

**Implementing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports:
A Brief District Guide for Moving Forward**

(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/implementingls.pdf>)

Strategic planning is necessary to ensure that the vision and design for a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports are effectively and efficiently implemented. The plan spells out an answer to: *How do we get there from here?*

Given that the work involves major systemic changes, the focus is on four major phases:

- (1) Creating Readiness and Commitment: enhancing the climate/culture/conditions for innovative systemic change
- (2) Start-up and phase in – initial implementation: adapting and phasing-in a prototype with well-designed infrastructure and capacity building
- (3) Sustaining, evolving, and enhancing outcomes: ensuring institutionalization, maintenance, momentum, and progress
- (4) Ongoing evolution: replication to scale and creative renewal.

**Exhibit 1 provides an overview of four phases and
some key tasks related to each phase.**

For each phase and task, strategic planning clarifies the who, what, when, and how with respect to:

- > *leadership and staffing for overseeing, steering, and implementing the strategic plan,*
- > *capacity building,*
- > *establishing ways to monitor (e.g., benchmarks and processes for assessing progress toward task completion),*
- > *formulating ways to evaluate effective implementation (e.g., indicators, standards, deliverables, and processes).*

Initial action planning, stresses the work with respect to the first two phases:

- (1) creating awareness, readiness, and committed engagement among key stakeholders for moving forward in developing a *Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*
- (2) initial implementation and phasing in the work at designated districts/schools.

Exhibit 1

Overview: Establishing a Comprehensive Learning Supports System

At all levels, key stakeholders and their leadership must understand and commit to systemic changes for the proposed innovation. Commitment must be reflected in policy statements and creation of an infrastructure that ensures essential leadership, resources, motivation, and capability for developing an effective system of learning supports.

Developing such a system requires blending resources. Thus, the emphasis throughout is on *collaboration* – cooperation, coordination, and, where viable, integration – among school and community stakeholders. Planning and accountability related to the following four phases of systemic change use data from evaluation of major antecedents, transactions, and outcomes.

First Phase – *Creating Readiness and Commitment*

- Introduce basic ideas to relevant groups of stakeholders to build interest and consensus for the work and to garner feedback and support
- Establish a policy framework and obtain leadership commitment – the leadership should make a commitment to adopt a comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching as a primary and essential component of school improvement
- Identify a leader (equivalent to the leader for the instructional component) to ensure policy commitments are carried out for establishing the new component

Second Phase – *Start-up and Phase-in: Building Infrastructure and Capacity*

- Establish temporary mechanisms to facilitate initial implementation/systemic change (e.g., a steering group, an organization change facilitator) and develop the capacity of these mechanisms to guide and manage change and provide essential leadership during phase-in
- Formulate specific start-up and phase-in actions
- Refine infrastructure so that the component is fully integrated with the instructional and management components
 - > Establish and train an administrative leader
 - > Ensure there is a resource-oriented mechanism (e.g., a Learning Supports Resource Team) and train those who staff it in how to perform major resource-oriented tasks (e.g., mapping, analysis, coordinating, planning, setting priorities for program development, enhancing intervention systems
 - > Help organize work groups for each major arena of component activity and facilitate their initial mapping and analysis of resources and formulation of recommendations
 - > Develop ad hoc work groups to enhance component visibility, communication, sharing, and problem solving (cont.)

Exhibit 1 (cont.)

- Establish a system for quality improvement and evaluation of impact and integrate it into school improvement planning, evaluation, and accountability
- Attempt to fill program/service gaps and pursue economies of scale through outreach designed to establish formal collaborative linkages among families of schools (e.g., a feeder pattern) and among district-wide and community resources (e.g., through establishing a Learning Supports Resource *Council*)

Third Phase – *Sustaining, Evolving, and Enhancing Outcomes*

- Plan for maintenance and institutionalization
- Develop strategies for maintaining momentum and progress

Fourth Phase – *Replication to Scale and Generating Creative Renewal*

The Work of the District Leadership Team

The district leadership team is a catalyst and manager of change. The team members ensure the "big picture" is implemented in ways that are true to the vision and compatible with the local culture. They ensure an effective operational infrastructure is developed at the district level. And, they are problem solvers – not only responding as problems arise but designing strategies to counter anticipated barriers to change, such as negative reactions and dynamics, common factors interfering with working relationships, and system deficiencies.

They do all this in ways that enhance empowerment, a sense of community, and general readiness and commitment to new approaches.

After the initial implementation stage, they focus on ensuring that institutionalized mechanisms take on functions essential to maintenance and renewal.

All this requires team members who are committed each day to ensuring effective implementation and who have enough time and ability to attend to details.

In building the team's capacity to do this work, the focus is on enhancing understanding of the process of systemic change and how to work with a site's stakeholders as they

- restructure their school's operational infrastructure (e.g., establish an administrative leader and a team to develop a comprehensive system of learning supports
- work with school staff, families, and community resources to create readiness, commitment, and capacity to change (e.g., both in terms of motivation and skills)
- communicate effectively throughout the process
- map and analyze resources, identify priorities related to system development, braid school-community resources
- monitor and provide ongoing support to ensure effective implementation

Exhibit 2 highlights specific tasks for the district leadership team to pursue in helping schools accomplish basic systemic changes.

Exhibit 2

Some of the Tasks the District Leadership Team Can Do to Help Schools Accomplish Basic Systemic Changes

1. Infrastructure tasks

- A. Work with school governance agents to further clarify and negotiate agreements about:
 - Policy changes
 - Administrator to lead develop a comprehensive system of learning supports
 - Time, space, and budget commitments
- B. Help identify members of a resource-oriented team for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports

2. Stakeholder development

- A. Provide leadership coaching for site leaders responsible for systemic changes
- B. Coach team members (e.g., about purposes, processes)
For example, at a team's first meeting, provide a brief orientation (a presentation with guiding handouts) and any immediate coaching and specific task assistance team facilitators or members may need. During the next few meetings, help with mapping and analyzing resources and setting priorities. Teams may also need help establishing processes for regular interaction.
- C. Work with leaders to ensure presentations and written information about infrastructure and activity changes are provided to all stakeholders

3. Communication (visibility), coordination, and integration

- A. Help establish mechanisms to ensure changes are written-up and effectively communicated
- B. Help ensure that the products of resource mapping, analysis, and priority setting are highly visible and widely shared
- C. Help ensure communication to all stakeholder groups is effective
- D. Help ensure that the comprehensive system of learning supports is fully integrated into school improvement planning

(cont.)

Exhibit 2 (cont.)

4. Formative evaluation and rapid problem solving

- A. Work with school leaders and team members to develop procedures for monitoring (formative evaluation) and rapid problem solving
For example, help determine if resources have been effectively mapped and analyzed and priorities established; is the resource-oriented team functioning effectively? has the comprehensive system of learning supports been fully integrated into school improvement planning?
- B. Help make certain there is rapid problem solving, and if not, help address systemic breakdowns (e.g., helps determine if systems are in place to identify problems related to functioning of the infrastructure and communication systems)

5. Ongoing support

- A. Provide ongoing information
- B. Offer ongoing coaching on an "on-call" basis
- C. At appropriate times, ask whether participants have dealt with longer-range planning, and if they haven't, determine what help they need
- D. Help participants identify sources for continuing capacity building.

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