



National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports



Press Release (January, 2015)

UCLA Center takes next step in helping transform student and learning supports

Years of research by UCLA’s Center for Mental Health in Schools has increased the awareness of state education agencies and school districts about how to improve student outcomes by taking new directions for student and learning supports. Now that awareness is widespread, the Center is launching the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*. This is a direct action initiative aimed at moving schools forward in addressing the complex array of factors interfering with students not achieving good outcomes. The focus is on unifying the many discrete practices and developing a comprehensive learning supports component at the school, district, and state levels.

Center co-directors Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor emphasize: “As states pursue higher curriculum standards and as Congress focuses on reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the need for this initiative is critical in enhancing equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school and beyond.”

Transformation of student and learning supports already is underway in Alabama. Beginning with 10 districts in 2013, it has expanded to 40 districts this year and plans to phase in the rest over the next few years. The aim is for every school in the state to unify currently fragmented supports and develop them into a comprehensive and equitable system. Other states and districts are taking steps to move in this direction.

Given the number of schools and students in trouble, transformation of student and learning supports is not just an education need, it is a civil rights and public health concern. Adelman and Taylor stress: “Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to enabling equity of opportunity.”

In launching the new initiative, the Center is taking an innovative approach to publishing its new book entitled: *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*. The resource will be placed directly online. The intent is to provide immediate and free access through the initiative’s webpages on the Center’s website (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>). In addition to the new book, the Center is revising and adding to its online, free resources - including professional development activities, powerpoints, implementation resources, and the System Change Toolkit.

The Center also will continue providing free online technical assistance and coaching to states, districts, and schools indicating a desire to move forward in developing a Learning Supports Component.*

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*Learning supports include all the resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school by directly addressing barriers to learning and teaching. In the classroom and school-wide, such supports encompass efforts to reduce the overemphasis on using extrinsic reinforcers and enhance an emphasis on *intrinsic motivation* to promote engagement and re-engagement.

Learning supports directly address interfering factors and do so in a way that (re-)engages students in classroom instruction. Attention to both these matters is essential because, in general, interventions that do not ensure a student's meaningful engagement in classroom learning are insufficient in sustaining student involvement, good behavior, and effective learning at school.

A learning supports component is operationalized as a unified, comprehensive, equitable, and systemic approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. The interventions range from classroom through school-wide to community-school partnerships that are designed to strengthen support at every school and in every community.