

Using ESSA to Transform Student and Learning Supports

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) recognizes that significant numbers of students require supports to successfully meet challenging state academic standards. The legislation clearly underscores that student and learning supports permeate efforts to enable every student to succeed. Unfortunately, the act muddies the nature and scope of such supports by scattering references to them throughout the various Titles, Parts, Subparts, and Sections. By addressing barriers to learning and teaching in a piecemeal and mostly indirect manner, ESSA conveys a fragmented picture and a lack of coherence with respect to essential supports. This reflects a long-standing problem related to school improvement efforts.

The shift to more local control provides an opportunity for state and local stakeholders to escape the limitations of the federal act and prevailing thinking. The opportunity is to move away from existing fragmented and marginalized approaches to more effectively deal with factors interfering with student success and enhance equity of opportunity. Making this happen involves starting transformative planning now. And a first emphasis must be on ending the way school improvement planning has marginalized direct efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching.

To more fully understand the current situation, see *ESSA, Equity of Opportunity, and Addressing Barriers to Learning* -- <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essaanal.pdf>

Some state and district leaders have started. They are focused on a fundamental transformation of how schools can enhance equity of opportunity by addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

We suggest that others start now by *establishing a leadership workgroup* charged with transformative planning. Such planning focuses on unifying and then developing a comprehensive and equitable system of student and learning supports by

- (a) adopting a three component framework for school improvement (i.e., establishing a component for addressing barriers to learning and fully integrating it with the components for instruction and management-governance)
- (b) moving beyond current MTSS thinking (i.e., developing an intervention continuum that functions as an *integrated set of subsystems* for promoting healthy social emotional development, preventing problems, responding quickly when problems arise, and contributing effectively to helping with severe and chronic problems)
- (c) organizing student and learning supports cohesively into a set of well-designed and delimited intervention arenas (e.g., we have categorized six that schools need to address each day)
- (d) weaving together school with relevant community resources appropriately and effectively
- (e) formulating the processes for systemic change, scale-up, and sustainability in a strategic and effectively resourced manner.



For a range of resources related to this matter, see
National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

And feel free to let us know if you want us to help.
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