

**School Practitioner Community of Practice**  
(A network for sharing & exchange)

*July 5, 2017*

*Request from a Colleague:*

**>About school boards and student/learning supports**

- Center’s Perspective
- Comments from Colleagues in the Field

**Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives**

**Featured Set of Center Resources on**

**>Mobilizing school boards to strengthen learning supports**

From the Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports, UCLA

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**Given shrinking education budgets, we have been asked to increase our outreach to make our free resources more available (e.g., for planning, professional development, etc.).**

***So please feel free to share with anyone you think might benefit (e.g., forward our resources to individuals and share on listservs and websites).***

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**For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**For previous postings of community of practice discussions, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>**

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*Note: In keeping with the National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports, this is being sent to and forwarded by over 100,000 school and community stakeholders concerned about (1) daily matters confronting schools, (2) promoting whole child development and positive school climate, and (3) the transformation of student and learning supports.*

**R**equ<sup>est</sup>: To strengthen student/learning supports, how can we “utilize school boards in their policy role? In their ‘bully pulpit’ role. In their hiring and retention of staff role?”

**C**enter Perspective: Clearly, strengthening the ways schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students requires buy-in from all the leading stakeholders (school board, superintendent and other district administrators, principals, student support staff, teachers, etc.). The summer is an especially key time to plan how to proceed in enhancing stakeholder understanding of the imperative for pulling resources together to enhance their effectiveness and then moving forward in developing student and learning supports into a more comprehensive and equitable system.

As policy leaders, school board members are especially concerned about using resources more effectively to improve how school address barriers to learning and teaching. However, the committee structure of most school boards tends not to include a major focus on this matter. So, rather than begging for more resources, our emphasis has been on suggesting that boards establish a standing committee on Transforming Student and Learning Supports. In our early work, we stressed the need for such a committee – see: *Restructuring Boards of Education to Enhance Schools’ Effectiveness in Addressing Barriers to Student Learning* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/boardrep.pdf> .

Here is an excerpt:

As with all school reform, the first and foremost concern for school boards is improving student academic performance and achievement. The reality is that the best instructional reforms cannot produce the desired results for a large number of students as long as schools do not have comprehensive approaches for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. Most school boards do not have a mechanism that gives full attention to the problem of how schools address barriers to learning and teaching. This is not to suggest that boards are ignoring such matters. Indeed, items related to these concerns appear regularly on every school board's agenda. The problem is that each item tends to be handled in an ad hoc manner, without sufficient attention to the “Big Picture.” One result is that the administrative structure in most districts is not organized in ways that coalesce its various functions (programs, services) for addressing barriers. The piecemeal structure reflects the marginalized status of such functions and both creates and maintains the fragmented policies and practices that characterize efforts to address barriers to student learning.

Given that every school endeavors to address barriers to learning and teaching, school boards should carefully analyze how their committee structure deals with these functions. Because boards already have a full agenda, such an analysis probably will require use of an ad hoc committee. This committee should be charged with making sure the board's structure, time allotted at meetings, and the way the budget and central administration are organized allow for a thorough and cohesive overview of all functions schools pursue to enable learning and teaching.

In carrying out this charge, committee members should consider work done by pupil services staff (e.g., psychologists, counselors, social workers, attendance workers, nurses), compensatory and special education, safe and drug free schools programs, dropout prevention, aspects of school readiness and early intervention, district health and human service activities, initiatives for linking with community services, and more. Most boards will find (1) they don't have a big picture perspective of how all these functions relate to each other, (2) the current board structure and processes for reviewing these functions do not engender a thorough, cohesive approach to policy, and (3) functions related to addressing barriers to learning are distributed among administrative staff in ways that foster fragmentation.

A standing committee can focus indepth and consistently on the topic of how schools in the district can enhance their efforts to improve instruction by addressing barriers in more cohesive and effective ways. The primary assignment for the committee is to develop a comprehensive policy framework to guide reforms and restructuring so that every school can make major improvements in how it addresses barriers interfering with the performance and learning of its students. Developing such a framework requires revisiting existing policy with a view to making it more cohesive and, as gaps are

identified, taking steps to fill them. Current policies, practices, and resources must be well-understood. This requires using the lens of addressing barriers to learning to do a complete mapping of all district owned programs, services, personnel, space, material resources, cooperative ventures with community agencies, and so forth. The mapping process should differentiate between (a) regular, long-term programs and short term projects, (b) those that have the potential to produce major results and those likely to produce superficial outcomes, and (c) those designed to benefit all or most students at every school site and those designed to serve a small segment of the district's students. In looking at income, in-kind contributions, and expenditures, it is essential to distinguish between "hard" and "soft" money (e.g., the general funds budget, categorical and special project funds, other sources that currently or potentially can help underwrite programs). It is also useful to differentiate between long- and short-term soft money. It has been speculated that when the various sources of support are totaled in certain schools as much as 30% of the resources may be going to addressing barriers to learning.

