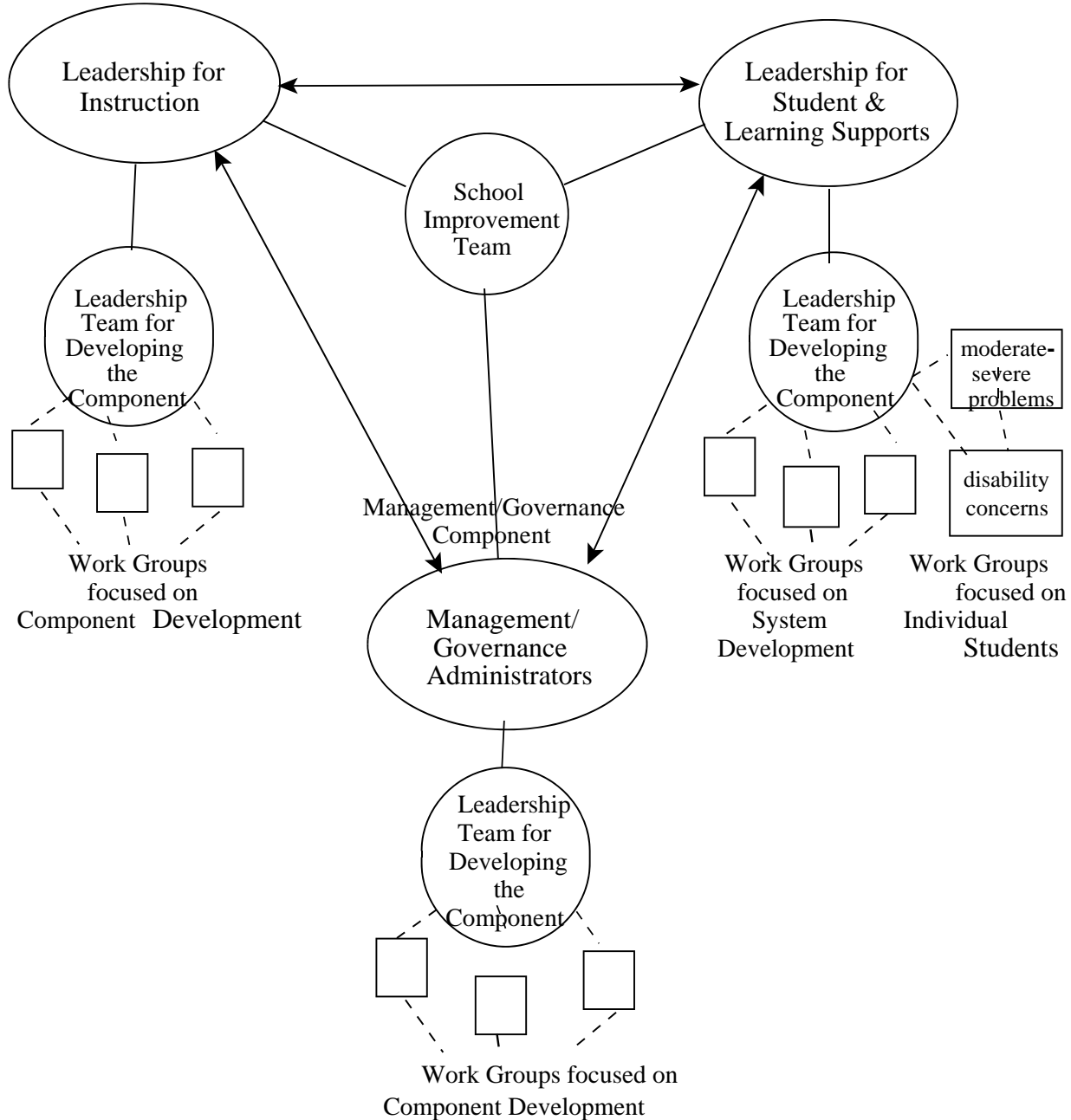
*For a more details, see – *Brief Overviews* in Section A of the Center’s System Change Toolkit online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkit1.htm>.

Exhibit C

Prototype of an Integrated Leadership Infrastructure at the School Level*

Facilitating Learning/Development
Instructional Component

Addressing Barriers to Learning
Enabling or Learning Supports Component



*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.