



# *Executive Summary*

*A Center Report . . .*

## *Pioneer Initiatives to Reform Education Support Programs*

The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA.  
Center for Mental Health in Schools, Box 951563, Los Angeles, CA 90095- 1563  
Phone: (310) 825-3634 | Fax: (310) 206-5895 | E-mail: [smhp@ucla.edu](mailto:smhp@ucla.edu) | Website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

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# Pioneer Initiatives to Reform Education Support Programs

On Monday, May 22, 2000, a group of leaders involved in pioneer initiatives to reform and restructure education support programs participated in a day-long “summit” meeting at UCLA. This report extrapolates basic implications from work being done by such initiatives.

*School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students.*

*But when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.*

Carnegie Council  
Task Force (1989)

**P**olicy makers are calling for higher standards and greater accountability for instruction, improved curricula, better teaching, increased discipline, reduced school violence, an end to social promotion, and more. At the same time, it is evident that current strategies to accomplish all this are inadequate to the task. This is likely to remain the case as long as so little attention is paid to reforming and restructuring the ways schools address many well-known factors interfering with the performance and learning of so many young people.

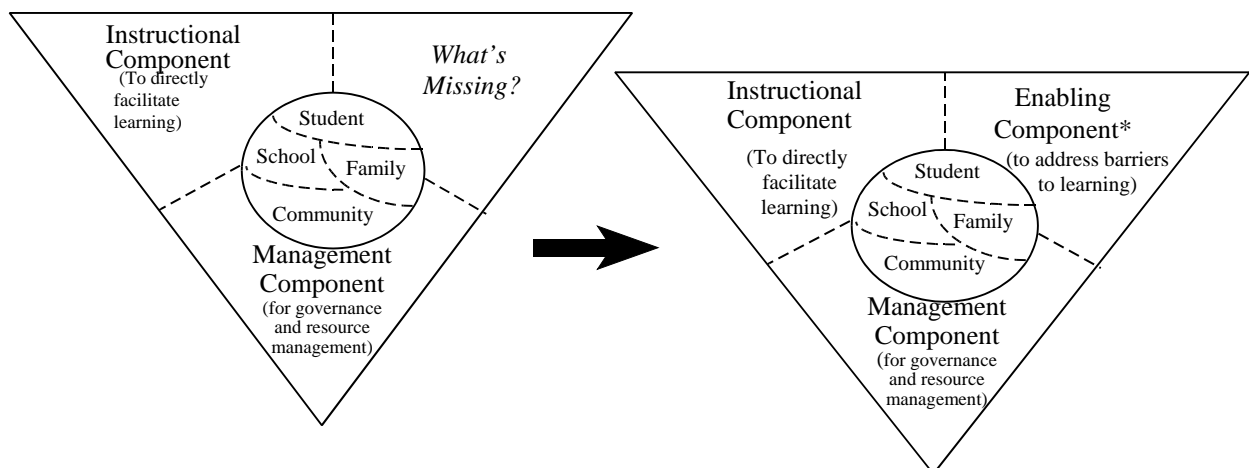
Pioneer initiatives around the country are demonstrating the need to rethink how schools and communities can meet the challenge of addressing persistent barriers to student learning. As a whole, their work underscores a reality that too few school reformers have acted upon. Namely:

*If our society truly means to provide the opportunity for all students to succeed at school, fundamental changes are needed so that schools and communities can effectively address barriers to development and learning.*

Based particularly on the work of several comprehensive initiatives, the full report stresses the need to expand school reform (see figure below). These initiatives are restructuring education support programs under the umbrella of a newly conceived reform component that focuses directly on addressing barriers to learning and development. This component is to be fully integrated with the others and assigned equal priority in policy and practice.

The notion of barriers to learning encompasses external and internal factors. It is clear that too many youngsters are growing up and going to school in situations that not only fail to promote healthy development, but are antithetical to the process. Some also bring with them intrinsic conditions that make learning and performing difficult. As a result, youngsters at every grade level come to school unready to meet the setting's demands effectively.

Figure. Moving from a two to a three component model for reform and restructuring.



\*The third component (an enabling component) is established in policy and practice as primary and essential and is developed into a comprehensive approach by weaving together school and community resources.

Addressing barriers is not at odds with the "paradigm shift" that emphasizes strengths, resilience, assets, and protective factors. Efforts to enhance positive development and improve instruction clearly can improve readiness to learn. However, it is frequently the case that preventing problems also requires direct action to remove or at least minimize the impact of barriers, such as hostile environments and intrinsic problems. Without an effective, direct intervention, such barriers

can continue to get in the way of development and learning.

The concept of an enabling component embraces a focus on healthy development, prevention, and addressing barriers. Thus it is not a case of a negative vs. a positive emphasis (or excusing or blaming anyone). It's not about what's wrong vs. what's right with kids. It is about continuing to face up to the reality of major extrinsic barriers, as well as personal vulnerabilities and real disorders and disabilities.

