



Addressing Barriers

to Learning



New ways to think . . .

Better ways to link

Volume 12, Number 2
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Engaging the Strengths of Families, Youth, and Communities in Rebuilding Learning Supports

Now, forty-two years after the passage of ESEA, federal policies of parental involvement and community participation continue to be more rhetorical than meaningful; more theoretical than practical; an afterthought rather than a forethought; and they take a back seat to the more bureaucratic and technical elements of public education change and reform, especially testing and assessment.

Arnold F. Fege (2006)
Harvard Educational Review

Next time you are involved in a group discussion about how to improve schools, look around the table. After you note who is there, ask yourself, which stakeholder groups are not represented (or are not effectively represented).

Missing too often are the contributions of families, youth, and many other key community entities. This is the case despite policies that call for enhancing parent and community involvement. Policy makers recognize that such involvement is essential to schools and schooling. However, as has been a common experience in operationalizing policy, verbal commitments have not been reflected in daily practice.

So the question arises:

How can schools increase positive family, youth, and community involvement to achieve the mutual benefits that can be accrued from bringing together these invaluable resources?

From an infrastructure perspective, one major strategy is to develop *school-community collaboratives* in which key stakeholders work together. A complementary approach is to rework school and district infrastructure mechanisms for purposes such as developing a sustainable system of learning supports for every school. In the following discussion, we focus mainly on the first strategy.

School-Community Collaboratives: A Bit of a Paradox

An apparent paradox arises when school-community collaboratives are discussed. It is clear that their numbers are increasing, but typically involvement of a wide range of families, youth, and community resources is not. Collaboratives aim to strengthen schools, families, youth, and neighborhoods and reduce problems. However, too many are implemented poorly and end up being just another effort that promised a lot, did little, and as a result, increased skepticism about collaboration.

Years ago, former Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders cautioned: "We all say we want to collaborate, but what we really mean is that we want to continue doing things as we have always done them while others change to fit what we are doing." Others have cautioned that some so-called collaboratives amount to little more than groups of people sitting around engaging in "collabo-babble."

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What is Collaboration?

Collaboration involves more than simply working together. It is more than a process to enhance cooperation and coordination. Professionals who work as a multidisciplinary team to coordinate treatment do not constitute a collaborative; they are a treatment team. Interagency teams established to enhance coordination and communication across agencies are not collaboratives; they are coordinating teams. Committees tend to be work groups for specific tasks.

The hallmark of collaboration is a formal agreement among participants to establish an autonomous structure to accomplish goals that would be difficult to achieve by any of the participants alone. While they may have a primary affiliation elsewhere, they commit to working together under specified conditions to pursue a shared vision and common set of goals.

A collaborative structure requires shared governance (power, authority, decision making, accountability) and the weaving together of a set of resources for pursuing the shared vision and goals. It also requires building well-defined working relationships to connect and mobilize resources (e.g., financial and social capital) for use in planful and mutually beneficial ways.

**Some wag defined collaboration as
*an unnatural act between
nonconsenting adults***

Growing appreciation of human and social capital has resulted in collaboratives expanding to include a wide range of stakeholders (people, groups, formal and informal organizations). The political realities of local control have further expanded collaborative bodies to encompass local policy makers, representatives of families, nonprofessionals, youth, and volunteers.

By embracing a wide spectrum of stakeholders, collaboration becomes both a desired process and an outcome. That is, the intent is to establish strong working relationships that are enduring. However, family, youth, community, and school collaboration is not an end in itself. It is a turning point meant to enable participants to pursue increasingly potent strategies for strengthening families, schools, and communities.

Why is Effective Family, Youth, Community, & School Collaboration So Important?

Schools are located in communities, but often are islands with no bridges to the mainland. Families live in neighborhoods, often with little connection to each other or to the schools their youngsters attend. Nevertheless, all affect each other, for good or bad. Because of this and because they share goals related to education and socialization of the young, schools, homes, and communities must collaborate with each other if they are to minimize problems and maximize results. And, in the process, they can empower the voices, energy, and resources of all who participate.

- Dealing with multiple and interrelated concerns (e.g., poverty, crime, violence, safety, child development, education, employment, housing), requires multiple and interrelated actions.
- Promoting well-being, resilience, and protective factors and empowering families, youth, communities, and schools also requires concerted effort.

