Evolving School Improvement Planning for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching
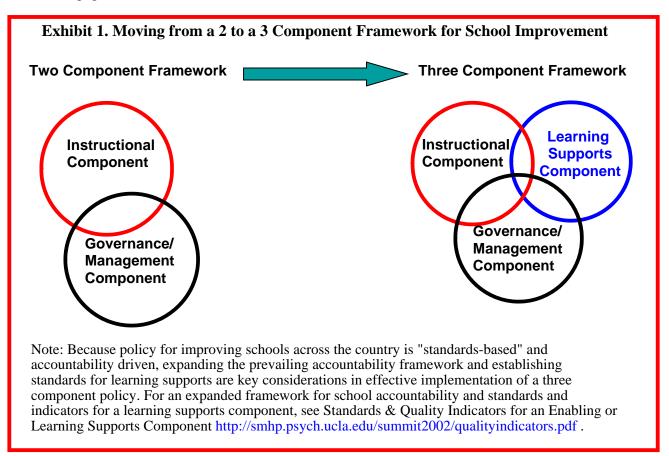
As a result of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states, districts, and schools are revisiting school improvement plans. This is an opportunity to innovate and evolve the way schools handle factors that interfere with students learning and teachers teaching.

ESSA recognizes that significant numbers of students require supports to successfully meet challenging state academic standards. The legislation clearly underscores that student and learning supports permeate efforts to enable every student to succeed.

Unfortunately, the act muddies the nature and scope of such supports by scattering references to them throughout the various Titles, Parts, Subparts, and Sections. By addressing barriers to learning and teaching in a piecemeal and mostly indirect manner, ESSA conveys a fragmented picture and a lack of coherence with respect to essential supports. This perpetuates long-standing problems related to improving student/learning supports (e.g., fragmented planning and implementation, marginalization, counterproductive competition for sparse resources).

Based on our Center's analyses of school improvement plans, this brief resource provides a planning guide for detailing a transformation of student/learning supports.

> **(1)** *Adopt a three component framework for school improvement*. Evolve the current two component emphasis on instruction and management/governance to establish a third component that unifies existing efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. Moving from a 2 to a 3 Component Framework for School Improvement

Two Component Framework → **Three Component Framework**

Instructional Component

Governance/ Management Component

Instructional Component

Learning Supports Component

Governance/ Management Component

Note: Because policy for improving schools across the country is "standards-based" and accountability driven, expanding the prevailing accountability framework and establishing standards for learning supports are key considerations in effective implementation of a three component policy. For an expanded framework for school accountability and standards and indicators for a learning supports component, see Standards & Quality Indicators for an Enabling or Learning Supports Component http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/qualityindicators.pdf .

(2) *Operationalize development of the third component as a multiyear plan for establishing a comprehensive and equitable system of student/learning supports*. Stress that the component focuses on the whole child development and enhancing equity of opportunity for all students in-classrooms and schoolwide. Effective implementation also can foster productive school-community relationships and promote a positive school climate.

Outline the component as having the following two major facets (see Exhibit 2):

(A) *A continuum of intervention that expands what is referred to in ESSA as a multi-tier system of supports (MTSS).* See Exhibit 3. Note as contrasted to the limited way MTSS is portrayed, the need is to develop the continuum as an *integrated set of subsystems that weaves together school-community resources* for (1) promoting healthy social-emotional development and preventing problems, (2) responding quickly when problems arise, and (3) contributing effectively to helping with severe and chronic problems.

(B) *A cohesive and coherent approach that coalesces programs, services, and initiatives*. To escape the trend to generate laundry lists of programs and services at each level, it is necessary also to group the activity into a circumscribed set of arenas reflecting the *content purpose* of the activity. In doing so, a core concern is enhancing supports in the classroom, as well as expanding supports schoolwide. A cohesive and coherent approach coalesces programs, services, and initiatives by organizing them into arenas of student/learning supports that map onto the continuum. Research has established six such arenas. As indicated in Exhibit 2 and outlined in Exhibit 4, these are categorized as (1) classroom-based learning supports, (2) support for transitions (assisting students and families negotiate school and grade changes and many other transitions), (3) home & school connections & engagement, (4) crisis response and prevention, (5) community involvement and collaborative engagement, and (6) student and family special assistance.
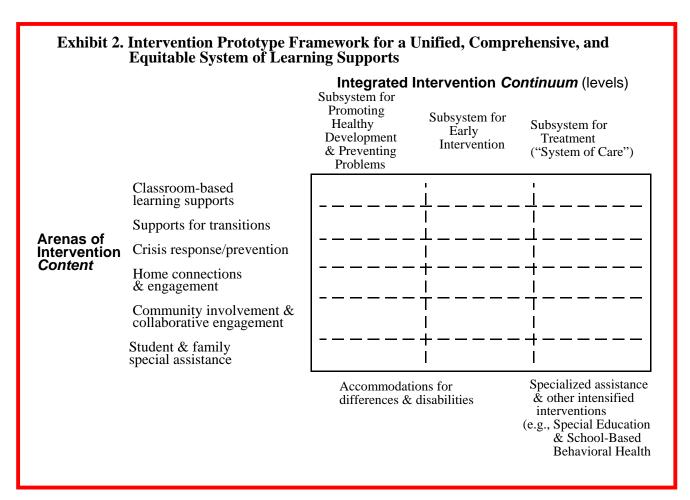
Exhibit 2. Intervention Prototype Framework for a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System of Learning Supports

