

Addressing Barriers to Learning

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... the Center's quarterly e-journal*

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports – 2020

*Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
enabling equity of opportunity, promoting whole child development,
and enhancing school climate.*

Student and learning supports have long been marginalized in school improvement policy and practice. As a result, such supports are developed in an ad hoc and piecemeal manner. Implementation is fragmented and at times redundant. Those involved often are counterproductively competitive, especially when funding is sparse (and when isn't it?).

All this needs to change. Yet, most of the widely circulated reports about improving schools pay scant attention to these concerns.

And while the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) offers opportunities for change, it also continues the piecemeal approach to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students and families.

Direct actions for fundamental systemic changes are needed. To these ends, the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports* was inaugurated in 2015. (Groundwork was laid by the earlier initiative for New Directions for Student and Learning Supports.) The aims of this ongoing initiative are to mobilize direct actions for

- Elevating school improvement policy discussion about ending the marginalization of student and learning supports
- Moving toward transformation of such supports.

What the Initiative Has Done So Far

Wide ranging outreach has been made to stakeholders concerned about school improvement, especially those focusing on enhancing equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school and beyond. Over 2019 and into 2020, special, but not exclusive, attention is on contacting key legislators in every state about reframing school improvement policy to move from a two to a three component framework.

Work on Clarifying the Need and Delineating New Directions

The initiative has provided analyses underscoring the need for transformation and has developed prototypes for new directions. See, for example, the following:

- *Analyses of ESSA's Focus on Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essaanalyses.pdf>
- *Evolving School Improvement Planning for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/evolving.pdf>

Also in this issue: *Community Schools Need to Play a Role in Transforming Student/Learning Supports*

- *ESSA and Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching: Is there Movement toward Transforming Student/Learning Supports?*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/2018%20report.pdf>
- *How Well Do State Legislatures Focus on Improving School Efforts to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching & Re engage Disconnected Students?*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Legisanal.pdf>
- *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html
- *Improving School Improvement*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

In addition, the work has been presented at professional conferences and workshops, integrated into the curriculum of pre-service and inservice courses, featured in textbooks and reports for school improvement. **Exhibit 1 highlights a few examples.**

Stimulating Pioneering and Trailblazing Activity

Across the country state departments, districts, and schools have explored new directions for providing student/learning supports. The pioneering and trailblazing efforts have helped clarify the type of systemic changes that are required to succeed. They reflect "out-of-the-box thinking."

The various efforts have highlighted four key and interacting considerations that must be the focus of new directions thinking. First and foremost, they point to the need to

- Revisit school improvement policies in order to expand them in ways that will end the marginalization of student/learning supports
- Adopt intervention frameworks that unify and guide development of a comprehensive, equitable, and systemic learning supports component at every school
- Rework the infrastructure at school, complex, and district levels to ensure effective leadership, redefine roles and functions, and establish resource oriented mechanisms
- Develop strategic approaches to enable effective and sustainable systemic change and replication to scale

Early in the initiative, *Scholastic, Inc.* reached out to enter into a collaboration with our Center at UCLA to move the work forward. **Exhibit 2 notes what Scholastic reports about the trailblazers.**

Taken as a whole, the initiative offers a detailed blueprint for how student/learning supports can be transformed, resources to make it happen, and invaluable examples and lessons learned to aid moving forward. See

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>

A Call to Action – You Can Play a Role

Growing awareness and blueprints for new directions, makes this year an advantageous time for action by everyone concerned about ending the marginalization of student/learning supports. Here's some ways:

(1) Be a potent voice advocating for

- >Policy changes that can end the marginalization of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching
- >Development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports

Consider doing the following:

- Participate at decision making and planning tables focused on school improvement so you can clarify the need to
 - >Expand from a two to a three-component policy framework
 - >Unify student/learning supports
 - >Develop the unified component into a comprehensive and equitable system
- Contact local media about covering
 - >The inadequacy of how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students
 - >Potential new directions that transform student/learning supports

(2) Advocate for transformative system changes with school improvement policy makers (e.g., legislators, principals, superintendents, mayors, governors, associations/organizations, unions, guilds, business and philanthropic leaders). Focus their attention on

- Ending the marginalization of student/learning supports by expanding school improvement policy from a two to a three component framework for planning and implementation
- Ceasing to generate student/learning support activity that further fragments, marginalizes, and results in counterproductive competition for sparse resources
- The need to help schools unify and develop a comprehensive and equitable system of student/learning supports

Exhibit 3 provides a links to resources that you can choose from in order to provide basic information and examples to others.