Interrelated actions require collaboration. Collaboration is essential to increasing support and assistance for learning and for addressing barriers to learning. It can enhance opportunities and generate new approaches for strengthening family, school, and community.

For schools, this can translate into enhanced academic performance, fewer discipline problems, reduced drop out rates, higher staff morale, and improved use of resources. For families and other community entities, collaboration with schools and with each other can enhance parenting and socialization, address psychosocial problems, and improve the fabric of family and community life.

Effective collaboration is a key to promoting well-being and addressing barriers to development, learning, family and youth well-being, and community self-sufficiency.

families, communities, and schools working together

Collaboratives can weave together a critical mass of resources and strategies to enhance caring communities that support all youth and their families and enable success at school and beyond. Strong family-school-community connections are critical in impoverished communities where schools often are the largest piece of public real estate and also may be the single largest employer.

One example of all this is the Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative in Los Angeles. With initial funding from the Annenberg Foundation, the connections between local schools and the surrounding community are being strengthened for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders. This encompasses a focus on safe and healthy schools and neighborhoods, positive development and learning, personal, family, and economic well-being, and more. Census data indicate that the median family income is between \$20,000 and \$30,000 annually. Nearly all families in the area speak Spanish at home; about 85 percent of first graders do not speak English. The evaluator for the work, Charles Kerchner, reports positive outcomes for all sectors involved in the collaborative. For instance, he notes that “Breed Street Elementary, and several of the surrounding schools have done a remarkable job in increasing student achievement. Breed scored 705 – better than many suburban schools on the state achievement index, and several other schools are not far behind. ... Parent participation has blossomed at the school; and as parents learn about the school, they are also learning about political power: how to get it and how to use it. They conduct organized critiques of classrooms and report their findings to the faculty and administration. They have also become more involved in their own children’s education and much better informed about how school operates and how their children can navigate the system.”

**It's Not About a Collaborative . . .
It's About Collaborating to be Effective**

As defined above, effective collaboratives attempt to weave the responsibilities and resources of key stakeholders together to create a new form of unified entity. For example, such collaboratives may draw on various sources of social and financial capital, such as youth, families, religious and civic groups, community based organizations, businesses, parks and libraries, and post-secondary institutions. This includes agencies, organizations, and any facilities providing programs for education, literacy, enrichment, recreation, the arts, youth development, health and human services, juvenile justice, vocational education, and economic development.

An optimal approach involves formally blending together resources of at least one school and sometimes a group of schools or an entire school district with local family and community resources. The aim, of course, is to sustain connections over time.

While it is relatively simple to make informal linkages, establishing major long-term collaboratives is complicated. Doing so requires vision, cohesive policy, and basic systemic reforms. The complexity is readily seen in efforts to establish comprehensive systems of learning supports. Such systems involve

much more than linking a few services, recreation, and enrichment activities to schools. Major systemic changes are required to develop and evolve formal and institutionalized sharing of a wide spectrum of responsibilities and resources. Collaboratives often are established to address a specific local problem or in the wake of a crisis. For the long haul, however, such mechanisms need to be guided by a broad and enlightened vision about strengthening the young, their families, schools, and neighborhoods. Moreover, building an effective collaborative requires stakeholders who can creatively assume leadership and are ready to commit to and learn new and multifaceted roles and functions.

*Leaving no child behind
is only feasible through
well-designed collaborative efforts*

(cont. on p. 4)

It is commonly said that collaboratives are about building relationships. Collaboratives built mainly on personal connections are vulnerable to the mobility that characterizes many such groups. Moreover, the objective is not simply to establish personal connections, but to build *working* relationships that are potent, synergistic, stable, and sustainable. This requires a well-designed and institutionalized infrastructure for performing tasks, solving problems, and mediating conflict.

A collaborative needs financial support. The core operational budget can be direct funding and in-kind contributions from the resources of stakeholder groups. A good example is the provision of space for the collaborative. A school or community entity or both should be asked to contribute the necessary space. As specific functions and initiatives are undertaken that reflect overlapping arenas of concern for schools and community agencies such as safe schools and neighborhoods, some portion of their respective funding streams can be braided together. Finally, there will be opportunities to supplement the budget with extra-mural grants. A caution here is to avoid pernicious funding. That is, it is important not to pursue funding for projects that will distract the collaborative from vigorously pursuing its vision in a cohesive (nonfragmented) manner.