For examples of board policy to enhance a system of learning supports, see Section A of the Center's System of Change Toolkit – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>. In addition to viewing the examples, see the prototype the Center developed:

>Board Policy – *Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/boardpolicy.pdf>

**C**omments from Colleagues in the Field: We shared the request with a number of colleagues; here are excerpts from the responses:

- (1) "School boards can be 'brought along' by the Supt demonstrating the system through their work. For example, organizing the meeting agendas into the 3 components, placing a graphic organizer in poster form on the walls of the Board Room that have the goals in the 3 components and either the "spokes" or a chart of the six areas and the learning supports in each of them. That helped me to keep a focus on the decisions we made supporting the work."
- (2) "When you think about the people who voluntarily serve on these boards, one must assume that they are passionate about education and children. (They certainly aren't doing it for the money.) While they care, they are also in a position to be 'lobbied' on issues that can range from building improvements, to salaries, to extracurricular activities, to support for breakfast programs, to adoption of reading programs, etc. etc. etc. The 'fragmented' graphic that is used to demonstrate the numbers of programs and initiatives within a single district comes to mind. All these programs and efforts have a legitimate purpose but compete with one another for limited resources. The same applies to what board members have to do when they think about balancing budgets and approving changes in policies and practices. They need to understand everything that's going on and do what they think will be best for students.

A good way to approach a school board to discuss policy is to first educate members about the academic benefits that an organized system of learning supports can provide. I'm sure that many of [the Center/s] on-line resources could be used to provide basic information. I would follow that information with a status of the learning supports available in the district and how effective they've been (or not been) using data. Then, I would follow with specific recommendations for policies that could help increase their effectiveness and how these policies or practices could support student achievement/performance. These policies could include standards for hiring as well as expectations for how existing staff can utilize and support the efforts that exist. ...

One final suggestion is to revisit the board of education on a regular basis (perhaps once a semester?). If they make a policy change, they should receive updates on the impact of the change as well as offer ideas for ways to continue to improve in the future. Keeping learning supports in forefront also legitimizes the effort because it continually reinforces the ties between supports and academic achievement. It's something that is on-going and takes many forms as student needs shift. Sharing the 'good things' also provides board members with information (facts and data) they can share with the public about what they are doing in the district."

- (3) “In California, the LCAP (Local Control Accountability Plan) seems to be the greatest factor driving district decision making regarding policy, learning supports, and hiring practices. (‘Districts will engage parents, staff, and community members to gather input to develop LCAPs that address the needs of all students.’) Districts are required to set priorities based on input from staff, parents, and community, within the eight priority areas established by CDE. Under the LCAP priorities of School Climate and Student Engagement, districts then must identify specific goals, actions, and metrics to achieve these goals.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/statepriorityresources.asp>

Data driven decision making can be a critical tool to guide districts in identifying priorities and progress monitoring. As schools and districts identify priorities based on their data dashboard, this information can inform policy at the school, district (board) level. The SWIFT framework that we are working with has developed a Data Dashboard and tools that support districts to guide their decision making, establish priorities, and progress monitoring. Here is a link to some of their tools:

[http://www.swiftschools.org/sites/default/files/SWIFT%20TA%20Practice%20Brief\\_Data%20Snapshots.pdf](http://www.swiftschools.org/sites/default/files/SWIFT%20TA%20Practice%20Brief_Data%20Snapshots.pdf)

The District Capacity Assessment (DCA) is also a great tool to assist districts to align their goals, actions, resource allocations, and hiring practices with their LCAP priorities and/or with their selected initiatives. The outcomes of this self-assessment are used to help district leaders ‘better align resources with intended outcomes and develop action plans to support the use of effective innovations’ (e.g., learning supports).

<http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/sites/implementation.fpg.unc.edu/files/SISEP-Handout22-DCAOverview.pdf>

Finally, the ACSA "Whole School Whole Child" Model seems to be a useful model to focus a district's attention on learning supports within an MTSS framework.

<http://www.ascd.org/programs/learning-and-health/wsc-model.aspx>

I think that the work at the [UCLA] Center is critical to assisting school boards to focus on learning supports and remove barriers to support learning!”

