

Interventions to Support Readiness, Recruitment, Access, Transition, and Retention for Postsecondary Education Success*

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

Prevailing policies primarily support broad-band, but limited scope direct strategies to enhance engagement and success in postsecondary education. These include interventions focused on

- cultivating early attitudes, a college going culture, and readiness
- recruitment outreach including involvement on K-12 campuses of postsecondary institutions and K-12 students coming to postsecondary sites
- financial aid such as scholarships and loans
- first-year transition programs including welcoming and support networks
- academic advising before the first year
- monitoring to provide further advice, learning supports and special assistance when problems are noted.

Available evidence highlights that such direct strategies are useful in increasing the pool of applicants for postsecondary education, improving transitions, and enhancing retention, but the evidence also suggests that the prevailing set of interventions is insufficient for enhancing equity of opportunity. As is widely acknowledged, the factors interfering with student engagement and success in a formal education environment are complex, and complex problems require comprehensive solutions. Prevailing policies have led to fragmented and marginalized interventions that connect with relatively few of the many students in need.

In revisiting policy using the lenses of equity of opportunity and social justice, our analysis suggests the need for policy that can guide development of a much more comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system of interventions. That system should begin preK and continue in a fully interconnected way through postsecondary graduation. The focus is on enhancing equity of opportunity by addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students.

Developing such a comprehensive preK-16 system requires developing a unified component for enabling success at school by

- reframing current student support programs and services, and integrating, at every stage, the best broad-band, but limited scope direct strategies
- redeploying available resources and aligning them horizontally and vertically
- revamping school-community infrastructures to weave resources together to enhance and evolve the system
- supporting the necessary systemic changes in ways called for by comprehensive innovation, scale-up, and sustainability.

To these ends, we offer three recommendations:

(1) Move Beyond Broad-Band, But Limited Scope Direct Strategies to Initiate Development of a Comprehensive PreK-16 System.

Specifically, we propose

- moving preK-16 school policy from a two to a three component framework with the third component directly focused on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students; this third component must be treated as equal and primary to the others in policy so that it is not marginalized in practice,
- embedding under the component to address barriers to learning all efforts to address factors interfering with students having an equal opportunity to succeed at school
- expanding the school accountability framework to encompass the three component framework.

(2) Revamp and interconnect Operational Infrastructures.

Conceiving a comprehensive system is one thing; implementing it is quite another. Developing and institutionalizing a component to address barriers to learning and teaching requires a well designed and effective set of operational mechanisms. The existing ones must be modified in ways that guarantee new policy directions are implemented effectively and efficiently. How well these mechanisms are connected determines cohesiveness, cost efficiency, and equity.

(3) Support Transformative and Sustainable Systemic Change.

Systemic transformation to enhance equity of opportunity across preK-16 requires new collaborative arrangements and redistributing authority (power). Policy makers must provide support and guidance not only for implementing intervention prototypes, but for adequately getting from here to there. This calls for well-designed, compatible, and interconnected operational mechanisms at many levels and across agencies.

In sum, current policies and practices are unlikely to effectively increase the number of students who engage and succeed in postsecondary education. It is time to move beyond piecemeal and marginalized policy and fragmented practices. The need is to develop a comprehensive and cohesive system of interventions that address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students at every stage from prekindergarten through postsecondary. Without such a system there is no equity of opportunity.

***See the full policy and practice analysis report online at:**
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/postsecondary.pdf>

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