The governance of the collaborative must be designed to equalize power so that decision making appropriately reflects all stakeholder groups and so that all are equally accountable. The leadership also must include representatives from all groups, and all participants must share in the workload – pursuing clear roles and functions. And, collaboratives must be open to all who are willing to contribute their talents.

Obviously, true collaboration involves more than meeting and talking. The point is to work together in ways that produce the type of actions that result in important results. For this to happen, steps must be taken to ensure that collaboratives are formed in ways that ensure they can be effective. This includes a productive infrastructure and providing participants with the training, time, support, and authority to carry out their roles and functions. It is when such matters are ignored that groups find themselves meeting and meeting, but going nowhere.

Structure Follows Function

Operationally, a collaborative is defined by its *functions*. Many functions are involved in rebuilding learning supports. These include enhancing how

existing resources are used, pursuing new resources, improving planning, coordination, communication, mutual support, and much more.

The above functions encompass a host of specific tasks. Examples include mapping and analyzing resources, finding ways to share facilities and other resources, enhancing programs in the school and community, and recommending priorities.

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It's relatively easy to establish a "collaborative;" what's hard is turning the group into an mechanism that effectively accomplishes essential tasks.

Keep in mind the organizational principle:

Structure follows function.

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Organizationally, a collaborative must develop a differentiated infrastructure (e.g., steering and work groups) that enables accomplishment of its functions and related tasks. Furthermore, since the functions pursued by a collaborative almost always overlap with work being carried out by others, a collaborative needs to establish connections with other bodies. (See resources on pp. 5 & 6 for guides to infrastructure building.)

Barriers to Collaboration

Barriers to collaboration arise from a variety of institutional and personal factors. A fundamental institutional barrier is the degree to which efforts to establish such connections are *marginalized* in policy and practice. The extent to which this happens is seen in how few resources schools tend to deploy for building effective collaboratives.

And, even when a collaboration is initiated, the matters addressed usually are marginalized. For example, many groups spend a great deal of effort on strategies for increasing client access to programs and services and reducing the fragmentation associated with piecemeal, categorically funded programs (e.g., programs to reduce learning and behavior problems, substance abuse, violence, school dropouts, delinquency, and teen pregnancy). However, problems of access and fragmentation stem from marginalization, and this barrier remains a major deterrent to successful collaboration.

Institutional barriers are seen when existing policy, accountability, leadership, budget, space, schedules, and capacity building are nonsupportive of efforts to pursue results effectively and efficiently. Nonsupport may simply take the form of benign neglect. More often, it stems from a lack of understanding, commitment, and/or capability related to establishing and maintaining a potent infrastructure for working together and for sharing resources. Occasionally, nonsupport takes the ugly form of forces at work trying to actively undermine collaboration.

Examples of institutional barriers include:

- policies that mandate collaboration but do not enable the process by reconciling divergent accountability pressures that interfere with using resources optimally
- policies for collaboration that do not provide adequate resources and time for leadership and stakeholder training and for overcoming barriers to collaboration,
- leadership that does not establish an effective infrastructure (including mechanisms such as a steering group and work/task groups)
- differences in the conditions and incentives associated with participation (including the fact that meetings usually are set during the work day and community agency and school participants salary usually is in effect during attendance, while family members and youth are expected to volunteer their time)

At the personal level, barriers mostly stem from practical deterrents, negative attitudes, and deficiencies of knowledge and skill. These vary for different stakeholders but often include problems related to work schedules, transportation, childcare, communication skills, understanding of differences in organizational culture, accommodations for language and cultural differences, and so forth.

Other barriers arise because of inadequate attention to systemic change concerns. How well a collaborative

is implemented significantly depends on the personnel doing the implementing and the motivation and capabilities of participants. Sufficient resources and time must be redeployed so they can learn and carry out new functions effectively. And, when newcomers join, well-designed procedures must be in place to bring them up to speed.

Effective collaboration requires vision, cohesive policy, potent leadership, infrastructure, capacity building, & ongoing problem solving

In bringing school and community stakeholders to the same table, it is a given that there will be problems related to the differences in organizational mission, functions, cultures, bureaucracies, and accountabilities. Moreover, when families and youth are at the table, power differentials are common, especially when low-income families are involved and are confronted with credentialed and titled professionals.

Working collaboratively requires learning from each other. This, of course, is easier when all stakeholders are committed to learning. And, overcoming barriers involves moving beyond complaining about problems. It calls for careful analyses of why a problem has arisen and then creatively solving it. This, too, is easier when stakeholders are committed to overcoming barriers.

