Student and Learning Supports: Increasing Availability and Enhancing Student Access and Use

In an era of tight resources, it becomes ever more essential to use existing resources in the most effective way, to rethink how they are used, and to amplify positive use of human and social capital. This is especially the case with respect to student and learning supports.

Other Center documents present frameworks to guide realignment of resources for student and learning supports.* Our focus here is on highlighting steps related to (a) redeploying and braiding resources to increase what is available and (b) enhancing effective use of such supports by students.

Increasing Availability by Redeploying and Braiding Resources

Mapping and analyzing existing resources are key processes in improving student and learning supports.

First Step – Develop a detailed map of what the school and district have in place, including any community resources that are formally linked to district and schools.

Second Step – Analyze the map to clarify what's working, redundancies, and gaps.

Third Step – Use the analysis to decide what resources can be redeployed and priorities for filling the gaps.

Once the district and its schools have maximized effective use of existing student and learning support resources, the focus expands *strategically* to braiding school and community resources.

Fourth Step – Map and analyze formal and informal community resources.

Note: It is common for schools and districts to catalogue the service agencies in their community in order to make referrals for students and families. Tight budgets call for amplifying and personalizing the use of human and social capital. This means connecting with a broad range of formal and informal community resources (see Exhibit on next page). Special attention must be given to the empowering possibilities of enhanced home involvement, student service learning (e.g., peer buddies, mentors, mediators, "counselors"), and volunteer programs (including mentors, tutors, etc.).

Mapping the full range of community resources begins with what the district and schools can readily identify and expands after a school-community collaborative is established.

Fifth Step – Outreach to formal and informal community resources to establish a working collaborative focused on fully mapping community resources and then *strategically* filling gaps and expanding what's available.

Note: Establishing an effective and highly productive collaborative requires educating all participants about how best to establish an operational infrastructure to meet major functions and tasks and utilize the strengths and assets of all participants and the different institutional and other cultural differences represented.

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*Appended to this document are a few Center aids related to framing interventions, mapping resources, and conducting analyses.

Exhibit
A Range of Community Resources that Could Be Mapped

County agencies and bodies (e.g., departments of health, mental health, children & family services, public social services, probation, sheriff, office of education, fire, service planning area councils, recreation and parks, library, courts, housing)

Municipal agencies and bodies (e.g., parks and recreation, library, police, fire, courts, civic event units)

Physical and mental health & psychosocial concerns facilities and groups (e.g., hospitals, clinics, guidance centers, Planned Parenthood, Aid to Victims, MADD, "friends of" groups; family crisis and support centers, helplines, hotlines, shelters, mediation and dispute resolution centers, private practitioners)

Mutual support/self-help groups (e.g., for almost every problem and many other activities)

Child care/preschool centers

Post secondary education institutions/students (e.g., community colleges, state universities, public and private colleges and universities, vocational colleges; specific schools within these such as schools of law, education, nursing, dentistry)

Service agencies (e.g., PTA/PTSA, United Way, clothing and food pantry, Visiting Nurses Association, Cancer Society, Catholic Charities, Red Cross, Salvation Army, volunteer agencies, legal aid society)

Service clubs and philanthropic organizations (e.g., Lions Club, Rotary Club, Optimists, Assistance League, men's and women's clubs, League of Women Voters, veteran's groups, foundations)

Youth agencies and groups (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA/YWCA, scouts, 4-H, Woodcraft Rangers)

Sports/health/fitness/outdoor groups (e.g., sports teams, athletic leagues, local gyms, conservation associations, Audubon Society)

Community based organizations (e.g., neighborhood and homeowners' associations, Neighborhood Watch, block clubs, housing project associations, economic development groups, civic associations)

Faith community institutions (e.g., congregations and subgroups, clergy associations, interfaith hunger coalition)

Legal assistance groups (e.g., public counsel, schools of law)

Ethnic associations (e.g., Committee for Armenian Students in Public Schools, Korean Youth Center, United Cambodian Community, African-American, Latino, Asian-pacific, Native American organizations)

Special interest associations and clubs (e.g., Future Scientists and Engineers of America, pet owner and other animal-oriented groups)

Artists and cultural institutions (e.g., museums, art galleries, zoo, theater groups, motion picture studios, TV and radio stations, writers' organizations, instrumental/choral, drawing/painting, technology-based arts, literary clubs, collector's groups)

Businesses/corporations/unions (e.g., neighborhood business associations, chambers of commerce, local shops, restaurants, banks, AAA, Teamsters, school employee unions)

Media (e.g., newspapers, tv & radio, local access cable)

Family members, local residents, senior citizens groups

Enhancing Student Access and Use

The intent of student and learning supports is to increase equity of opportunity to succeed at school by addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. This can only be accomplished if the students make use of the opportunities. To increase student use, steps must be taken to enhance awareness and interest, facilitate access, and gather student input about use. This is especially so for some subgroups. As Stanton-Salazar (2011), emphasizes "... access to resources and institutional support, among low-status students and youth, is significantly dependent upon the network characteristics, network-related capacities and skills, and networking orientations of those institutional agents devoted to supporting and empowering low-status youth...."