Integrated Intervention *Continuum* (levels)

Subsystem for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems — Subsystem for Early Intervention — Subsystem for Treatment ("System of Care")

Arenas of Intervention *Content*

- Classroom-based learning supports
- Supports for transitions
- Crisis response/prevention
- Home connections & engagement
- Community involvement & collaborative engagement
- Student & family special assistance

Accommodations for differences & disabilities

Specialized assistance & other intensified interventions (e.g., Special Education & School-Based Behavioral Health)

Exhibit 3. Intervention *Continuum:* Interconnected *Subsystems*

School **Resources**
(facilities, stakeholders,
programs, services)

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weaving together school and
relevant community resources
as appropriate and feasible

Community **Resources**
(facilities, stakeholders,
programs, services)

Examples:
• General health education
• Social and emotional
  learning programs
• Recreation programs
• Enrichment programs
• Support for transitions
• Conflict resolution
• Home involvement
• Drug and alcohol education

• Drug counseling
• Pregnancy prevention
• Violence prevention
• Gang intervention
• Dropout prevention
• Suicide prevention
• Learning/behavior
  accommodations &
  response to intervention
• Work programs

• Special education for
  learning disabilities,
  emotional disturbance,
  and other health
  impairments

*Subsystem for Promoting
Healthy Development &
Preventing Problems*
primary prevention – includes
universal interventions
(low end need/low cost
per individual programs)

Subsystem for Early Intervention
early-after-onset – includes
selective & indicated interventions
(moderate need, moderate
cost per individual)

Subsystem for Treatment of
severe and chronic problems
indicated
interventions as part of a
"system of care"
(High need/high cost
per individual programs)

Examples:
• Recreation & Enrichment
• Public health &
  safety programs
• Prenatal care
• Home visiting programs
• Immunizations
• Child abuse education
• Internships & community
  service programs
• Economic development

• Early identification to treat
  health problems
• Monitoring health problems
• Short-term counseling
• Foster placem't/group homes
• Family support
• Shelter, food, clothing
• Job programs

• Emergency/crisis treatment
• Family preservation
• Long-term therapy
• Probation/incarceration
• Disabilities programs
• Hospitalization
• Drug treatmen

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Exhibit 4. Six Content Arenas of a Learning Supports Component

Research over many years stresses that the content of student and learning supports clusters usefully into six arenas. (We think of these arenas as the curriculum of learning supports.)
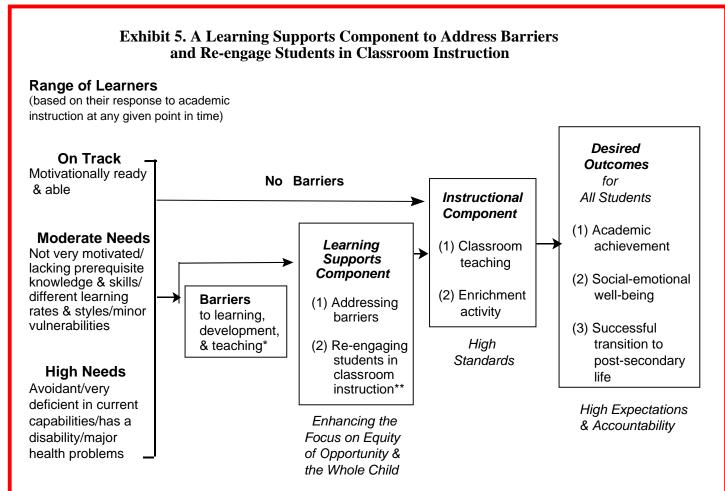
(1) *Classroom-based learning supports*. The aim is to enhance strategies in regular classroom to enable learning (e.g., working collaboratively with other teachers and student support staff to ensure instruction is personalized with an emphasis on enhancing intrinsic motivation for all students and especially those manifesting mild-moderate learning and behavior problems; re-engaging those who have become disengaged from learning at school; providing learning accommodations and supports as necessary; using response to intervention in applying special assistance; addressing external barriers with a focus on prevention and early intervening).

