



*A Center Policy & Practice Brief**

What Do Principals Say about Their Work? Implications for Addressing Barriers to Learning and School Improvement

(August, 2011)

Abstract

This brief highlights what principals say about their work, especially about how the job has changed and what factors most affect job performance and satisfaction. The data have been culled from various surveys, reports, interviews, and so forth published since 2000. Specific attention is given to the degree to which concerns about addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students are and are not discussed. Implications for school improvement are outlined.

The intent of this report is to stimulate discussion of ways to enhance and enable principal effectiveness with the full range of students at their schools. At the end of the document is an invitation to send comments that can be synthesized and shared widely.

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What Do Principals Say about Their Work? Implications for Addressing Barriers to Learning and School Improvement

*Understanding the perceptions of principals about their work
is fundamental to improving schools.*

Principals are expected to play a key role in improving and reforming schools. This has resulted in widespread discussions about the characteristics of effective school leaders. However, these discussions have paid relatively little attention to the on-the-job realities as experienced by principals.

This brief highlights what principals say about their work, especially about how the job has changed and what factors most affect job performance and satisfaction. The data have been culled from various surveys, reports, interviews, and so forth published since 2000. Specific attention is given to the degree to which concerns about addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students are and are not discussed. Implications for school improvement are outlined.

The intent of this report is to stimulate discussion of ways to enhance and enable principal effectiveness with the full range of students at their schools. At the end of the document is an invitation to send comments for synthesis and widespread sharing.

How the Job Has Changed

In various interviews over the past decade, principals have clearly stated that the job demands have radically changed and need to be redefined (e.g., see Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, et al., 2003; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). They widely acknowledge that it no longer is enough for principals to be good managers. They are now also expected to be effective, evidence-based “instructional leaders” (White, Brown, Hunt, & Klostermann, 2011). At the same time, they report that the management component of the job has become ever more complex and stressful and requires more time than other education leadership tasks (Sodoma & Else, 2009). They cite the many complications stemming from federal regulations related to general and special education laws, reduced budgets, fund raising (including the search for extramural grants), human resource recruitment, development, and evaluation, and more (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, et al., 2001; White, Brown, Hunt, & Klostermann, 2011).

With respect to the expectation that principals provide instructional leadership, respondents in a 2003 Public Agenda survey of 935 principals indicated that as instructional leaders the need is not so much for a focus on enhancing teacher knowledge about subject matter as it is on strengthening the ability of school staff to engage students and parents. Seventy-six percent said that new teachers have in-depth knowledge of their subjects well in hand. The main concern for half the respondents was that new teachers tend not to have a talent for motivating students to do their best and lack ability to establish strong working relationships with parents. Based on

these data, Farkas, et al. (2003) stress that principals report a need to focus specifically on ensuring that teachers have

“the ability to bring a subject alive, to notice an individual child’s strengths and weaknesses, to adapt to a variety of learning styles in the same classroom, to shift gears when current events take them in a different direction, to find alternative approaches when a child fails to grasp the material....”

The degree of ethnic, social class, and language diversity found in many districts is reported as further complicating the role of principals as instructional leaders. Available survey data suggest that principals and staff serving a high proportion of students from low-income families cite many challenges that interfere with improving school quality, enabling student performance, reducing behavior problems, and achieving desired outcomes (MetLife Survey, 2008; West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010; Young, Madsen, & Young, 2010).

Another reported shift is toward shared leadership and greater collaboration with stakeholders. A survey of 500 principals found that 78% think that increased collaboration among teachers and school leaders would have a major impact on improving student achievement. And 89% believe a collaborative school culture where students feel responsible and accountable for their education also improves student performance (MetLife Survey, 2009).

The job also is continually changing as technological advances find their way into schools. Principals state that digital information and communication is presenting new ways to improve all facets of school activity, but at the same time, they indicate that integrating technology into school improvement efforts is creating formidable challenges (Collins & Halverson, 2009; MetLife Survey, 2009).

In general, as Hall, Berg, and Barnett (2003) concluded based on two decades of studying beginning principals in the U.S.A.:

The job has become increasingly complex, more difficult, and with intense and unreasonable pressures to solve a broad menu of education, social, and personal problems.
Hall, Berg, & Barnett

...the job has become increasingly complex, more difficult, and with intense and unreasonable pressures to solve a broad menu of education, social, and personal problems. ... demands for accountability, maintaining a safe environment, and serving all the needs of children (and many of the needs of their parents) means that in reality no one person can do it all.