If you want us to send information to anyone, just let us know.

At a minimum, let us know your thoughts about direct action to elevate student and learning supports in policy as a nonmarginalized and unified system. That will help us in mobilizing others. (See examples in Exhibit 4).

Send your ideas and any information about what you see happening to Ltaylor@ucla.edu or to adelman@psych.ucla.edu .

***Why do you think we'll do better
at school this year?***



***Because I heard that Congress passed
a law that says every student will succeed!***

Exhibit 1

A Sample of Pioneering and Trailblazing Activity

To capture the various venues and the lessons learned from trailblazers, the Center's website has a section with links to those we know about – see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>

State Departments

At this level, Alabama, Hawai'i, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, and Ohio are notable. Hawai'i actually passed legislation for what they called a *Comprehensive Student Support System*. In 2011, Alabama undertook an ambitious agenda to implement a *Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*. Alabama made a commitment to provide every district in the state with the coaching needed to implement the Learning Supports framework developed by the UCLA Center. The state employed a cohort model, and self-selecting districts received coaching to implement the approach over multi-year phases. A 2018 report indicated that, 69 districts had joined one of the five cohorts of districts, and as part of a special leadership development grant, 71 principals from six districts that represent all areas of the state and serve high-poverty and/or rural students were provided additional training.

Districts

In addition to the districts in Alabama, work was done in such diverse venues as Gainesville City Schools (GA), Grant Parish (LA), Sumter School District (SC), Cedar Rapids (IA), and the School District of La Crosse (WI).

Here's how Cedar Rapids Community School District (IA) describes their approach:

... Barriers to learning encompass both internal and external factors that may get in the way of the student being able to reach maximum potential. These difficulties can increase as students internalize the frustrations of confronting these barriers and the negative effects of performing poorly at school. ... In order to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports has been designed and implemented. This system includes an intervention framework that is comprehensive and cohesive in nature. It encompasses systems to promote healthy development, is preventative in nature, provides assistance in a timely fashion, and addresses the broad range of learning, behavioral, physical and emotional needs found in schools. ...

<http://www.cr.k12.ia.us/departments-services/learning-supports/>

For an article featuring the work in Sumter (SC), see *Leading by Way of Alignment: Building a Comprehensive and Unified System of Supports* published in the South Carolina Association of School Administrators' *Palmetto Administrator*.

http://dropoutprevention.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Leading_by-Way_of_Alignment_Dr_Shawn_Hagerty_11-17-Solutions-Resource.pdf

Regional Education Associations

In Iowa, the *Great Prairie Area Educational Agency (AEA)* adapted the work the Center accomplished with the Iowa Department of Public Instruction – see

<https://www.gpaea.org/services/learning-supports>

In Ohio, the *Muskingum Valley Education Service Center (ESC)* created the Care Team Collaborative (CTC) framework (K-12 services) by merging the research-based practices from UCLA Center, Search Institute, and Ohio Department of Education's *Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*. As they stated, the purpose was:

“to promote systemic alignment and blend funding to increase access to educational, social, emotional, behavioral and physical health services (universal prevention, early intervention, intensive intervention) to develop healthy, resilient youth who succeed in school and life. ... schools can no longer focus only on improving instruction and management to reach every child. Schools must include ‘enabling components’ directed at addressing children’s non academic barriers to learning. Schools and communities must work together to build the infrastructure not just to provide services, but to ensure that addressing barriers to learning is as much of a leadership priority as curriculum, instruction and management. CTC’s training and support offers school leaders tools to revisit infrastructure and make strategic changes to comprehensively address non academic barriers....”

(cont.)

