



**29 years  
& counting**

**School Practitioner  
Listserv**

**A Weekly Community of Practice Network  
for Sharing and Interchange**



**In keeping with the 2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports, this community of practice network has expanded in number of participants and topics discussed. The thematic emphasis is on (1) daily concerns confronting those working in and with schools, (2) the transformation of student and learning supports, and (3) promoting whole child development and positive school climate.**

**January 26, 2015**

*This week's edition is devoted to responding to requests about*

**Justifying a Greater Role for Student Support Staff**

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**Please forward this to a few colleagues you think might be interested. The more who join, the more we are likely to receive to share.**

**For those who have been forwarded this and want to be part of the weekly exchange, send an email to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

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**W**e receive frequent requests from school staff across the country who want to play an expanded role in developing and implementing student and learning supports.

Here is a recent example:

"I am working at a K to 5 school, five special ed classrooms.... At least one more special education classroom will be moved to this site next year. I would like to expand my role to include social and emotional supports and group work for all students. ... I need to justify the time as part of my caseload otherwise I will be assigned another school to do assessment. ... I want to promote my role in a continuum of support model.... Not all the student support staff agree with me and many do not see this as our role."

## **R**esponse from the Center

We see expanding the roles and functions of student support staff as *essential* to effective school improvement. We suggest that the best way to justify the expansion involves doing more than just arguing for providing more *direct services*. The focus needs to be on an expanded *leadership* role in school improvement related to developing a better *system* for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. (Trailblazers across the country are approaching this in terms of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports.)

One way to make the case for expanding into a leadership role is to work with a group of student and learning support colleagues to (a) map and analyze current student and learning supports resources, (b) present the findings to highlight critical gaps and weaknesses, and (c) make recommendations for systemic changes to enhance equity of opportunity for success at school. (Use a comprehensive intervention framework to guide the work, e.g., <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf> )

Appended to this document are links to some resources for clarifying the need and directions for expanding the roles and functions of student support staff. Here is an excerpt from one of these resources:

From: *Framing New Directions for School Counselors, Psychologists, & Social Workers*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/report/framingnewdir.pdf>

Clearly, pupil service personnel will continue to be needed to provide targeted direct assistance and support. At the same time, their roles as advocates, catalysts, brokers, and facilitators of systemic reform will expand. As a result, they will engage in an increasingly wide array of activity to promote academic achievement and healthy development and address barriers to student learning. In doing so, they must be prepared to improve intervention outcomes by enhancing a collaborative systemic approach within a school and with a wide range of community resources in order to more effectively deal with the complex concerns confronting schools.

Consistent with systemic changes that have been unleashed by trailblazing efforts is a trend toward less emphasis on intervention ownership and more attention to accomplishing, desired outcomes through flexible and expanded roles and functions for staff. This trend recognizes underlying commonalities among a variety of school concerns and intervention strategies and is fostering increased interest in inter-disciplinary education.

The following Exhibit highlights examples of an expanded set of functions and accountabilities for student support staff presented in the above resource.

### **(1) Direct Interventions with Students and Families**

*Student support* – demonstrates the ability to plan, implement, and evaluate programs and services that equitably address barriers to learning and promote healthy development among a diverse range of students (e.g., developmental and motivational assessments of students, regular and specialized assistance for students in and outside the classroom, prereferral interventions, universal and targeted group interventions, safe and caring school interventions; academic and personal counseling; support for transitions)

*Family assistance* – demonstrates the ability to plan, implement, and evaluate programs and services for students' families whenever necessary to enhance student support (e.g., providing information, referrals, and support for referral follow-through; instruction; counseling; home involvement)

### **(2) Interventions to Enhance Systems Within Schools**

*Coordination and integration of programs/services/systems* – demonstrates the ability to plan, implement, and evaluate mechanisms for collaborating with colleagues to ensure activities are carried out in the most equitable and cost-effective manner consistent with legal and ethical standards for practice (examples of mechanisms include case-oriented teams; resource-oriented teams; consultation, coaching, and mentoring mechanisms; triage, referral, and care monitoring systems; crisis teams)