And with dwindling budgets, increased accountability consequences, frequent changes in school assignments, etc., the complexity has become even greater and the negative impact on principals and their work is considerable. All this raises new concerns about how to recruit, prepare, and retain effective principals (Battle & Gruber, 2010; Conrad & Rosser, 2007; Shoho & Barnett, (2010).

What Affects Job Performance and Satisfaction?

Effective job performance by a principal is best understood in transactional terms. That is, it is a function of the fit between what the principal brings to the situation and the situational factors that must be addressed. The principal brings a set of assimilated knowledge, skills, and attitudes, a current state of being (demographic status; immediate physiological, cognitive, and emotional states), and available institutional resources. The situation presents a host of demands and stressors which differ with respect to contextual factors such as locale and level of schooling. At any given juncture, the situational demands and stressors may or may not be a good fit with what the principal can mobilize effectively.

Logically, if the principal handles a situation well, job satisfaction is likely to be higher than when things don't go so well. However, it is important to remember, as Conrad and Rosser (2007) note, job satisfaction is a subjective, global feeling (an affective response). It stems from a confluence of attitudes about the work that are dependent on "individuals' perceptions, attitudes, needs, and values." From the perspective of intrinsic motivation theory and practice (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Deci & Moller, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 1985), job dissatisfaction is strongly related to experiences that negatively affect motivation (e.g., threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to significant others).

Factors relevant to principal job satisfaction are covered in surveys by MetLife (2008, 2009) and Public Agenda (Farkas, et al., 2001; 2003) and reports from a variety of researchers. The following synthesizes sources of dissatisfaction by highlighting factors cited as often deterring effective job performance, especially in poor urban and rural locales.

Prominently cited are:

>Increasingly complicated, political, and bureaucratic job demands and mandates

Politics ...
bureaucracy ...
mandates ...

As already discussed, the job has changed. In the 2003 Public Agenda report that surveyed 925 principals, 49% state that politics and bureaucracy are the chief reasons school leaders quit. In surveying 652 school leaders in Missouri, Conrad and Rosser (2007) found a general theme was that stress is increasing due to mandated high stakes testing, school violence, reform initiatives, pressure from within school interest groups, and financial constraints.

>Inadequate resources and support to do the job effectively (e.g., insufficient money; dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of teachers and other staff and the difficulty of removing poor personnel; frequent loss of good personnel; poor facilities, equipment, and supplies; poor home and community support; poor administrative training programs)

**Inadequate
resources and
support**

In the 2003 Public Agenda report, 88% of the principals indicated they were experiencing “an enormous increase in responsibilities and mandates without getting necessary resources;” 58% reported that insufficient funding was the most pressing issue (Farkas, et al., 2003). Ongoing budget cutbacks can be expected to worsen the situation.

>Students whose backgrounds require significant accommodations to succeed at school (including those for whom English is a second language, those with disabilities, those lacking grade readiness with respect to skills, knowledge, and attitudes) and teachers who need a lot more training and support in working with these students

**Inability to
effectively
accommodate
differences and
disabilities**

For example, 67% of urban principals in the 2008 MetLife survey reported that more than a quarter of their students arrive not fully prepared to learn at their grade level. In the 2003 Public Agenda report, 65% of the principals indicate they “are obligated to spend a disproportionate amount of money and other resources on special education.” With reference to new teachers, 53% of the principals indicated that many need much more training in effective ways to reach struggling students, and 38% stated many also need a lot more training in effective ways to handle discipline problems. In a study of perspectives on the dropout problem, 76% of a national sample of 169 principals indicated that dropouts are a major national concern; 75% indicated that their own schools needed to provide more support for potential dropouts (Bridgeland, DiIulio, Jr. & Balfanz, 2009). This is all complicated by widespread principal advocacy for ensuring schools develop the “whole child” (Chester, Terry, Liddiard, et al., 2010).

>Standards and accountability indicators that are unrealistic, inappropriate, unfair

**Unrealistic
demands**

In the 2003 Public Agenda report, 38% of the principals say unreasonable standards and accountability demands are a chief reason school leaders quit. With specific respect to the No Child Left Behind Act, 88% complained that it contained unfunded mandates, 73% said it relied too much on standardized testing, and 57% saw the consequences

and sanctions for schools as unfair. Also of concern to 76% were demands for quickly improving the language skills of non-English speaking students and closing the achievement gap.