Summits and Presentations (webinars, conferences, workshops)

- >In 2017, a national summit on *ESSA and Learning Supports: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching to Enhance Equity of Opportunity* was held.. 75 leaders from 20 states and D.C. accepted the invitation and represented state education departments, county and regional offices, districts (large/small, urban/rural), schools, the U.S. Department of Education, and other institutions. The day included a three district panel discussing lessons learned during early implementation (panelists were: Angela Mangum, Superintendent, Selma (AL) City Schools, Shawn Hagerty, Director of Specialized Programs, Sumter (SC) School district, Andy Kubas, Director of Learning Supports, Bloomington (MN) Public Schools) <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/nextsteps.pdf>
- >Examples of webinars, presentations, and workshops over the last couple of years are:
 - >>*Pennsylvania ASCD* webinar – by Adelman and Taylor
 - >>*Georgia School Counselor Association Conference* presentation – by Merrienne Dyer.
 - >>*ASCD National Conference* presentation – by Merrienne Dyer
https://e19.ascd.org/conference_schedule_new.cfm
 - >>*Connecticut Association of Schools Fall Leadership Conference* keynote – by Jane Today
 - >>*Community Schools Conference* presentation – by Scholastic Team
 - >>*National Dropout Prevention Conference* – Scholastic Team
 - >>*National Dropout Prevention Center* – Scholastic Team <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYDg4alT1Dk>
 - >>*Learning Forward Conference* in Vancouver (BC) – Scholastic Team
 - >>*National Family and Community Engagement Conference* – Scholastic Team

Featured in Reports and Other Publications Focused on School Improvement

In addition to being cited in books and journals, the work has been used widely in many reports and resource documents prepared by state departments of education, national centers for school improvement, education professional associations and guilds, journalism websites, news media, and so forth. Here are two examples:

- >Excerpt from: *Trauma informed school practices*
<https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2101/2015/02/CLEAR-Trauma-Informed-Schools-White-Paper.pdf>
... Adelman and Taylor (2008) promote a public health approach to addressing the mental health needs of children in schools, using a comprehensive, integrated approach to address the full continuum of emotional, behavioral, and learning problems. They argue that addressing mental health needs of students is not solely about providing interventions for children with diagnosed mental disorders or identified pathology; it is instead about both, "(1) promoting healthy development as one of the keys to preventing psychosocial and mental health problems and (2) focusing on comprehensively addressing barriers to development and learning" (p. 295). This approach allows schools to address the needs of all students, while promoting a mechanism for more formal and sustained engagement for children with progressively greater and more complex need....
- >Excerpt from: *Educating the Whole Child: Engaging the Whole School* (NY state)
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/SEDLguidelines.pdf>
... As school-age children approach adolescence their self concept is informed and challenged by how family, peers and adults evaluate them. Researchers from the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) School Mental Health Project urge schools and districts to develop an integrated and cohesive classroom and school-wide component that addresses interfering factors and re-engages students in classroom instruction and healthy relationships.

Integrated into Curriculum Frameworks

Excerpt from the KY Dept of Ed's Curriculum Framework:

... *School Climate and Barriers to Learning* - It is critical that educators establish and maintain a positive context that facilitates learning. School and classroom culture and climate impact important factors for learning such as engagement, behavior, self-efficacy, achievement and social- emotional

(cont.)

development. The optimum learning environment is one of high expectations and low stress. A positive learning environment is especially critical for at-risk students, due to factors like poverty, disability or abuse. If schools become a source of significant additional daily stress for students (e.g., over-demanding, overwhelming, full of opportunities for failure, over-controlling, non-supportive, boring, hostile or bully-ridden), students cannot learn. Neither can they grow or progress through life's typical developmental stages and challenges, particularly in adolescence. The reality is that negative and stressful learning environments can themselves become barriers to learning (Adelman and Taylor, 2006; National School Climate Council).

