

## Beginning Steps in Personnel Development Related to Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

**B**ecause the idea of developing a comprehensive system of learning supports for every school is relatively new, a critical element of capacity building involves professional development. *The following is a brief guide to beginning personnel development for school staff (teachers, support staff, administrators) using free online resources.* These resources are intended to provide an introduction to the concepts and practices that form a comprehensive system of learning supports and how to get such system development going at a school.

What needs to be learned can be done individually or as part of a *learning community*. We find the best strategy is to form small facilitated self-study groups and avoid anything that conveys the perception of another in-service workshop or meeting designed around some new mandate.

Good facilitation is key to making this not only a valuable learning opportunity but also a major contribution to school improvement. This means asking someone with good facilitation skills to take on the role of facilitator. One of the most important things a facilitator does is set a positive tone for the learning sessions (ensuring that group participants feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts, ideas, experiences, concerns and questions). Participants will gain the most from a session after doing some pre-session preparation, engaging actively throughout each session, contributing experiences and knowledge, and sharing ways they apply what is learned.

While this personnel development is designed for schools undertaking to develop a comprehensive system of learning supports, it can also be used to bring others up to speed who join in after the work is underway.

Infused throughout the content of these learning opportunities and guiding the pioneering work across the country are the following tenets:

- Every school has a wide range of learners and must ensure equity of opportunity for all students and not just a few.
- External and internal barriers to learning and factors that disrupt teaching widely interfere with schools achieving their mission.
- To meet the challenge for the many students in need, school districts must design and implement learning support systems that are comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive, and institutionalize them at every school.
- Learning support systems must address barriers to learning and teaching and ensure that students are engaged and re-engaged in classroom learning. Such systems must reflect the best available science, with a special emphasis on intrinsic motivation theory and practices.
- Schools need strong leadership for systemic change and an infrastructure that facilitates schools and communities working together in pursuit of a shared vision and common set of goals around learning supports and student achievement.

At any time, feel free to contact the UCLA Center Co-directors (Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor) to discuss ways they can help move things forward. Just email [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu). If such an exchange is inadequate, ask for a phone conference; and if that is insufficient, face-to-face interactions can be arranged. We look forward to working with you and encourage you to feel free to contact us at any time to share insights, ask questions, and provide feedback.

## **Why Focus Sparse Personnel Development Time on a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports**

At the outset, we want to stress that we see the core question confronting all school improvement policy makers and planners is: *How do we ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and have a strong start toward being productive contributors to our society?* This question encompasses concerns for raising student achievement and closing achievement gaps, addressing disparities among children from different backgrounds and with disabilities, countering bullying, reducing drop out rates, and more.

Whether the term used is reform, school improvement, or innovative transformation, the call is clear; it is time for major systemic changes. And pioneering initiatives are underway across the country designed to reframe student and learning supports and develop a comprehensive and systemic approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students. The aim is to rebuild systems and practices to better enable learning for all children. The immediate emphasis is on ways to develop a comprehensive and cohesive system to address barriers to learning and teaching.

Most schools strain to address the various challenges faced by students, their families, and school staff – challenges that often seriously interfere with learning and teaching. The notion of “barriers to learning and teaching” encompasses both external and internal factors that negatively affect student motivation and ability to benefit from classroom instruction. These factors include the wide range of problems stemming from restricted opportunities associated with poverty and disability, neighborhood violence, difficult family conditions, inadequate physical and mental health care, acquiring English as a second language, experiencing crises and disasters, and more.

Currently, student and learning supports are so highly fragmented and marginalized in policy and practice that the resources allocated to address barriers to learning are not playing a cost-effective role in improving schools. Schools (and districts and state education agencies) need to redeploy existing resources and programs that are allocated for addressing barriers to learning and must weave these together with the invaluable resources that can be accessed from students, family members, and community stakeholders.

The following learning opportunities are meant to help build the capacity of schools as they proceed to form the type of comprehensive system of learning supports that can ensure all students truly have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

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(1) *What's the School Doing Currently*

Participants should begin by acquiring some understanding of how their school addresses student and learning supports (e.g., the range of programs and services implemented by their schools, relevant policies currently in place).