>Conflicts with superintendents, colleagues, parents, students, community and political representatives, and other stakeholders (including litigation)

Conflicts with stakeholders

In the Public Agenda report, almost half the principals are cited as indicating that “they generally have to ‘work around the system’ to get things done.” They also stressed a worsening picture with respect to the problem of “parents complaining about school personnel or second guessing their decisions;” and 80% express concern about trends for parent and others to pursue legal action.

>Daily emergencies, unsafe environments, and poor school climate

Daily emergencies

The 2003 Policy Agenda report noted that 74% of principals said that “daily emergencies rob [them] of time that would be better spent in the classroom or on teaching issues.” However, despite the national statistics on crime, violence (including bullying), and the frequency of discipline problems (Nieman, 2011), principals in the MetLife sample rated concerns about student safety as the least prevalent factor hindering student learning. For example, only 8% of urban or inner city principals reported violence was a problem with at least a quarter of their students. (Sixteen percent of teachers in urban settings, however, reported violence was a barrier to learning for at least a quarter of their students.) As to school climate, principal surveys tend not to delve specifically into the topic. However, researchers do ask students, teachers, and parents about the topic and the principal’s role is seen as a major determiner (e.g., Wynn, Carboni, & Patall, 2007).

>Problems related to long work hours and personal and familial life

No time for family

A common principal complaint is that “There’s just no time for my family.” Conrad and Rosser (2007) report that personal and family issues (e.g., personal conflicts, demands of family, pressure to succeed) were the most powerful factors having a negative impact of principal satisfaction. Eckman (2004) found that both female and male principals reported role conflicts as they struggle to balance their role commitments. Summing this matter up,

a principal in the Public Agenda report is quoted as saying: “It’s become a 24/7 job, and you have no life. ... we just had two principals resign.... [saying], ‘I want my life back.’”

In addition to the above factors, the following also are reported as affecting job satisfaction:

>Poor compensation and job security

Only about half of the respondents in the MetLife survey strongly agree that they earn a decent salary. In the Public Agenda report, only 63% reported feeling very secure about keeping their job.

Lack of appreciation

>Negative school and/or personal reputation

Only about half of the MetLife respondents agree that they are recognized for good performance and are respected in today’s society. In the Public Agenda report, 55% stressed that the problem of uninformed or sensationalist coverage of education in the press is worsening.

And, of course, for any principal declining job satisfaction exacerbates a downhill spiral and is related to physical and mental health problems and attrition (Battle & Gruber, 2010). At the same time, “few school leaders have consistent outlets for expressing any accumulating stress and frustrations” (West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010).

All the above said, it is well to remember that a substantial number of principals report significant overall job satisfaction (MetLife Survey, 2008; Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011; Sodoma & Else, 2009; West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010). For example, in the Metlife survey 68% rated themselves as very satisfied and 78% say they love being a principal. At the same time, many might love it more if the above factors were less of a problem.

**What About Students
Who Require
More than Direct
Instruction to
Succeed at School?**

In *practice*, there are three primary and overlapping components for improving schools in ways that enhance equal opportunity for student success at school:

- *the instructional component* -- includes all direct efforts to facilitate learning and development
- *the enabling (or learning supports) component* – embraces direct efforts to address factors interfering with learning and teaching
- *the management component* – encompasses managerial and governance functions.

In *policy*, however, the enabling/learning supports component is not given the same priority and attention as the other two. Efforts to address interfering factors are planned in a piecemeal and ad hoc fashion and implemented in fragmented ways. The work is not well integrated into school improvement policy and practice despite the need for developing a unified system of student and learning supports and providing staff with significant inservice education to better address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011a). Indeed, as budgets tighten, the trend always is for such “auxiliary” supports to be among the first cut (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011b).

**Surveys pay relatively
little attention to
exploring the
principal’s role
vis à vis student and
learning supports.**

For the most part, those conducting surveys pay relatively little attention to exploring the principal’s role vis à vis student and learning supports. As indicated above, they do ask about the difficulties related to student populations that are highly diverse. And, large percentages of principals surveyed raised concerns about how many students arrive not fully prepared to learn at their grade level (e.g., many students coming from poverty backgrounds, English Language Learners, special education students). They also noted too little parent engagement in helping and too much conflict with advocates. And they stressed concerns about how many teachers lack adequate preparation to facilitate the learning of struggling students, turn around those who misbehave, and prevent dropouts.