<http://education.ky.gov/curriculum/modcurrframe/Documents/Kentucky%20Model%20Curriculum%20Framework.pdf>

Stimulating Research, Advocacy, and Legislation

We are pleased to see growing interest in researching efforts to unify and develop a comprehensive and equitable system of learning supports. Here is an excerpt from a recently completed dissertation at Virginia Tech:

Leadership in School Improvement: Planning and Providing for Barriers to Student Learning by Erin Boothe Lenart (7/23/19) <https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/handle/10919/91937>

School improvement reform requires "substantive systemic change" that considers the "current culture of schools and intended school improvements" (Adelman and Taylor, 2007). This study used a qualitative, multiple case-study methodology, a semi-structured interview protocol, and a document review to identify how school leaders in five, accredited high or mid-high poverty Virginia middle schools both identified and provided resources to address barriers to student learning. The instrumentation tool for this study was based on the learning or enabling components of the Adelman and Taylor improvement model (2008). The tool was used to qualify the school leaders' site-based school resource allocation and then analyzed for common themes. The study found that some learning or enabling supports were more represented than others. The study also found that there were three key leadership traits among school leaders who had effectively resourced the learning supports: instructional leadership; human-resource leadership; and culture and expectations leadership. Implications from this study include the need for further research on models for school improvement that require schools and districts to identify, plan, and provide for barriers to student learning. A second implication is the need for further study on leadership traits that might exist in school leaders who not only recognize but are able to inspire the implicit and explicit need to plan and provide for overcoming barriers to student learning.

Finally, here's a sample of feedback on the initiative and its current focus on state legislatures.

- >From a Chief State School Officer: *Thank you for keeping us in the loop on your advocacy efforts. We do incorporate many parts of your model into our current turnaround work. Much of this can be done without enabling legislation and in many instances we have enabling legislation. I have shared your work with our turnaround specialists.*
- >From a state board of education member: *Thank you for your initiative on this important matter of identifying external and internal barriers to education. This is an important variable that I've been discussing for a long time with my colleagues.... Often educators seem to feel they are resigned to merely treating the symptoms of this problem of barriers as you describe, without being able to cure the disease.*
- >From a state legislator: *Thank you for sending this! As a past teacher and principal I understand well the need to support children in the third component you shared.*
- >From a state legislator: *This is a pretty helpful frame shift! Thanks for sending*

Note: See the prototype for proposed legislation: *Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching: Ensuring a Three Component Approach to School Improvement*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/draftbill.pdf>

Exhibit 2

Scholastic Reports on Work Related to Implementing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

Current Work with School Districts

Chapel Hill Carrboro School District – While high performing for many students, this district also has one of the largest achievement/opportunity gaps for students of color. Scholastic's team is working with the MTSS problem solving team to research and develop the highest impact strategies in all six of the practice areas of Learning Supports to address systemic issues in both attendance and behavior. The district is focusing on using the three component framework as a "strategy bank" to address equity. At the same time, the district team is working across all three components (Instruction, Management and Learning Supports) in an aligned manner to address the achievement gaps.

Bronx New York – Scholastic's team is working with a group of schools from two districts in the Bronx. This is the third year in one of the districts. The focus is on using the three component framework as a district leadership model. As the schools identify the areas of focus from their school improvement plans, scholastic's coaches school leadership teams to align school team efforts based on the Instructional framework and the Supportive Environment framework from the New York City Department of Education.

Descriptions of Scholastic's Approach to the Work

Learning Supports Pathway: An Integrated Model of School Improvement

http://dropoutprevention.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Learning_Supports_Pathway_Overview_11-17-Solutions-Resource.pdf

Ensuring All Students Succeed: The Imperative for a Learning Supports Framework

(Webinar) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYDg4alT1Dk>

*The Alabama State Department of Education's Learning Supports Initiative:
A Compendium of Practice & Findings*

http://dropoutprevention.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Alabama_DOE_LS_Compendium_11-17-Solutions-Resource.pdf

Schools must recognize that they have a range of learners, and they must design learning support systems that really ensure equity of opportunity for the many—not just a few.

Dr. Shawn Hagerty, Sumter County Schools, SC

We can see the power in the coherence. It's like putting a machine together and getting it to work more effectively.

Dr. Merrienne Dyer, Superintendent, Gainesville City Schools, GA

Learning Supports is a natural way of doing business. You always have to make sure a child is able to meet his or her full potential, but you have to address those barriers so that a child can be complete.