What the best and wisest parent wants for his [or her] own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.

John Dewey, *The School and Society*, 1907

A Few Resources for Collaborative Infrastructure Building

>School and Community Collaboration to Promote a Safe Learning Environment. *State Education Standard*, 7, 38-43 (2006). National Association of State Boards of Education.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/school&communitycollaboration.pdf>

>*School-Community Partnerships Guide* (rev. 2004). <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/guides/schoolcomm.pdf>

>*Fostering School, Family, and Community Involvement. Guidebook*. Northwest Regional Educ. Lab. (2002).
http://www.safetyzone.org/safe_secure.html

Both the above guides discuss the dimensions, characteristics, principles, and ways to build and maintain effective collaboratives.

(cont. on p. 6)

- > *An untapped resource: Exploring youth representation on your board or committee* (undated Guide)
<http://www.atthetable.org/handout.asp?ID=70>
 How to expand representation on collaboratives and empower the youth. Includes information on capacity building and barriers.
- > *Building Family-School Partnerships that Work*. <http://www.ncpie.org>
 Combines on-the-ground perspectives and federal, state, and district policy research, with current social science research on key parental involvement issues and effective practices.
- > *Connections with Schools: Strategy Briefs* (2006). National Center for Family and Community
<http://www.sedl.org/connections/research-briefs.html>
 Covers reaching out to diverse populations, organizing family-community-school connections, and developing a collaborative approach
- > *Toward a School District Infrastructure that More Effectively Addresses Barriers to Learning and Teaching*. (2007). [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/toward a school district infrastructure.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/toward%20a%20school%20district%20infrastructure.pdf)
- > *Sustaining School and Community Efforts to Enhance Outcomes for Children and Youth: A Guidebook and Tool Kit*. (Updated 2004). <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/sustaining.pdf>
- > Self-study Surveys:
 - >> *School-Community Collaboration* >> *Home Involvement in Schooling*
 These and other related surveys are online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Surveys/Set1.pdf>
 - > *Working Collaboratively: From School-Based Teams to School-Community-Higher Education Connections*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/worktogether/worktogether.pdf>
 Outlines models of collaborative school-based teams and interprofessional education programs.
 - > *Working Together: School-Family-Community Partnerships* (2006).
http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/rural_ed/toolkit/toolkit.htm
 Provides info, resources, and strategies to help strengthen parent and community involvement. Divided into 3 sections: Teacher Tools, Family Tools and Professional Development Tools.
 - > *The School Leader's Guide to Student Learning Supports: New Directions for Addressing Barriers to Learning* (2006). <http://www.corwinpress.com/book.aspx?pid=11343>
 - > *The Asset-Based Community Development Institute* – <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>
 Established in 1995 by the Community Development Program at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research. Built on three decades of community development research by John Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. The Institute spreads its findings on capacity-building community development through extensive and substantial interactions with community builders and by producing practical resources and tools.

“As the challenges to community-based organizers and developers escalate, so also do the creative new responses that community builders invent. Many of these inventors now recognize that rebuilding low- and moderate-income communities ‘from the bottom up’ requires the mobilization and participation of all of the ‘assets’ at hand. Prominent among these local assets are the local schools. At the same time, local educators are recognizing that successful schools rest on the rock of economically mobile communities.”

John Kretzmann (1992) in *Community-Based Development and Local Schools: A Promising Partnership*
<http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/community/jody-wp9214.html>

They've asked me to be part of a school-community collaborative.



Great! Tell them we want more pupil-free days on the school calendar.

Center News



Revamped Tool Kit for Rebuilding a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkit.htm>

Announcing! Establishment of a Partnership with Scholastic, Inc. for Leadership Institutes

Several months ago we were contacted by the Community Affairs unit of *Scholastic Inc.* about establishing an initiative to help school policy makers and administrators respond to the imperative for rebuilding supports for learning. The emphasis is on how schools can directly and systematically deal with factors that keep too many students from connecting effectively with good instruction. The initiative will reflect pioneering work from across the country that is moving learning supports to a prominent place in enhancing school improvement and student outcomes.

As a first phase, we are working together to draft a set of introductory leadership materials; then, we will provide a series of Leadership Institutes for policy maker and administrator organizations. This initiative will enhance the work being done with respect to the *National Initiative: New Directions for Student Support*.