(2) *A Brief Introduction to the Basics*

Access online the webinar prepared in collaboration with AASA and Scholastic Inc. entitled: *Strengthening School Improvement by Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching*. The Center's co-directors discuss why a system of learning supports is imperative for schools to succeed, and what forward thinking states and districts are doing to implement such systems. <https://scholastic.webex.com/scholastic/lsr.php?AT=pb&SP=TC&rID=48915112&rKey=09f14db0881f5159&act=pb>

To access just the powerpoint presentation go to:

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/powerpoint/Webinar\(10-29-09\).ppt](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/powerpoint/Webinar(10-29-09).ppt).

(3) *Follow-up Brief Introductory Document*

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

(Note: if this document doesn't seem to fit your situation, there are others to choose from in Section A of the Center's Rebuilding Toolkit –

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

(4) *Intro to some states and districts where the work is underway* – browse the following:

>**Brochures from Districts and State Departments**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkit1a.htm>

>**Examples of state and District Design Documents**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkitb1a.htm>

(5) *More in depth learning about the nature and scope of a comprehensive system of learning supports* – see any of the following:

>***Rebuilding for Learning: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching and Re-engaging Students*** – A special handbook prepared as part of the UCLA Center's collaboration with Scholastic, Inc.\*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/RebuidlingV11RD28.pdf>

>To access a set of handouts (in Power Point format) developed from the handbook, go to:

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/scholasticpresentation.ppt>

>**Six session online modules** (based on the above handbook) developed as part of the UCLA Center's collaboration with Scholastic, Inc.; choose any that seem helpful. The modules can be accessed at:

<http://rebuildingforlearning.scholastic.com/>

(Note: The online modules were initially developed to orient school leaders to the principles, tenets, and frameworks upon which a comprehensive system of learning supports is based. All school staff will find that the sessions provide a "blueprint" that enables them to more deeply understand the work.)

\*If anyone feels the need for textbook learning, Corwin Press has published several books by the Center co-directors related to developing a comprehensive system of learning supports. See, for example: Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006). *The implementation guide to student learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide: New directions for addressing barriers to learning.*

(6) *About building capacity for systemic change* – Developing a comprehensive system of learning supports requires facilitating change. To better understand what is involved, see

>***Change Agent Mechanisms for School Improvement: Infrastructure not Individuals***

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/change\\_agents.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/change_agents.pdf)

>***Steps and Tools to Guide Planning and Implementation of a Comprehensive System to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching***

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

>For answers to typical questions raised in the process, browse and share as needed material from:

>**Q & A Talking Points** (in Section A of the Center's Rebuilding Toolkit)

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkita2.htm>

(7) *Establishing Leadership and a Learning Supports Resource Team*

>**Job descriptions** – Examples of job descriptions for both an administrative and staff lead for a learning supports component.

At a School Site – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentsupport/toolkit/aidd.pdf>

Learning Support Coordinator job description from the Tucson USD --

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/leadershipls1.pdf>

>***What is a Learning Supports Resource Team?***

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resource\\_coord\\_team.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resource_coord_team.pdf)

(Note: Some resource materials for developing a Learning Supports Resource Team –

>>***Resource Oriented Teams: Key Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Education Supports***

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Report/resource\\_oriented\\_teams.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf)

>>***Developing Resource-Oriented Mechanisms to Enhance Learning Supports***

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/contedu/developing\\_resource\\_oriented\\_mechanisms.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/contedu/developing_resource_oriented_mechanisms.pdf) )

(8) ***Mapping and Analyzing Resources***

>***Addressing Barriers to Learning: A Set of Surveys to Map What a School Has and What It Needs***

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Surveys/Set1.pdf>

>***Resource Mapping and Management to Address Barriers to Learning: An Intervention for Systemic Change***

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

(9) ***Connecting the Family of Schools and Weaving Together School and Community Resources***

>***Connecting Schools in Ways that Strengthen Learning Supports***

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

(10) ***Use the toolkit and the other Center Resources for Aids and to Learn More***

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

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Note: The center at UCLA is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563 Phone: (310) 825-3634. Email: [smhp@ucla.edu](mailto:smhp@ucla.edu).