(2) *Support for transitions*. The aim is to support students and families as they negotiate the many transition challenges related to schooling (e.g., hurdles encountered during school and grade changes, daily transitions, program transitions, accessing supports, and so forth).

(3) *Home connections and engagement with school*. The aim is to address barriers to home involvement (e..g., help those in the home enhance supports for their children, strengthen home and school communication, increase home support of the school).

(4) *Community involvement and collaborative engagement*. (e.g., outreach to develop greater community connection and support from a wide range of entities, including enhanced use of volunteers and other community resources, establishing a school-community collaborative)

(5) *Crisis response and prevention.* The aim is to effectively handle and, as feasible, prevent school and personal crises (e.g., preparing for emergencies, implementing plans when an event occurs, countering the impact of traumatic events, implementing prevention strategies; creating a caring and safe learning environment)

(6) *Student and family special assistance.* The aim is to facilitate student and family access to special assistance (including specialized services on- and off-campus) as needed.

The six arenas:

- unify student and learning supports by grouping the many fragmented approaches experienced at school in ways that reduce responding to overlapping problems with separate and sometimes redundant interventions

- address barriers to learning and teaching through improving personalized instruction, increasing accommodations, and providing in-classroom supports and special assistance as soon as problems arise

- enhance the focus on motivational considerations with a special emphasis on intrinsic motivation as it relates to individual readiness and ongoing involvement and with the intent of fostering intrinsic motivation as a basic outcome

- add specialized remediation, treatment, and rehabilitation as necessary, but only as necessary.

A fuller sense of each of these arenas is provided in the set of self-study surveys online at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/surveys/set1.pdf .

Strategically, the system first addresses interfering factors and then (re)engages students in classroom instruction (see Exhibit 5).

**Exhibit 5. A Learning Supports Component to Address Barriers
and Re-engage Students in Classroom Instruction**

Range of Learners
(based on their response to academic instruction at any given point in time)

On Track
Motivationally ready & able

No   Barriers

Moderate Needs
Not very motivated/ lacking prerequisite knowledge & skills/ different learning rates & styles/minor vulnerabilities

Barriers
to learning, development, & teaching*

Learning Supports Component

(1) Addressing barriers

(2) Re-engaging students in classroom instruction**

Instructional Component

(1) Classroom teaching

(2) Enrichment activity

High Standards

High Needs
Avoidant/very deficient in current capabilities/has a disability/major health problems

Enhancing the Focus on Equity of Opportunity & the Whole Child

Desired Outcomes for All Students

(1) Academic achievement

(2) Social-emotional well-being

(3) Successful transition to post-secondary life

High Expectations & Accountability

*Barriers include both external and internal factors and can be grouped in terms of neighborhood, family, school, peer, and personal conditions.

**In promoting engagement and re-engagement, the component stresses a reduced emphasis on using extrinsic reinforcers and an enhanced focus on intrinsic motivation as a process and outcome consideration. In keeping with public education and public health perspectives, interventions focus on providing physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports in the classroom and schoolwide to enable learning and engagement for all students and especially those manifesting problems.

For the most recent detailed presentation and resource references, see H.S. Adelman & L. Taylor, (2017). *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide.* Free access from the Center's homepage at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/ .

(3) As a final planning step, *formulate the processes for systemic change, scale-up, and sustainability in a strategic and effectively resourced manner.* See *Education Leaders' Guide to Transforming Student/Learning Supports* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transguide.pdf or the just published *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System.* San Diego: Cognella Academic.
https://titles.cognella.com/transforming-student-and-learning-supports-9781516512782.html

A Few Center References on ESSA & Addressing Barriers to Learning

ESSA, Equity of Opportunity, and Addressing Barriers to Learning –
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essaanal.pdf

Using ESSA to Transform Student and Learning Supports –
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/may2016essa.pdf

ESSA State Consolidated Plans: Rethinking MTSS to Better Address Barriers to Learning –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essamtss.pdf

Bullying As Another Symptom of the Need for ESSA Planning to Focus on Transforming Student and Learning Supports – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/bullyessa.pdf

ESSA: Will Adding a Nonacademic Accountability Indicator Enhance Student and Learning Supports? –
    http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/accountrep.pdf

Piecemeal Policy Advocacy for Improving Schools Amounts to Tinkering and Works Against Fundamental System Transformation – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/tinkering.pdf

Preparing for ESSA? Start by Reviewing the Analyses of What's been Wrong with School Improvement Efforts – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/markrev.pdf

Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide.
    Free access from the Center's homepage at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/

Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System. San Diego: Cognella Academic.
    https://titles.cognella.com/transforming-student-and-learning-supports-9781516512782.html

For a range of other resources related to this matter, see
National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html

And feel free to let us know if you want us to help.
Contact us at Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu