**First Steps at State Education Agencies and School Districts in
Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports
as an Essential Component for School Improvement and Student Success**

State education agencies and districts have roles and functions associated with a wide range of federal and state funded programs as well as a range of student support programs designed to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school. As the focus on school improvement at state education agencies and school districts moves from mostly stressing compliance to playing a greater role in capacity building for school improvement, leaders are rethinking strategies to integrate the various programs, personnel, and funds available for student and learning supports.

To help with all this, our Center at UCLA reviewed how SEAs pursue their focus on addressing barriers to student learning and has distributed findings and recommendation in a report entitled:

State Education Agencies & Learning Supports: Enhancing School Improvement (2009)
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/seals.pdf

Our intent is to help agency leadership better facilitate how districts and schools fully incorporate development of a comprehensive and cohesive system for addressing barriers to learning into school improvement planning. The report includes:

< An analysis of how state education agencies frame and organize the student and learning support facets of school improvement
< Recommendations for state education agencies with respect to expanding school improvement policy, framing intervention, and reworking operational infrastructure
< Implications for school improvement guidance

We also surveyed districts about what they need to move forward; see report entitled:

*Transforming School Improvement to Develop a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports:
What District Superintendents Say They Need to Move Forward*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/superintendentssay.pdf

With the increasing number of state education agencies and districts expressing interest in a comprehensive system for learning supports, we have drawn from experiences in working with state departments of education and districts to provide a bit of a roadmap on how to get started. The following is intended as a brief overview of three key facets of moving forward.

Making it a Priority and Clarifying Why

Available data on student achievement, the achievement gap, absences, dropouts – all indicate why learning supports are imperative and need to be a high priority; data on service and program fragmentation and lack of cost effectiveness– all provide evidence about why student and learning supports need to be redeveloped into a comprehensive system.

The message needed from the education agency leaders is illustrated by the statement made by a chief state school officer in introducing her state's initiative for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports:
    "If every student in every school and community is to achieve at high levels, we must
    rethink how student supports are organized and delivered to address barriers to learning.
    This will require that schools and school districts, in collaboration with their community
    partners, develop a comprehensive, cohesive approach to delivery of learning supports

that is an integral part of their school improvement efforts. Investing in our young people today is investing in their future, and, in turn, investing in their future is an investment in the future of our state."

Such a message needs to be circulated widely as part of a formal kick-off for the work; it should be accompanied with an invitation for input immediately and at specific intervals as the work proceeds.

Turning the Vision into an Operational Design

Rather than another isolated "initiative," we find that a fundamental transformation such as this one requires a well-crafted design developed by a leadership group which represents instruction, professional development, evaluation/accountability, as well as learning supports. The group's charge is to create a strong and sustainable design for a system of learning supports that is fully integrated into guidance for school improvement.

Building on a Good Example from One SEA: We had the good fortune to work with Iowa as it developed its design for a comprehensive system of learning supports. Drawing on that experience, we suggest the following step and processes:

< The chief state school officer designates key leaders to constitute a team to prepare a design for a comprehensive system of learning supports (intervention and operational infrastructure frameworks and how to make it happen throughout the state).

>> The team in Iowa included representatives from key units, including those responsible for instruction and curriculum, professional development, special education, safe and drug free schools, at risk prevention, and data/evaluation. In addition, representatives from the field (principals, regional support staff) were included to keep a focus on how the plans would play out at the school level.

>> Consultants with relevant expertise provided input about learning supports and helped to facilitate the process

< A key staff member needs to be identified as the "point person" for leading the work, ensuring that follow up occurs between design team meetings.

< The design team is charged with producing a product in a period of about two months in a form that can be shared widely and can be used to inform the formation of a learning support component at every level (state, regional, district, and school)

< As background for the work, the team should have several sessions to make certain they are appropriately informed about matters such as

>> what is working well with respect to what schools do to support student learning and what's still needed to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage students who have become disengaged from classroom instruction -- with particular attention to reducing the achievement gap and dropout rates. (Related to this is whether there is a comprehensive intervention framework for learning supports.)

>> existing learning support policies, resources, and programs at state, regional, district, and school levels to appraise strengths, weaknesses, and gaps (e.g., What policies are in place? What needs revision if we are to develop a comprehensive system of learning supports that is fully integrated into school improvement plannning?)

>> current organizational and operational infrastructures related to learning supports at each level (e.g., How are we currently working to integrate interventions and work cohesively? Do we have adequate high level leadership for learning supports? Do we have workgroups for system development? mechanisms for collaboration across divisions and programs and between school and community?)

