To: District and State Collaborative Network for
Developing Comprehensive Systems for Learning Support

From: Howard Adelman & Linda Taylor

11/22/11

Re: *Learning Supports Resource Assessment* **-- Mapping and Analyzing What is**
Being Done to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

In a recent policy note we recognized that, as has always been the case when education budgets tighten, the tendency is to trim student support efforts more severely than other budget items. This reflects the long-standing marginalization in policy and practice of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching. Given the pressing need for student and learning supports to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school, we stressed the importance of balancing budget cuts and redeploying resources in ways that ensure there remains a critical mass of school resources allocated for student and learning supports to enable schools to redeploy and then outreach to leverage and braid with a wide range of community resources.

Given sparse resources, the emphasis must be on meeting high priority intervention needs in new and more cost effective ways. At the same time, the long-term aim must remain that of moving toward developing a comprehensive system to provide student and learning supports.

Most districts and schools have done some needs assessment related to factors interfering with students learning and performance at school. As leaders address the most pressing needs and also move toward developing a comprehensive system of learning supports, it is time to do a thorough *learning supports resource assessment*.

A learning supports resource assessment involves determining

(1)   what percentage of resources are being devoted to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students and

(2)   how the resources are being used.

The resource assessment provides an essential basis for analysis of strengths and critical gaps in dealing with the pressing support needs of students and staff in addressing interfering factors. And the analysis is central to setting priorities and planning development of a comprehensive system of learning supports.

> *Accomplishing the resource assessment requires someone taking a leadership*
> *role for learning supports and mobilizing a team to help.*

Network Participant Gainesville City Schools (GA) Reports on the Impact of their Learning Supports Resource Assessment

We recently heard from Gainesville City (GA) school district about their experiences in doing such an assessment. (Note: Gainesville is one of the lead districts in the AASA/Scholastic/UCLA Learning Supports Collaborative -see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/aasagainesville.pdf)

Gainesville has integrated learning supports into the district's strategic plan and into all district wide work groups. They have a district Director of Learning Supports and learning supports leadership teams in each school. They convene all the teams for sharing about learning supports across the district.

The school teams have been involved in doing an indepth, mapping of all resources each school currently uses to address barriers to learning and teaching, including whatever resources the community is adding to the mix. They are using a tool our Center developed which outlines a six step process and provides a structured intervention framework to chart current activities and resource use. (See: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf)

Gainesville indicates that the work helped the district and schools clarify the fragmentation, enhance organization and coordination, eliminate duplication, end ineffective programs, and redeploy resources to strengthen promising work and fill some gaps. Moreover, the mapping and analyses are helping move daily operations from just "putting out each fire.... We are now doing things more from a systemic level and less from an individual level." They stress that the matrix:

> "Gave us a framework on which to organize the work we were doing. After listing all our interventions, the tools were helpful in allowing us to better articulate the organization of our interventions and thus able to see gaps.... in terms of what type of support we had in place. ... When the schools saw this…they were also able to see where they needed to be able to help a larger percentage of the student population versus the usual 15-20% of the students that they had been spending their time with."

Additional Sharing about Learning Supports Resource Assessment

In the coming months, we would like to facilitate sharing about how districts, schools, state education agencies, and others have or are planning to do a learning supports resource assessment *as a basis for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports*.

We also want to improve the way our resources support such an assessment. In this respect:

(1) Take a look at the Center's current mapping tool and let us know if it needs improvement. See:
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf

(2) If you have or know of a good tool for learning supports resource assessment, please share.

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As always, send communications to Ltaylor@ucla.edu
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This document is also online at the collaborative network website:
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/network/network.html