

Lauderdale County Schools

When her system was selected as one of the pilot districts, Superintendent Gray asked John Mansell, Supervisor of Student Services to head the efforts to address barriers to student success. He indicated that they” are excited about this undertaking as we are weary of the ‘whack a mole’ approach in addressing barriers to student success.” He indicated the following:

The Lauderdale County School system is composed of three elementary (K-6) schools, one high (7-12) school, and six (K-12) unit schools. Our current enrollment is approximately 8,500 students. Almost half of which receive free or reduced meals. The racial make-up of school system is predominately white (92%.) Our ESL population is less than one per cent which is relatively small compared to other systems of our size in Alabama.

After reviewing various data sources, it has been determined by our district and school teams that chronic absenteeism is putting too many of our students at risk of not completing high school. Like schools throughout the U.S. we have interventions such as truancy review boards, early warning, and in extreme cases legal procedures in place to combat truancy. What we are lacking is systemic and consistent procedures in place that will successfully correct the problem in early grades and provide quality remediation for days missed.

What is the "magic bullet" that will effortlessly and quickly stop students from missing too many days of school? Seriously, I am hoping that you can direct me to research, articles, advice, etc. of what other systems have and/are currently doing that has been successful . We have reviewed the Gainesville, Georgia study and our district team is meeting with community organizations March 4th to seek their input in reducing our absenteeism.

I am thanking you in advance for your reply and on behalf of the Lauderdale County School System I wish to also express our gratitude for all the hard work you have done in giving students the opportunity to be successful.

Our Center at UCLA responded first by summarizing a bit about what we previously shared with the other nine districts. We followed this up with a direct response about the pressing concern re. attendance. (The response about attendance is available upon request.)

The aim in moving toward unifying and then developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports, of course, is intended to substantively transform existing marginalized and fragmented student and learning supports into a unified and comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Developing and sustaining such a system are major steps in enhancing equity of opportunity for the success of all students at school and beyond.

The design for the work is based on work in which we have been involved for a long time and which is moving forward as pioneering efforts across the country. Over the years, we have developed a great amount of free and easily accessible aids and tools for the work you and your colleagues are undertaking. For example, see our "System Change Toolkit: Transforming student supports into a Unified and Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching" <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

We recently put together a new brief document (that is in the toolkit) entitled: "Five essential elements of a unified and comprehensive system of learning support" – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essentials.pdf> . (A colleague in a district in another state told us: "I wish this would have been the first resource I was directed to in an effort to begin understanding the work! This is fabulous and it is the best resource that helps contextualize learning supports.")

Other items that may already be familiar to you are:

>"Developing a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports: First Steps for Superintendents Who Want to Get Started" – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/superstart.pdf>

>"Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School: Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff" – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf>

We know the work is challenging (especially with everything else that has to be done). We want to help in any way we can. (We do a lot of long distance mentoring, coaching, and technical assistance by email and phone with teams that are moving this work forward. All this is done at no cost to those who are pioneering the work.) Others have found it particularly helpful when we work with them on developing their strategic plan for the work so that it can be fully integrated into district and school strategic plans for school improvement.

Please feel free to contact us at any time; we will be more than pleased to assist as you move forward.

Looking forward to helping with this important work. (Our emails are adelman@psych.ucla.edu Ltaylor@ucla.edu .)