Four steps can help: (1) enhancing student participation in mapping, analysis, and decision making with respect to improving student and learning supports, (2) capitalizing on the ability of significant others to influence use of such supports, (3) facilitating student choice, access, and use of needed supports, and (4) eliciting feedback from students.

  (1) *Student Participation in Mapping and Analyzing Resources* – Rarely are students, especially those not doing well as school, included in these processes; yet their input is vital to enhancing motivated student use. Student involvement can be expedited in various ways (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, inclusion in work groups that map and analyze resources).

  (2) *Mobilizing Others to Influence Student Use* – There is a growing research base related to the positive impact of a range of individuals who are able to make a personal connection with a student (e.g., some family members and school staff, peers, older youth, adults who work with youth in the community through agencies, organizations, churches). Such individuals provide role models, support, guidance, and inspiration. Obviously, mentor programs aim at providing such a connection.

<div style="text-align:center;">From the Literature</div>

As Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003) note: "For many youth, older siblings, extended family members, peer, neighbors, and key adults in the community all play a very important role in helping to determine their overall well-being and future life changes. For youth from working-class ethnic minority communities, these agents often play a decisive role in guiding them away from risk factors and into productive adulthood. ... The research literature presents a strong body of evidence that in any population of urban, low-income youth, the most resilient tend to be those who are socially connected to supportive adults in the extended kinship group, school, or community."

  With specific respect to mentors, Beam, Chen, and Greenberger (2002) stress "Practitioners and program planners should consider facilitating and strengthening the naturally occurring important relationships between adolescents and nonparental adults. ... many youths in need of additional adult investment languish on the waiting lists of assigned mentorship programs or may be ineligible for such programs. ... some youths *do* have existing relationships with adults in their environment who might play a more consequential role in their development."

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(3) *Facilitating Student Choice, Access, and Use of Needed Supports* – The aim is to have students access and effectively use needed supports. They are more likely to do so if they *perceive* such supports as personally worthwhile and likely to lead to good outcomes. As suggested, such perceptions are enhanced when others the student values endorses the intervention. Positive perceptions also are enhanced when the students are empowered to make their own decisions. Moreover, school staff must do more than make referrals. They must actively work with students (and their families) to help overcome barriers that interfere with immediate and longer-term follow-through. This involves developing a personalized plan for immediate action and longer-term follow-through.

Note: One way to begin in developing a personalized plan is to engage the student in a structured discussion exploring such matters as:
- Who do you talk with when you have personal problems?
- Who helps you when you have problems at school?
- Who at the school seems to care about you? In the community?
- Is there anyone special and important in your life at this time?
  (e.g., someone you look up to, admire).
- What makes this person (or persons) so special?
- What programs or opportunities at school do you find helpful? In the community?
- What else at school do you think could be helpful to you? In the community?
- What and who could be most helpful to you at this time?

(4) *Using Student Input to Improve Intervention Attractiveness & Effectiveness* – Student input also is vital to improving interventions in ways that can enhance motivated participation. Again, such feedback can be expedited through personal interviews, surveys, focus groups, etc. The point is not to just ask about whether the support is O.K., but to elicit specifics about what's good and not so good and what the student thinks would make it better. This is especially important with respect to students who are not doing well as school and other subgroups (e.g., those with emotional problems, nondocumented students).

Concluding Comments

At the heart of a good student and learning support system is a welcoming and caring school that provides many ways for connecting students with good role models, valued activities, and supportive learning and social networks. Including students in design and development processes is seen as vital to maximizing the likelihood that they and their peers will perceive supports positively, seek them out, and participate in a motivated manner.

References

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Kretzmann,J. & McKnight, J. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets.* IL: ACTA Publications.
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Stanton-Salazar, R. (2011). A social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students and youth. *Youth & Society, 43,* 1066-1109.

Stanton-Salazar, R. & Spina, S. (2003). Informal mentors and role models in the lives of urban Mexican-origin adolescents. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 34,* 231-254.

A Few Center Aids

>*Frameworks for Systemic Transformation of Student and Learning Supports* –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/frameworksforsystemictransformation.pdf

>*Resource Mapping and Management to Address Barriers to Learning: An Intervention for Systemic Change* –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resourcemapping/resourcemappingandmanagement.pdf

>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: A Set of Surveys to Map What a School Has & What It Needs* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Surveys/Set1.pdf

>*Schools, Families, and Community Working Together: Building an Effective Collaborative* –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/buildingeffectivecollab.pdf

>*School-Community Collaboration: A Self-study Survey* –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/schoolcommunitysurvey.pdf

See also the Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds:

>>Collaboration: school, community, interagency –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/interagcollab.htm

>>Mapping existing school and community resources for addressing barriers to learning –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2312_06.htm

>>Mentoring – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/mentoring.htm

>>Youth Development – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/youthdev.htm

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If you have comments, suggestions, examples you would like to share,
please let us know. Send comments to ltaylor@ucla.edu