Yolanda McCants, School Improvement Coordinator, Anniston City Schools, AL

Instruction alone is not a powerful enough intervention to help all students succeed.

Paul Reville, Harvard GSE, Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration and Former Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

The Learning Supports network truly worked. The frameworks are ideal for positioning people in key roles.

Dr. Daniel Boyd, Superintendent, Lowndes County Schools, AL

All quotes from *Learning Supports Pathway: An Integrated Model of School Improvement*

Exhibit 3

Resources Clarifying a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System of Learning Supports

The following are examples of some brief documents that help provide a picture of new directions for student/learning support. These are from Section A of the Center's *System Change Toolkit* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>. All are free and readily accessed.

Examples of Design Documents from the state departments in

- >Alabama – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/aladesign.pdf>
- >Iowa – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing2.htm#iowa>
- >Louisiana – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/brochure.pdf>

Brochures from Districts and Other State Depts – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkita1a.htm>
Introducing the Idea of Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports to a New Superintendent or to One Who May Be Ready to Move Forward –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/introtosups.pdf>

Q & A Talking Points – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkita2.htm>

Legislation Prototype – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/draftbill.pdf>

Policy Statement Prototype – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/policyproto2012.pdf>

District Policy Example – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/grantpolicy.pdf>

Other Examples of Policy Statements/Legislation –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentssupport/toolkit/aida.pdf>

Powerpoints, Webinars, and Handouts –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/trainingpresentation.htm#slide>

See especially the brief introductory webinar at

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/powerpoint/briefintrosldesrec.pptx> and the accompanying handouts – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/intropphandouts.pdf>

Recent Books Detailing the Work

>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide* –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

>*Improving School Improvement* –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

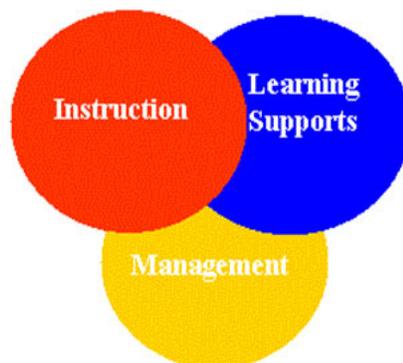


Exhibit 4

Share Your Views and Experiences With Us

>A superintendent recently sent this:

I realized that we were approaching student improvement the wrong way ... I am the Superintendent of a Joint Union High School District. I just wanted to send a message to you to thank you for all the work you have done ... and let you know how this impacted our district. In 2009, as an Assistant Superintendent I happened to get an e-mail from SMHP that had an article about how schools were trying to do school improvement the wrong way. It indicated that the only to have student improvement was to improve student support systems. I read it very carefully and then started receiving your articles regularly. I realized that we were approaching student improvement the wrong way, through just academic improvements. During that time we had the lowest graduations rates and highest dropout rates in our county, 70% and 30%. So, because of your work we started the road of providing more extensive support in all areas. We increased the number of psychologists in our district from 1 districtwide to 1 on every campus. The number of counselors were increased, we partnered with the local Mental Health agency to contract with them to have mental health services on all our sites. We brought in Chaplains at every campus, we increased our services for drug and alcohol counseling. We brought in counselors specifically to deal with students in gangs. We provided other intensive interventions. AND we started seeing the results. We increase the graduation rates every year, from 70% to 75% initially but continued that growth.

We now have the highest graduation rate in the county, 95.7%. The dropout rates are also the lowest in our county with a 4% dropout rate. Our attendance rate went from the low 80% to now being at the highest it has ever been at 97%. This means our students want to come to our schools because we offer so many support systems for them. What I learned was that to create enduring change and improvements we needed to change our entire system and not do a band-aid approach. Of course our job is never done because like I tell my team, we still need to reach that 4% of students that dropout. So, to you and to your team, a thank you for the work you do in this area. Your ideas and strategies guided me in our work.