Building a system of supports for learning requires blueprint guides, materials, tools and other resources for strategic planning, implementation, and capacity building. Such resources also help to deepen learning about the substance and processes of the work to be done. With this in mind, this online, evolving toolkit provides a wide range of detailed resource materials (e.g., exemplars, guides, aids, tools).

The kit is divided into three sections.

Section A offers *exemplars and guides* related to moving forward with a comprehensive system of learning supports.

Section B includes a variety of brief guidance and blueprint notes, tools, and training materials developed by the Center at UCLA to aid capacity building (particularly staff and stakeholder development).

Section C provides the menu of over 130 specific Quick Finds available in the online clearinghouse accessed through the Center at UCLA. Each *Quick Find* is a gateway to a host of resources.

Want resources? Need technical assistance? We can help!

Contact us at: E-mail: smhp@ucla.edu Ph: (310) 825-3634 Toll Free Ph: (866) 846-4843

Write: Center for Mental Health in Schools, Department of Psychology, UCLA
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563

Or use our website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

If you're not receiving our monthly electronic newsletter (ENEWS), send an E-mail request to:

smhp@ucla.edu

or subscribe online @ – <http://lists.ucla.edu/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/mentalhealth-L>

For access to the latest Center developed resources, go to:

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsnew/JustPutOnline.htm> <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsnew/otherresources.htm>

FOR THOSE WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS, ALL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE BY CONTACTING THE CENTER.

Exchange info on MH practices in school and network with colleagues across the country by joining (1) the **Weekly Listserv for School MH Practitioners** and/or (2) **the Center's Consultation Cadre**. Sign up by email at smhp@ucla.edu or by phone – Toll Free (866) 846-4843.

Also, phone, fax, E-mail, or snail mail us if you want to submit feedback, request resources, or send comments and info for us to circulate.

**Update on the National Initiative:
New Directions for Student Support**

California continues to offer important examples of ways to move in new directions. See page 9 of this newsletter for the work being done by the schools and community in Berkeley.

In addition, California legislation for a *Comprehensive Pupil Learning Supports System* (SB 288) has been reintroduced by State Senator Leland Yee.
http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/sen/sb_0251-0300/sb_288_bill_20070215_introduced.pdf

And, the preliminary draft of the CA. Department of Mental Health’s initiative for "Prevention and Early Intervention and School-based Programs, Interventions and Systems" incorporates some major facets of our Center’s work. See the agency’s draft of "Standards for Key Areas in Developing Systems for Prevention and Early Intervention" in *Where’s It Happening? Examples of New Directions for Student Support & Lessons Learned*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/wheresithappening.htm>

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If you have been involved in developing a comprehensive approach to New Directions for Student Support, please send us the information so that we can include it.

Also, let us know if you are associated with a district that is ready to move forward and want to explore ways we might be able to help.

Contact: ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Next summits and leadership institutes are currently being planned. (Let us hear from you about where and when.)

Interested in learning more about all this? Go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ndannouncement.htm> and/or contact the Center.

Center Staff:
*Howard Adelman, Co-Director
Linda Taylor, Co-Director
Perry Nelson, Coordinator
. . . and a host of graduate and undergraduate students*

Sometimes we feel like we’re diagonally parked in a parallel universe.

Latest Center Online Resources

Online Clearinghouse Quick Find topics:

- > *Foster Care* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/fostercare.htm>
- > *Disciplinary Practices* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/discpractices.htm>

Guidance and Policy Notes:

- > *Integrating Learning Supports into the Infrastructure of a Small School* – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infrastructure small school notes.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infrastructure/small%20school%20notes.pdf)
- > *An Open Letter to Congress: Reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to Better Address Barriers to Learning & Teaching* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/congress%20letter.pdf>

Information Resource:

- > *What’s the Research-base for Moving toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports?*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/WhatstheEvidenceBase.pdf>

And, remember that the Center continues to provide free and ready online access to a range of other resources to support moving in new directions and enhancing learning supports.

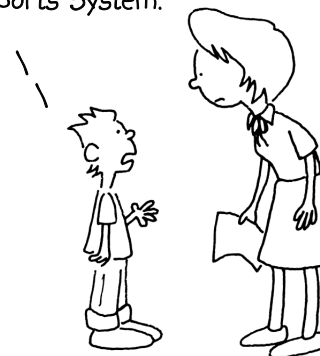


Center Impact Evaluation

Thanks to all who responded. The updated report can be accessed online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/evaluation/impacteval02rep.pdf>



I heard it takes a village,
but I’d settle for a good
Learning Supports System.