>> available data for evaluation and accountability (Is there a need for more data?)

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(Note: Where the information wasn't readily available, Iowa formed workgroups to gather and then present the information.)

< Meet, draft a section, share it for feedback with a representative group of stakeholders, incorporate feedback as appropriate; move on to the next section and repeat process; finalize the design document. Be clear that the protoype is to be adapted to fit localaties.

Exhibit

Table of Content from Iowa's Design Document: An Example to Build On

Iowa's design document is entitled: *Fulfilling a Promise, Investing in Iowa's Future: Enhancing Iowa's Systems of Supports for Learning and Development* online at:
http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=2588

A brief summary is online at:
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/iowabriefsummaryofdesign.pdf

The full document also is online at:
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/iowasystemofsupport.pdf

We can all learn from this a pioneering effort. Here is the Table of Contents.

Disseminate the Design as Part of a Strategic Process for Systemic Change

Rolling out the design is a first step toward widespread implementation and eventual systemic change and institutionalization (sustainability).

Key impetus for moving from the design to practice comes from

(a) Policy statements and school improvement guidance establishing that school should develop a comprehensive and cohesive system of learning supports along the lines of that presented in the design document

> SEAs and districts will need to revisit school improvement planning guides to ensure they focus on development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and do so in ways that are fully integrated with plans for improving instruction at the school. This encompasses developing guidelines for (a) operationalizing comprehensiveness in terms of a framework that encompasses a full continuum of interventions and a well conceptualized set of content arenas and (b) delineating standards and accountability indicators for each content arena.

> Guidelines for school improvement planning should include an emphasis on redefining and reframing roles and functions for school-site leadership related to development and implementation of such a system. Guidelines for school improvement planning should also specify ways to weave school and community resources into a cohesive and integrated continuum of interventions over time.

(b) Formulation of a strategic statewide plan for phasing in districts and schools

> With the focus on low performing schools and districts, the temptation is to layer another mandate on these sites. While this is inevitable, our experiences suggests the value of selecting a range of schools or districts and especially those interested in developing a learning support system.

(c) Rreframing the organizational and operational infrastructure at the SEA, at regional support units, and at participating districts

> See *State Education Agencies & Learning Supports: Enhancing School Improvement* and the guidance note *Infrastructure for Learning Supports at district, Regional, and State Offices* for a framework to consider in reworking infrastructure in ways that promote development and full integration of a comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching. As indicated, it is essential to have a cabinet level administrative leader (e.g., an associate superintendent) who is responsible and accountable for all resources related to addressing barriers to learning.

(d) Capacity building support from the SEA and regional support units

> Of particular importance is leadership training and regular access to coaching, a toolkit, and technical assistance.

Some Resources

From the Center at UCLA:

School improvement planning: What's missing? http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsmissing.htm

Another initiative? Where does it fit? A unifying framework and an integrated infrastructure for schools to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infrastructure/anotherinitiative-exec.pdf

Designing schoolwide programs in Title I schools: using the non-regulatory guidance in ways that address barriers to learning and teaching.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/DOEguidance.pdf

Legislation in need of improvement: reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act to better address barriers to learning
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/nclbra.pdf

Addressing what's missing in school improvement planning: expanding standards and accountability to encompass an enabling or learning supports component
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enabling/standards.pdf

Toward a school district infrastructure that more effectively addresses barriers to learning and teaching.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/toward a school district infrastructure.pdf

Infrastructure for learning support at district, regional, and state offices.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentsupport/toolkit/aidk.pdf

Resource oriented teams: Key infrastructure mechanisms for enhancing education supports.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf

Developing resource-oriented mechanisms to enhance learning supports - a continuing education packet.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/contedu/developing_resource_orientedmechanisms.pdf

About infrastructure mechanisms for a comprehensive learning support component.
http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infrastructure/infra_mechanisms.pdf

Frameworks for systemic transformation of student and learning supports.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/frameworksforsystemictransformation.pdf).

Community schools: Working toward institutional transformation.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/csinstitutionaltrans.pdf

Also see "Toolkit" for *Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm

Other relevant resources:

Hawai`i Department of Education (2004). *Comprehensive Student Support System.*
>Overview online at: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/hawaii.pdf

California's Proposed Legislation (2005). *Comprehensive Pupil Learning Support System.* >Online at: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ab171(1-20-05).pdf

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006). *The school leader's guide to student learning supports: New directions for addressing barriers to learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006). *The implementation guide to student learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide: New directions for addressing barriers to learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Adelman, H.S. & Taylor, L. (2009). *Rebuilding for learning: Addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging students.* New York: Scholastic, Inc.