>From a District Director of Student Supports:

I cite the Center's work repeatedly as I advocate for a unified model for student and learning support services that embeds into our existing school settings as one division. This year we have taken the first step and created a division for school support services that houses our counseling services, career pathways, and assessment programs. It is a work in progress to shift mindsets to see how these programs connect to reduce barriers and increase capacity for success with our re-engaged students. I forward the Center emails to the new division team members to engage us in a dialogue about what unification of our programs means to us and how we can work together to strengthen student support. It isn't perfect and is certainly far from done. Your information keeps me on track as I guide us through this period.

>From Texas, we learned about the following testimony to the Texas Senate Finance Committee re. *Addressing Barriers to Student Learning*

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5728d34462cd94b84dc567ed/t/58885c6259cc681363f0e1ca/1485331557808/Senate-Finance-TEA-budget+testimony-January2017.pdf>

...On average, schools use about 14 different strategies or programs to prevent violence and promote safe learning environments. Instead of adopting a different program to combat each new problem that emerges, schools can develop a consistent and long-term strategy that addresses multiple student concerns through a set of well-integrated programs and services. Rather than having siloed efforts that are disconnected from each other, schools have the opportunity to strategically align policies, strategies and practices, weaving together school and community resources, to promote students' healthy development and learning and prevent things schools, students, families and the state wants to see less of: bullying, truancy, mental health concerns, substance abuse, disciplinary actions, and school failure. TEA provides little guidance to districts on using available resources to more effectively address nonacademic barriers to learning. ... Education service centers (ESCs) offer schools information and training on things like positive behavior management and supports, bullying prevention, and family and community engagement. However, with separate ESCs leading different efforts, training related to school climate is largely planned and delivered in silos. ... (cont.)

Note: The testimony to the Texas Senate Finance Committee concluded by recommending Establishment of an Office of Student Learning Supports at TEA, with a minimum of one FTE, charged with leading agency efforts to address non-academic barriers to student learning.

>From the website, the California Department of Education (CDE), we learned about its efforts to align a system of supports to better meet the needs of the whole child (from cradle to career).

Within CDE, we have created a One System Action Team (OSAT) made up of CDE division representatives to support and continue to build the basis for "whole child" support systems and drive the CDE-wide integration of the "one system" concept. The OSAT will provide the internal mechanism to ensure a collaborative, department-wide focus on supporting and building the capacity of LEA's to implement proven or promising research-based programs and practices, specifically targeted at one system serving the whole child.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/onesystem.asp>

>And from the Department's The EDge newsletter:

... the California Scale-Up MTSS Statewide (SUMS) Initiative, will 'address barriers to learning and re-engage disconnected students by creating a culture of collaboration' among disparate and fragmented support systems. The plan envisions a statewide transformation that will 'increase equitable access to opportunity, develop the whole child, and close the achievement gap for all students.' ... As an initiative that encompasses the whole state, SUMS also answers the broader national effort for reform called for by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor ... at UCLA. ...

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/edgenewsletterhome.asp>

And here's an example of the many requests we receive:

Our district leadership has begun the process of reading and discussing your publication, *Transforming Student and Learning Supports*; we feel it fits nicely with the vision we have for our students and schools. We would like to set up a time to discuss it further.

Our Center, of course, is always ready to help. The best way to start is with a conference call with key district leadership. In preparation for the call, districts email us the matters they want to discuss and we suggest looking at the resources cited in Exhibit 3.

Why do they keep asking us the same needs-assessment questions over and over again?



Because it's cheaper than doing something to address the needs!

Community Schools Need to Play a Role in Transforming Student/Learning Supports

The real difficulty in changing the course of any enterprise lies not in developing new ideas but in escaping old ones. John Maynard Keynes

Because the Community Schools' movement emphasizes enhancing student/learning supports, some policy makers have developed the false impression that such initiatives are the way to meet all the support needs of students and their families. This impression likely has contributed to serious cuts related to student supports (e.g., districts laying off student support personnel) in the struggle to balance tight school budgets. And such thinking detracts from appreciating the critical need to transform the way schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students and families.

Advocates for Community Schools rightfully are busy clarifying that they have an important role to play in contributing to the enhancement of student/learning supports. At the same time, they need to play a greater role in advocating for *transformation* of how schools prioritize, organize, and provide such supports.