Ideas into Practice Where's It Happening? Berkeley, CA

Berkeley has a strong school-community collaboration. The following are excerpts from two January 2007 documents prepared by the Berkeley Integrated Resources Initiative.¹

“In June 2005 the Berkeley Alliance – a longstanding partnership between the Berkeley Unified School District, the City of Berkeley, the University of California-Berkeley, and the Berkeley community – formally committed to supporting the Berkeley Integrated Resources Initiative. This is a community-wide endeavor to integrate school and community resources, in policy and practice, with a common goal of promoting healthy child and youth development and breaking down barriers to learning.”

“The Vision calls for the Berkeley Unified School District, the City of Berkeley, the University of California-Berkeley, and local community organizations [to] work collectively and purposely to identify and weave their relevant resources to effectively address barriers to learning and promote healthy development for all Berkeley children and youth.”

“The Mission calls upon the partners to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development for Berkeley children and youth. [This] entails the strengthening of students, schools, families, and neighborhoods to foster a developmentally appropriate learning environment in which children and youth can thrive. The systemic change process emphasizes a coordinated school improvement and agency reform effort that leverages and weaves school-owned and community-owned resources in a comprehensive manner. In their work together, schools and agencies will create and provide a continuum of support for children and youth that emphasizes promoting healthy development for all, intervening early when problems arise, and providing specialized services to address critical needs.”

¹ *Schools-Mental Health Partnership: Strategic Plan* – online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/BIRI%20Schools%20Mental%20Health.pdf>

Universal Learning Support System: Assessment Report – online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/Universal%20Learning%20Support%20System%20Assessment%20Report.pdf>

“The first step taken was to undertake a comprehensive mapping of resources and gaps in Berkeley. To accomplish this goal it was necessary to establish a conceptual framework for the assessment. The partnership sought a model that was comprehensive enough to address the wide range of issues facing children and families as they grow and develop. After some reflection, the partnership adopted the Comprehensive Systemic Intervention Framework developed by ... the UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools....

In August 2005 Berkeley Unified School District received an Integrating Mental Health in Schools grant from the U.S. Department of Education. This grant, organized around the [UCLA] framework, called for a systemic reform process that would affect all of the public schools and students in Berkeley.”

This was implemented as part of “the Berkeley Integrated Resources Initiative,” a community wide endeavor launched in 2005 to integrate school and community resources in policy and practice, with a common goal of promoting healthy child and youth development and breaking down barriers to learning. The initiative builds on a longstanding partnership between the Berkeley Unified School District, the City of Berkeley, the University of California at Berkeley and the broader community and weaves together existing institutional change efforts into a single coordinated and unified process. The initiative calls for a systemic change process in which the organizations collaborate along a common vision, language and process, and implement necessary policy changes to sustain the effort over time. [To these ends], the initiative adopted the Comprehensive Systemic Intervention Framework developed by ... the UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools.

This framework is based on the premise that the ‘range of barriers to student learning is multifaceted and complex and the number of students affected is quite large...[and therefore] it is reasonable to stress that a comprehensive and systemic approach to intervention is necessary.’ This framework, therefore, ‘conceives the scope of activity as a school-community continuum of interconnected intervention systems consisting of: systems for promotion of healthy development and prevention of problems; systems for intervening early to address problems as soon after onset as is feasible; and systems for assisting those with chronic and severe problems.’”

The framework categorizes “six Universal Learning Supports in an attempt to capture ‘the multifaceted work schools need to pursue in comprehensively addressing barriers to learning.’ The BIRI Steering Committee has added a seventh arena, cultural literacy, to emphasize the importance of supporting children and youth in culturally competent ways, given the diversity of the Berkeley community. The categories are:

1. Classroom-focused enabling - enhancing regular classroom strategies to enable learning (e.g., improving instruction for students with mild-moderate learning and behavioral problems and re-engaging those who have become disengaged from learning at school)
2. Support for transitions (e.g., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes, daily transitions)
3. Home involvement with school - strengthening families and home and school connections
4. Crisis response and prevention - responding to, and where feasible, preventing school and personal crises
5. Community involvement and support (e.g., outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
6. Student and family assistance - facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed
7. Cultural literacy - the ability to tailor outreach, engagement, and intervention to the unique cultural and linguistic characteristics of students and families.”