Given the questions asked and those not asked, it would be easy to conclude that principals think about the above matters mainly in terms of deterrents to their work. A different picture might emerge if surveys explored the principal’s role in establishing an

effective system of student and learning supports as a fundamental function.

The questions asked also convey the impression that principals think mostly about their work with teachers. Teachers, of course, are not the only staff at a school. Others are there to play a role in providing support for teachers, students, and families to better address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. These include student and learning support staff such as school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, school social workers, Title I coordinators, resource teachers, and so forth. Such staff are essential resources for preventing and correcting student learning, behavior, and emotional problems, engaging families, and connecting with the community. They are involved in initiatives such as response to intervention, school-wide positive behavioral supports and interventions, those designed to ensure safe and supportive school environments, full service community schools, school-based health centers, specialized instructional support services, compensatory and special education interventions, family resource centers, foster child and homeless student education, and student assistance programs.

Clearly, there is much to learn about what principals think and do about their enabling or learning supports component.

Failure to address the principal's role related to student and learning supports reflects the widespread tendency to marginalize this essential component of school improvement (Adelman & Taylor, 2006b; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2004). Moreover, given the emphasis on principals as instructional leaders, it is not surprising that surveys have not focused much on how student and learning supports can be fully integrated into their school improvement efforts.

Failing to address the principal's role related to student and learning supports reflects the marginalization of this essential component of school improvement

There is in all this an irony, a paradox, and a dilemma. The irony is that key principal dissatisfactions with their work stem from the reality that teachers are not effective enough with many subgroups of students. The paradox is that by giving short shrift to student and learning supports, essential ways to enhance teacher effectiveness in working with students and families are not in place. The challenge for school improvement policy and practice is how to develop a comprehensive system of learning supports without further overwhelming principals, their staff, and school budgets.

How Principals Can Improve Schools to Better Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching?

“It is not enough to say that all children can learn or that no child will be left behind; the work involves achieving the vision of an American education system that *enables* all children to succeed in school, work, and life.”

(From the 2002 mission statement of the Council for Chief State School Officers [CCSSO] – italics added)

Fortunately, work related to pioneering initiatives around the country is providing realistic and cost-effective guidance for how principals can lead the way in enabling schools to address factors that interfere with learning and teaching (see sidebar on the next page). The emphasis is on

- (1) rethinking and coalescing existing student and learning support programs, services and personnel in order to develop a unified and comprehensive system
- (2) reworking operational infrastructure to weave together different funding streams, reduce redundancy, and redeploy available resources at school and from the community.

Such systemic changes are especially essential in schools that desperately need to improve equity of opportunity. And the timing is critical given the lack of balance in cutbacks and because prevailing ideas for using whatever resources are left are inadequate for addressing the many problems undermining student outcomes.

**New directions
are essential**

New directions innovations are pushing beyond individual and small group services, and ideas such as linking with and collocating agency resources and enhancing coordination. These strategies all have a place, but they do not address how to unify and reconceive supports to better meet the needs of the many rather than just providing traditional services to a relatively few students.

In the absence of new directions, the economic downturn means that (1) those student support staff who are not laid off will continue to be asked to help far more students than is feasible, and (2) despite limited and dwindling agency resources, there will be increased emphasis on schools making better connections with whatever limited public services are still available.

Pioneering Initiatives are Underway!

In motion across the country are trailblazing initiatives by several state education agencies and school districts (e.g., in Louisiana, Iowa, Georgia, Florida, Arizona – see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>).

For example:

- Over the past two years, Louisiana’s Department of Education has developed its design for a *Comprehensive Learning Supports System* and has begun district-level work. The design has been shared widely throughout the state; positions for Regional Learning Supports Facilitators have been created; and implementation is underway with first adopters (<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/15044.pdf>).
- A nationwide initiative by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in collaboration with our center at UCLA and Scholastic aims at expanding leaders' knowledge, capacity, and implementation of a comprehensive system of learning supports (<http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=7264>).
- In the Tucson Unified School District, the process of unifying student and learning supports into a comprehensive system has begun with the employment of a cadre of Learning Supports Coordinators to help with the transformation at each school (http://www.tusd.k12.az.us/contents/depart/learningsupport_es/index.asp <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/tusdbrochure.pdf>).