A Bit About Community Schools

The concept of *Community Schools* should not be confused with the geographic designation, *Community School Districts*, used by a variety of districts across the country. In such districts, there may or may not be schools that are pursuing the vision of the Community School movement.

While every school is located in a neighborhood, only a relatively few call themselves Community Schools. And, those that do vary considerably in the nature and scope of what they mean by the designation. For some, the term is adopted mainly to indicate a school's commitment to finding better ways to involve families and link with other community stakeholders. Others adopt it to reflect the implementation on campus of family centers, volunteer and mentor programs, school-based health centers, a variety of co-located health and human services, and efforts to extend the school day for learning and recreation. The most comprehensive Community Schools are involved in formal collaborations focused on weaving together a wide range of school and community resources (including the human and social capital in a neighborhood) in order to produce expansive results for children, families, schools, and neighborhoods.

More than just connecting community resources to a school

Among the diverse concepts commonly mentioned in discussions of Community Schools are establishing a psychological sense of community and well-being, promoting resilience and protective factors, increasing student and family empowerment, pursuing culturally responsive pedagogy, and ensuring social justice and equity of opportunity. Examples of stated aims include improving school climate, changing school culture, focusing on the whole child, addressing diversity needs, and taking a "broader and bolder approach" in order to improve public education.

Schools serving low-income families are a particular focus of those who promote Community Schools. Strong school-family-community connections are viewed as critical in impoverished communities. So is the opening-up of school resources. One of the ironies in such communities is that schools often are among the greatest local public resource investments (e.g., real estate, facilities, material resources) but their use is available mainly to students and during the regular school day. (It also is relevant that the schools often are the single largest local employer in a poor community yet hire few neighborhood residents.)

It is unclear about the number that have adopted the designation *Community School*. What does seem clear is that schools using the name vary widely in both their stage of development and ability to implement a full and comprehensive continuum of needed interventions.

Not surprisingly, reports suggest that developing a comprehensive and effective Community School necessitates lengthy and relentless collaboration of school, family, and community stakeholders. And, available evidence indicates few school districts are moving to use the model widely.

In general, the concept of Community Schools has great symbolic value. Implicit is recognition that schools, families, and communities are interlocking pieces that shape a society's character and viability. At its core is a commitment to enhancing school collaboration to address overlapping concerns and expand school improvement policy and practice to encompass commitment to whole child development and wellness.

The reality is that schools, families, and communities all affect each other (for good or ill). It is evident that dealing with multiple, interrelated concerns, such as poverty, child development, education, violence, crime, safety, housing, and employment requires multiple and interrelated solutions. Interrelated solutions require various forms of collaboration. Thus, in pursuing shared goals related to education, development, and socialization of the young and the general well-being of society, it behooves schools, homes, and communities to work together. Instead, too many schools remain islands within their communities.

School-Community Collaboration to Link Services to Schools

It should be noted, in addition to Community Schools, school-community collaboration is an agenda item for many districts, community, and school stakeholders. This is especially the case with respect to enhancing student/learning supports.

Most of the endeavors are small scale efforts – often funded demonstration projects, designed to connect services/programs to schools and improve coordination and case management. Particular emphasis has been on linking with physical and mental health and social service programs. Another emphasis is on expanding after school academic supports, recreation, and enrichment (e.g., tutoring, youth sports and clubs, art, music).

Some are limited to after school hours. Others take the form of health/wellness centers or parent/family centers that are available both during and after school hours. Such centers are established at or near a school and are described as offering school-linked or school-based services, integrated services, wrap-around services, one-stop shopping, full service schools, and systems of care.*

Whatever their form, school-community collaborations are built around stakeholder relationships. Such relationships frequently are referred to as partnerships; however, too often this is a premature characterization. Some don't even constitute a meaningful collaboration. It is important to emphasize here that bringing together stakeholders is not the same as establishing an effective collaboration. Meeting and forging informal links to accomplish specific tasks (e.g., linking schools with a few service agencies or after school program providers) is relatively simple and commonplace. Developing collaborative partnerships requires significant policy, shared accountability, and system changes that are codified in formalized agreements.