- (4) “For our district, the key piece of school board support is through our long-range strategic planning process. We facilitate a comprehensive needs assessment and feedback process with them. Once they have arrived at consensus on the long-range strategic plan, we utilize it to maintain focus. Those goals become talking points for policy and advocacy. When we make hiring recommendations, we also refer to the strategic plan goals and the attributes necessary to achieve them. It’s likely that being a district with about 60% poverty helps my board maintain focus on learning supports as well. They know what a critical role poverty plays in student achievement and the need for equity.”
- (5) “We are lucky to have a school board that is easy to access and we can have discussions. Some of our school board members have an interest in addressing Barriers to Learning. Because of this, it is important to provide them information on the three component model, range of learners, systems of support, the six content arenas, etc. If your decision makers have an understanding of the theory around the organizational structure of managing site and district supports, they will have an easier time supporting and building policies that support this work. I’m a big believer in developing relationships with both administration and the school board, in order to have discussions and share ideas about this work.”
- (6) “... I think the approach would differ with the size of the school district as smaller districts often have greater personal interaction compared with a huge district where areas are regions containing many school of different levels. Here we have the area divided into four quadrants and we have 21 schools plus a continuation school. ... From my perspective I have attempted over the years to do the following:
- >Put a face to my name and ask questions regarding the board member's vision for the district and five year plan. Look for ways to suggest supporting that plan in my role as school psychologist.
  - >Ask Board members to come speak to staff at school during staff meeting.
  - >Attend Board meetings.
  - >Presentation to the board.

... In general, Board members are elected by the community. Organize the parents. Contact community sources of information to do presentation to parent groups, like a once per month parent get together. Sometimes local stores may sponsor simple food and childcare so all parents may access. In my experience I have found that the community voice is quite powerful. More so than employees who are subject to reprimand by a ill equipped board member. Individuals with a personal agenda are frequently found on school boards. The task is to gather the people who will be voting for this individual and make their voice heard. ...”

(7) “I don't think our school board has much power other than to select a superintendent. Maybe that because we are such a large school district. What really matters is that student needs are presented in an honest way to boards and that they develop policy, but even when you have policy, policy is not always enforced. If kids can't read or write or do math, the focus will lie there. So much is actually connected, but boards tend to follow the most current "Sexy" or political trend and go with that. Best is to be where you can impact change. Usually that's closer to the schools and the families.”

(8) “In New Mexico the legislator passed HB 212. That bill took all ability of school boards to engage in any of this work. Our role is limited to:

1. Hire, supervise, fire superintendent
2. Develop, and submit a balanced budget.
3. Development & approval of district policies
4. Approval of investments, bonding, and capital

In our role as policy makers we can support instruction, curriculum, and staff with policy but the administration develops procedural directives.”

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## Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

**Is transforming student/learning supports a regular agenda item for your school board? If not, you might want to share this Community of Practice discussion with the board (or one of the members). Then, follow-up by asking for a time when you and a group of concerned stakeholders can talk about the idea of a committee that would specifically focus on strengthening learning supports. Let us know how we can help.**

Send your responses to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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## Featured Set of Center Resources on

### >Mobilizing school boards to strengthen learning supports

We frequently receive requests saying *I am about to meet with a school board member, what is the most concise document I can share to illustrate the need for a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning support?*

In responding, we note that Section A of the Center’s System of Change Toolkit contains several brief, introductory resources – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>.

For example, see

>*Toward Next Steps in School Improvement: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/towardnextstep.pdf>

Also see the 4 page Guidance Note:

>*Enhancing a School Board's Focus on Addressing Barriers to Learning & Teaching*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schoolboardfocus.pdf>

And there are the following examples of what some district school boards have adopted:

- >Multnomah Education Board Policy  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/Multnomah.pdf>
- >Grant Parish School Board: Comprehensive Learning Supports  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/grantpolicy.pdf>
- >Berkeley (CA)  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/berkeleywheresithappening\(2008\).pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/berkeleywheresithappening(2008).pdf)
- >Los Angeles Unified School District  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/losangeles.pdf>

**Note:** Adoption of a policy statement in no way guarantees follow-through. Critical drivers for policy implementation and sustainability include development of a design for a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports and related standards and accountability indicators that are fully incorporated into existing strategic plans for school improvement.

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If you missed the quarterly ejournal for summer, 2017 or the monthly ENEWS, you can access them on the Center's website <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

AND DOWNLOAD THE CENTER'S NEW (FREE) BOOK

***Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide***

(Also access from the Center's homepage)

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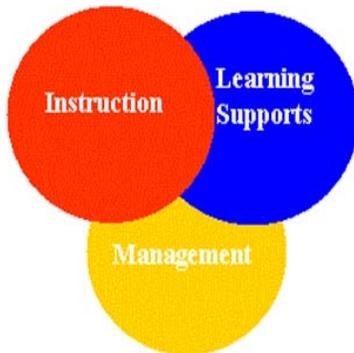
**THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!**

**For new sign-ups – email [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.**

**We post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net Exchange* on our website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm> and on *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>)**

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\*Information is online about the

**National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

**Also online is the report from the National Summit on the**

***Every Student Succeeds Act and Learning Supports: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching to Enhance Equity of Opportunity –***

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/summitreport.pdf>

And see the new book:

>*Transforming Student and Learning Supports:*

*Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*

<https://titles.cognella.com/transforming-student-and-learning-supports-9781516512782.html>