Such pioneers are moving forward to better balance cut-backs across all three components and to use remaining resources in ways that begin system building for the future.

The need is for principals and their staff to fundamentally rethink student and learning supports, with the aim of developing a comprehensive and cohesive system. Such a system encompasses a full continuum of interventions and covers a well-defined and delimited set of classroom and schoolwide supports (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2005, 2008, 2011c, 2011d; also see Attachment A). Exhibit 1 illustrates that the intent is to support all students by both addressing interfering factors and re-engaging students who have become disconnected from classroom instruction.

Developing the system entails

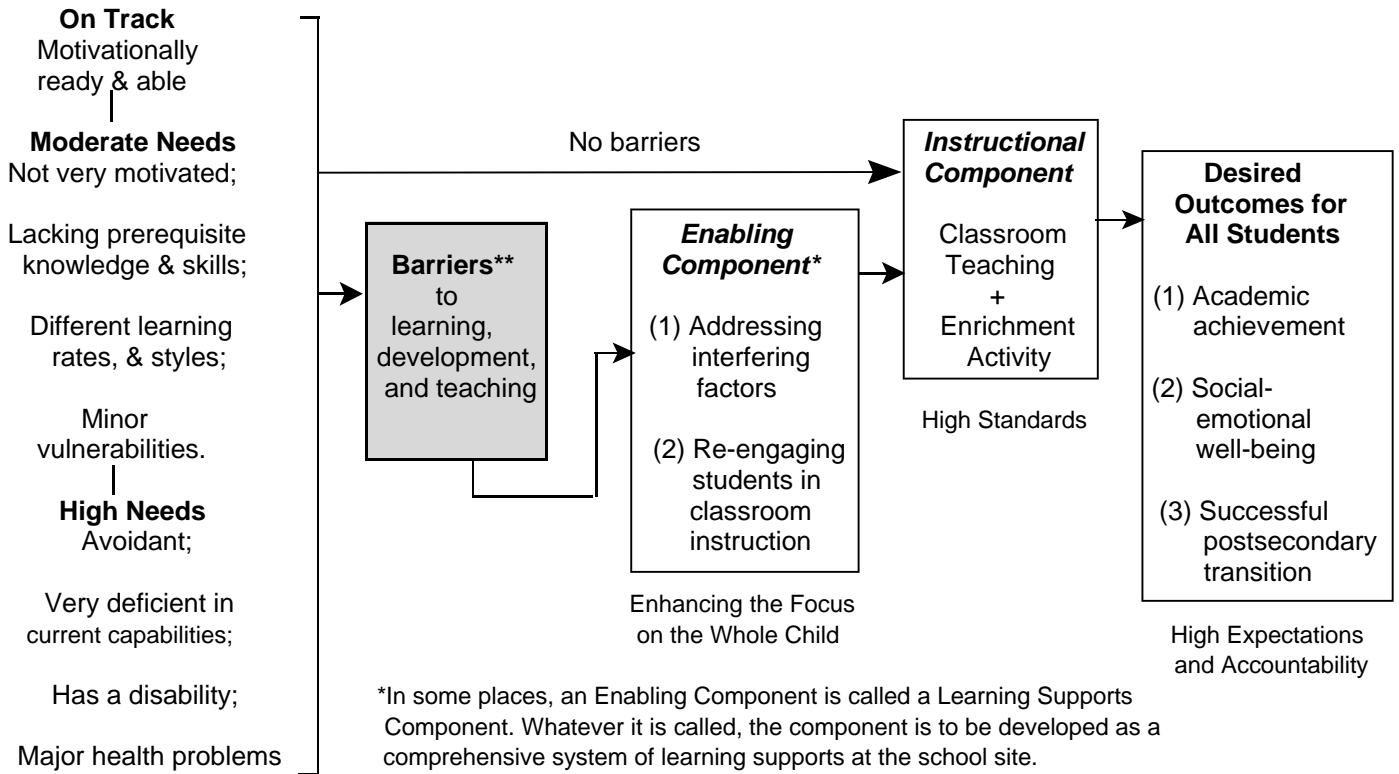
- (1) unifying all direct efforts to address factors interfering with learning and teaching at a school