In addressing barriers to student learning, the pioneering initiatives are improving school and class-room environments to prevent problems and enhance youngsters' strengths. At the same time, for those who need something more, school and community, working separately and together, provide essential supports and assistance.

Society has the responsibility to promote healthy development *and* address barriers.

The pioneer initiatives discussed in the report are showing how to:

*C Use an enabling component.* In various forms, each has adopted the concept of an enabling component and is moving to develop comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approaches. Some use the term learning support component; others use learner support, supportive learning environment, or comprehensive student support system. Whatever the term, the focus is on developing a full array of programs and services by melding school, community, and home, resources. The aim is to develop a continuum ranging from primary prevention through early intervention to treatment of serious problems. At each school, creation of such a component involves programs to (a) enhance the ability of the classroom to enable learning, (b) provide support for the many transitions experienced by students and families, (c) increase home involvement, (d) respond to and prevent crises, (e) offer special assistance to students and their families, and (f) expand community involvement (with a special focus on the use of volunteers).

*C Restructure education support programs from the school outward.* For too long there has been a terrible disconnect between central office policy and operations and how programs and services evolve in classrooms and schools. The initiatives recognize that planning should begin with a clear image of what the classroom and school must do to teach all students effectively and enable learning by addressing barriers. Then, the focus moves to planning how a family of schools (e.g., a high school and its feeders) and the surrounding community can complement each other's efforts and achieve economies of scale. Central staff and state and national policy then are expected to restructure in ways that best support local efforts *as defined locally*.

The experiences of those who are revamping support programs also are highlighting a variety of

other basic concerns about current practices, policy, and reforms. Extrapolating from the

work done to date, greater attention is especially needed related to:

***C Addressing barriers through a broader view of “basics” and through effective accommodation of learner differences.*** The curriculum in every classroom must emphasize acquisition of basic knowledge and skills. However, such basics must be understood to involve more than the three Rs and cognitive development. There are many essential areas of human development and functioning, and each contains “basics” that individuals need for success at school and in life. And, any individual may require special accommodation in one or more of these areas.

***C Enhancing the focus on motivational considerations.*** Every classroom must incorporate a focus that appreciates the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in relation to learner readiness and ongoing involvement and that fosters intrinsic motivation as a basic outcome.

***C Adding remediation as necessary, but only as necessary.*** Remedial procedures must be *added* to instructional programs for certain individuals, but only after appropriate nonremedial procedures for facilitating learning have been tried. Moreover, such procedures must be designed to build on strengths and must not supplant a continuing emphasis on promoting healthy development.

***C Enhancing school-wide approaches.*** Beyond the classroom, schools must have policy, leadership, and mechanisms for school-wide programs to address barriers to learning and teaching. Some of this activity requires partnering with other schools, some requires weaving school and community resources together.

***C Increasing policy cohesion and filling critical gaps.*** Relatedly, policymakers at all levels must revisit existing policy using the lens of addressing barriers to learning with the intent of both realigning enacted policy to foster cohesive practices and enacting new policies to fill critical gaps. However, given the realities of legislative bodies, additional mechanisms should be established quickly to facilitate appropriate blending of funds in pursuit of more comprehensive and multifaceted approaches for addressing barriers to learning and development and promoting healthy development.

***C Expanding the framework for school accountability.*** Besides focusing on high standards for academic performance, accountability must encompass all facets of a comprehensive and holistic approach to ensuring positive development and learning. Such expanded accountability incorporates high standards for learning related to social and personal functioning and for activity directly designed to address barriers to student learning. The former includes measures of social learning and behavior, character/values, civility, healthy and safe behavior, and other facets of youth development. The latter includes benchmark indicators such as increased attendance, reduced tardies, reduced misbehavior, less bullying and sexual harassment, increased family involvement with child and schooling, fewer referrals for specialized assistance, fewer referrals for special education, and fewer pregnancies, suspension, and dropouts.

***C Improving scale-up efforts.*** After developing efficacious demonstrations of ways to reform education support programs, policymakers and administrators at all levels must be ready to pursue new and improved strategies in order to ensure substantive district-wide systemic changes.

Our Center hopes to continue to play a meaningful role in moving forward with the reform and restructuring of education support programs. As for the participants at the May 22nd summit, all indicated a desire to work more closely together to convey lessons learned, share data on progress, and provide technical assistance, training, and mutual support. Others already have indicated a desire to become part of this growing network. A listserv has been established as one direct linking mechanism. The work of the initiatives also should be available soon on their websites; other sharing strategies will be explored. All who receive this document, of course, are encouraged to copy and send it to superintendents, principals, school board members, and any others concerned about addressing barriers to learning.

underwritten by our Center and its funders.)