*Development of program/service/systems* – demonstrates the ability to enhance development of a unified and comprehensive system of interventions for equitably addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development among a diverse range of students and their families (e.g., collaborates in improving existing interventions; collaborates to develop ways to fill gaps related to needed prevention programs, early-after-onset interventions, and assistance for students with severe and/or chronic problems; incorporates an understanding of legal and ethical standards for practice)

### **(3) Interventions to Enhance School-community Linkages & Partnerships**

*Coordination and integration of school-community resources/systems* – demonstrates the ability to plan, implement, and evaluate mechanisms for collaborating with community entities to weave together school and community resources and systems to enhance current activity and enhance development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated continuum of interventions for equitably addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development

### **(4) Supervision/Administration**

*Supervision of professionals-in-training and induction of new staff* -- demonstrates the ability to coach, mentor, and supervise professionals-in-training and newly hired pupil services personnel both with respect to generic and speciality functions  
*Administration of pupil services* -- demonstrates the ability to design, manage, and build capacity of personnel and programs with respect to specialized pupil services activities and generic systemic approaches to equitably addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development

*Administrative leadership in the district* -- demonstrates the ability to participate effectively in District decision making to advance an equitable and cost-effective role for pupil services personnel in addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development..."

Also of relevance are efforts to develop job descriptions for new roles for student support staff. The following is from a job description prepared by the Tucson Unified School District (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentssupport/toolkit/tusdjob.pdf> ).

"LEARNING SUPPORTS COORDINATOR – Responsible and accountable for developing and coordinating a sustainable comprehensive system of learning supports that enables all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school by addressing barriers to learning, enhancing engagement, student advocacy, and reengaging disconnected students. Such a continuum encompasses resources, strategies and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and cognitive supports in the classroom and schoolwide. This position will focus on implementing an equitable and restorative school culture and climate....

#### ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS

- Advance understanding of school leaders and coordinate resources to help them guide development and implementation of comprehensive systems of learning supports that effectively reduce barriers to learning and teaching and engage or re-engage students as learners
- Develop, support, and encourage classroom-based approaches that enhance intrinsic motivation and enable learning; open classroom to multiple supports and reduce referrals; prevent and handle problems that interfere with classroom activities and learning; and create a caring, personalized, and enriched, academic learning environment
- Coordinate school-wide learning supports that encompass systems related to (a) a full continuum of interventions ranging from primary prevention, through classroom and school intervention early after onset, to interventions for serious problems and (b) programs, services, and systems in designated arenas such as: 1) enhancing regular classroom strategies to enable learning 2) providing support for the many transitions experienced by students and families, 3) increasing home and school connections, 4) responding to and preventing barriers to success, 5) facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed, and 6) expanding community involvement and support
- Encourages, coaches, models or trains intrinsic motivation strategies continuously used by teachers....
- Acts as the liaison between the school and other entities (e.g., community resources) who work with the site related to a learning support system for classrooms and schoolwide
- Ensures that the activities of other entities (e.g., community resources) who work with the site on matters related to the learning support system for classrooms and schoolwide are operating under the umbrella of the learning support system and are well-coordinated and integrated with daily activities
- Collaborates with all district learning support coordinators to build capacity for effective implementation district-wide....”

NOTE: Expanding the role of student and learning support staff also is a major concern of the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports* – see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html> .

## Here are Some Thoughts from a Colleague in the Field

"In my experience, school systems have fairly specific ideas about the appropriate deployment of support staff that have deep historical roots and are thus resistant to change. If one is working in a school district that values student support staff as a way to create legally unassailable special education compliance documents, then it will make no sense to many to use these staff in any other role. In my own experience, I have had some success in forming liaisons with administrators and other student support staff who shared my interest in providing a wide range of services beyond testing for special education placement, three-year re-evaluation, or transition to community based services. However, whenever those administrators and counselors moved on, the innovative services were always abandoned and I was back to 'square one.' Occasionally a student support staff will be promoted to the Supervisor of Student Support Department. One would think that this would be the perfect solution for promoting the full spectrum of student support. However I have noticed that even student support staff are not immune to the pressures of the position, and tend to assign staff to service roles while creating roadblocks to broader functions. I tried providing position papers and research summaries to support the positive benefits of a broader role. Why do I mention all of this history? It says to me that there are deep systemic reasons for the situation and I have yet to find the best way to negotiate this topic. Some possible avenues for further exploration include:

- \*Pull your district operating documents to see exactly what functions are described in the Student support staff job descriptions and how the district conducts performance evaluations. If these documents do not support functions other than direct services, you will first have to suggest revisions to include them.