“A Universal Learning Support System (ULSS) is constructed to provide *appropriate* services to *all* children and youth who need them to be successful academically, behaviorally and socially.

To accomplish this goal, a ULSS must have an appropriate continuum of highly accessible services, ranging from the least to the most intensive, and the ability to deploy them equitably to children, youth and families based on need. [This calls for] ... a single, unified, interagency coordinated, and integrated system of services and supports ... funded, staffed and governed by all relevant public and private agencies and community organizations that share the goal of promoting healthy children, youth, families and communities....”

Comments from the Manager of Integrated Resources, Berkeley Unified Schools

“We have seen mental health as one part of a broader system of "Universal Learning Supports" (ULSS) for our students.... I did a training for a subsection of our ULSS Council (elementary schools) focused on the organization and coordination of learning support resources more holistically than we had done in the past, emphasizing a continuum of services (I kept pushing to try and get people to think about prevention/promotion) in areas such as mental and physical health, afterschool programing, special education, and on more abstract sometimes unrecognized supports such as the unique strengths of teachers/staff and their relationships with students.

So while we are pushing an elephant one step at a time, I really feel that our system is moving. But it is clearly a long term process that takes time, and also needs to be resourced. We are looking at ways of generating new financial resources to support it. Some of these may well come directly from BUSD, which is a real sign of increased buy-in.”

Lisa Warhuus, Ph.D.
Phone: 510/644-8991
Email: Lisa_Warhuus@berkeley.k12.ca.us

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For more, see *Where’s It Happening? Examples of New Directions for Student Support & Lessons Learned* – smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/wheresithappening.htm

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The solution to adult problems tomorrow depends in large margin upon how our children grow up today.

Margaret Mead

About the Research-Base for Moving Toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/WhatstheEvidenceBase.pdf>

We have found that the best way to approach the topic of evidence related to a Comprehensive Pupil Learning Support System is to stress two matters: (1) data showing the need for such systemic changes related to school improvement efforts and (2) data on the value of moving toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports.

- (1) There is a growing body of data attesting to the failure of current school improvement efforts — for example, we point to the evidence of
- high student dropout rates,
 - high teacher dropout rates,
 - the continuing achievement gap,
 - the plateau effect related to efforts to improve achievement test performance
 - the growing list of schools designated as low performing,
 - the degree to which high stakes testing is taking a toll on students

Related to this is the evidence that current school improvement planning does not adequately focus on the need for schools to play a significant role in addressing barriers to learning and teaching. See:

>>"*School Improvement Planning: what's Missing?*"
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsmissing.htm>

>>"*Addressing What's Missing in School Improvement Planning: Expanding Standards and Accountability to Encompass an Enabling or Learning Supports Component*"
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enabling/standards.pdf>

All these indicators point to the need for new directions in how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and the need for the proposed legislation.

- (2) There is an extensive and growing body of literature indicating the value of moving toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports. At this time, it is necessary to combine the data from a variety of efforts that have been undertaken. See, for example:

>>"*Addressing Barriers to Student Learning & Promoting Healthy Development: A Usable Research- Base*" online at
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/BarriersBrief.pdf>

>>>Also see Lists of Empirically Supported/evidence Based Interventions for School-aged Children and Adolescents annotated at
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/aboutmh/annotatedlist.pdf>

>>>And see a statewide example of data indicating a significant relationship across secondary schools between California's *Academic Performance Index* (API) scores and three-quarters of the survey indicators on the *Healthy Kids Survey* —
<http://www.wested.org/chks/pdf/factsheet.pdf>

The various studies show improvements in school attendance, reduced behavior problems, improved interpersonal skills, enhanced achievement, and increased bonding at school and at home.

What's the Problem?

There's a story about a family with an eight year old boy who had never spoken.

One morning at the breakfast table the family sat quietly eating when all of the sudden they heard:

"How come my hot cereal is cold?"

It took a second to realize the words had been uttered by their son.

Dumbfounded, they looked at him. Finally, the mother stammered,

"Y-Y-You spoke!"

"Certainly, " said the boy.

"But," asked his father, *"why haven't you said anything before?"*

"I didn't need to; everything's been fine up to now."

Moral: Solving problems calls for speaking up!

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