*In practice, the terms school-linked and school-based encompass two separate dimensions: (a) where programs/services are located and (b) who owns them. Taken literally, school-based should indicate activity carried out on a campus, and school-linked should refer to off-campus activity with formal connections to a school site. In either case, services may be owned by schools or a community based organization or in some cases may be co-owned. As commonly used, the term school-linked refers to community owned on- and off-campus services and is strongly associated with the notion of coordinating services.

School-Community Collaboration for Institutional Transformation

Those who want to enhance access and better coordinate and integrate supports for students have long been concerned about the poor linkages between communities and schools and within schools. (Early concern was seen in the human-service integration movement of the 1960s .) Recently, the efforts to address this concern have been described as an *integrated student supports* approach. Use of this term is a bit confusing since much of the activity primarily focuses on connecting community services to schools (e.g., health and social services, after-school programs) and doesn't include systematically working with existing school-owned student/learning support staff and their activity.

For example, in some instances, efforts are made to coordinate – but not integrate – with the work of the many school and district-based student support staff whose roles include preventing, intervening early, and treating students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Such school-employed personnel include psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses, dropout/graduation support staff, special educators, and others.

Failure to integrate with school support staff is reflected in how often community and school personnel work with the same students and families with little shared planning or ongoing communication. And, given the sparsity of community services, this usually means enhancing linkages with and co-locating a few services on a couple of school campuses. This benefits chosen schools but often reduces resources available to other schools in the community, thereby increasing inequities. The reality is that most of the widely touted projects have been built and operate on an exceptional resource base and can't be taken to scale across a school district. (And since scalability is an essential facet of equity, it is well to keep in mind that there are over 15,000 school districts and over 90,000 schools in the USA.)

An overemphasis on school-linked services can have serious unintended negative consequences

Moreover, our analyses find that, with respect to student/learning supports, special projects often increase fragmentation and marginalization and engender counter-productive competition for sparse resources. This happens because of differences in the institutional mission, accountabilities, and tight resources of most community agencies and schools. And, as noted above, some policy makers have developed the false impression that community resources are ready and able to meet all the support needs of students and their families and use this as a justification for reducing student support staffing.

Our research also suggests that focusing primarily on linking community services to schools tends to perpetuate approaches that overemphasize individually prescribed services and underemphasize improving learning and living conditions. And it downplays and thus contributes to the underutilization of the human and social capital indigenous to every neighborhood.

In general, prevailing discussions of linking community resources to schools fail to deal with an underlying and fundamental cause of the fragmentation and disorganization that characterize student/learning supports; namely, that all efforts to connect school-home-community are marginalized in current school improvement policy. As indicated in the preceding article, our Center's analyses indicate that school improvement practice is primarily guided by a two component framework (i.e., an instructional component and a management component). As a result, all interventions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students are given secondary consideration at best. This is incompatible with developing the type of comprehensive approaches needed to make values such as *every student succeeds* more than a rhetorical statement.

*It's Time to
Move Forward*

From our perspective, a narrow advocacy agenda for Community Schools and school-community collaboratives works against enhancing every student's civil right to equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond. A broader agenda calls not only for linking community resources to schools but advocating for the *transformation* of how schools prioritize, organize, and provide student/learning supports.

As the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports* stresses, a critical step forward is establishing a three component policy and practice framework for school improvement. The intent to *institutionalize* a high level priority commitment to addressing barriers to learning and teaching as a primary and essential facet of school improvement. We suggest that enhancing and sustaining collaborative school-community endeavors require such a third component. More generally, ending the marginalization of student/learning supports in school improvement policy and practice is fundamental to significantly closing the opportunity and achievement gaps.

From this perspective, we suggest that it is in the interest of the Community Schools' movement and all school-community collaboratives to advocate for adoption of a three component framework and framing and operationalizing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system that weaves together school and community resources.

(See the Call to Action on pages 2-3.)

For more on Community Schools and school-community collaboration, see the Center's Quick Find on *Collaboration and Community Schools*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1201_01.htm

Want resources? Need technical assistance? Coaching?
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**How come you're
not at school?**



**The principal told me to have a good day ...
So I came home!**

The Center for Mental Health in Schools operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project in the Dept. of Psychology, UCLA.

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