- \*When planning your proposal for role expansion, first elucidate those personal beliefs that lead you to want this. If others can resonate with why you think students/parents/teachers need you to expand your role, then they might be more likely to also want you to achieve the goals of your proposal.

- \*Conduct research to determine the need for alternative functions that you wish to provide in the district. Hard numbers are better than soft ones.

- \*Once you know what other functions are needed, conduct a 'force field analysis' with others like yourself who want student support staff broader role. This involves identifying factors that will help you to move forward, as well as roadblocks. You then generate ideas to activate as many of the positive factors as you can, and to minimize the effects of the roadblocks.

- \*Find a school district providing those broader functions (preferably about the same size and demographics, and not too far away to visit) and do a comparison of your district with that one to highlight the benefits of using student support staff beyond the direct services. A comparison should immediately give the impression that it is foolish not to add broader functions to the mix. Plus, cautious school districts will want to know they are not the first to give this expanded role concept a try.

- \*Find school administrators, special educators, teachers, board members that have broad expectations for their student support staff and ask them for their support. Find school board members, school administrators, school lawyers, school principals,

teachers, and parents who are against student support staff role expansion. Listen to their concerns. Your proposal for change must allay their fears. Prepare short-leave behinds that not only show how wonderful things could be, but also how you will protect your supervisors and the district should some of those fears come true.

\*When student support staff make a pitch for an expanded role, it can appear to be self-serving. Therefore, I suspect the people who really need to propose the general idea are the administrators, teachers, parents, and students. When the school board or the administration then turns to the school psychologist to ask ‘What do YOU think about all this?’, you can say ‘I’ve been thinking about this too, and have taken the liberty of putting together some materials showing how this could be accomplished.’ Reaching into your briefcase, you pull out the best darn proposal anybody has ever seen....

\*Be prepared for some administrators and board members to need to see your data for several years in a row before they believe the statistics and begin to think they might need to take some action because of them. Don’t let anybody trick you into a situation where no one could succeed. ...”

## **L**istserv Participants

What can you share about justifying an expanded role for student support staff? We look forward to sharing your recommendations. Send to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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## **Appendix**

### **Some Center Resources to Aid in Clarifying the Need and Directions for Expanding the Roles and Functions of Student Support Staff**

As part of our online clearinghouse, we have a Quick Find on:

> *Staffing Student Support Services: New Directions*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/staffingsupp.htm>

Here is a sample of titles of Center-developed resources relevant to this topic which you can access from this Quick Find:

#### **Center Reports**

- > *Expanding Educational Reform to Address Barriers to Learning: Restructuring Student Support Services & Enhancing School-Community Partnerships*
- > *Framing New Directions for School Counselors, Psychologists, & Social Workers*
- > *Organization Facilitators: A Change Agent for Systemic School and Community Changes*
- > *Preparing All Education Personnel to Address Barriers to Learning & Teaching*
- > *Key Leadership Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Student & Learning Supports*

**Fact & Info Sheets and Guidance Notes**

>Infrastructure for Learning Supports at District, Regional, and State Offices

>What is a Learning Support Leadership Team?

**Call to Action**

>Student Support Staff: Moving in New Directions through School Improvement

**Continuing Education**

>About Infrastructure Mechanisms for a Comprehensive Learning Support Component

>Leadership Training: Moving in New Directions for Student Support

**Guides to Practices**

>New Directions for Student Support: Some Fundamentals

**Newsletter Articles**

>Needed: A Greater Role for Learning Support Staff in In-service at Every School.

>Connecting Counseling, Psychological, & Social Support Programs to School Reform

>School Improvement: Where's Student Support

>Who at the School Addresses Barriers to Learning and Teaching?

As with all our Quick Finds, there also are links to online resources from other sources.

**Please share relevant resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences! Send to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**Note: Responses come only to the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA for possible inclusion in the next week's message.**

**We also post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net Exchange* on our website at**

**<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm>**

**and to *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page**

**<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>**

**For Recent Previous Postings, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>**