Exhibit 1

An Enabling or Learning Supports Component to Address Barriers and Re-engage Students in Classroom Instruction

Range of Learners

(based on their response to academic instruction at any given point in time)



****Examples of Risk-Producing Conditions that Can be Barriers to Learning**

Environmental Conditions **Person Factors**

Neighborhood	Family	School and Peers	Individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >extreme economic deprivation >community disorganization, including high levels of mobility & unemployment >violence, drugs, crime, etc. >minority and/or immigrant isolation >Lack of positive youth development opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >chronic poverty >domestic conflict/ disruptions/violence >parent/sibling substance abuse or mental illness >modeling problem behavior >abusive caretaking >inadequate provision for quality child care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >poor quality school >negative encounters with teachers >negative encounters with peers &/or inappropriate peer models >many disengaged students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >medical problems >low birth weight/ neurodevelopmental delay >psychophysiological problems >difficult temperament & adjustment problems >inadequate nutrition and health care

Note: A reciprocal determinist view of behavior recognizes the interplay of environment and person variables with negative environmental conditions exacerbating person factors.

- (2) connecting families of schools (such as feeder patterns) with each other and with a wider range of community resources
- (3) weaving together school, home, and community resources in ways that enhance effectiveness and achieve economies of scale.

Specifically, this requires a systematic focus on how to:

- Reframe current student support programs and services and redeploy the resources to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system for enabling learning
- Develop both in-classroom and school-wide approaches that enhance individual student interventions – including interventions to support transitions, increase home and community connections, enhance teachers' ability to respond to common learning and behavior problems, and respond to and prevent crises
- Realign district, school, and school–community infrastructures to weave resources together with the aim of enhancing and evolving the learning supports system
- Pursue school improvement and systemic change with a high degree of policy commitment to fully integrate supports for learning and teaching with efforts to improve instruction and school management/governance
- Expand accountability systems both to improve data-based decision-making, and to reflect a comprehensive picture of students' and schools' performance that incorporates efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching.

Starting points include ensuring the work is fully integrated into school improvement policy and practice, reworking operational infrastructure, setting priorities for system development, and (re)deploying whatever resources are available to pursue priorities (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2010, 2011e).

For additional resources related to understanding how schools can better address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students, see Attachments A and B. The resources cited can be used for professional development related to system development and specific interventions to enhance equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school.

Concluding Comments

Current policy and plans for turning around, transforming, and continuously improving schools are too limited because they are focused mainly on improving instruction and how schools manage resources. As long as principals are not asked about their involvement in designing and implementing *the enabling or learning supports component* for their school, relatively little attention is likely to be paid to this essential facet of school improvement. Every principal needs to be asked: *What does your school do to address key factors causing learning and behavior problems?* and *What is being done to do this work better?* Moreover, every school's improvement plan needs to be analyzed with respect to how the school (a) directly addresses barriers to learning and teaching and (b) re-engages students who have become disconnected from classroom instruction. Our research (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2006b; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2004) indicates that:

- (1) planning and implementation related to these matters often are done in an ad hoc and piecemeal manner
- (2) the functions of different student and learning supports staff are delineated in relative isolation from each other
- (3) a great deal of the work is oriented to discrete problems and with overreliance on specialized services for individuals and small groups (e.g., identified as at risk for specific problems such as grade retention, dropout, substance abuse, etc.) at the expense of supporting the many in need
- (4) a significant proportion of the budget at schools (and at district, regional, state, and federal levels) is expended on these matters with too little impact and accountability
- (5) most school improvement plans present inadequate ideas for improving student and learning supports (e.g., focus only on increasing coordination, enhancing what is available by linking with community health and human *services* and co-locating some of these services at school sites)
- (6) school-owned student supports are marginalized in school improvement policy and practice
- (7) involvement at schools of community resources *beyond* health and social services remains a token and marginal concern and marginalization, fragmentation, undesirable redundancy, and counterproductive competition often are compounded when linkages are made only to community *agencies* since agency *services* are rarely integrated with the ongoing intervention efforts of school staff
- (8) the operational infrastructure at schools and at all other levels reflects the policy marginalization of student and learning supports and maintains the limited impact of such supports in helping improve student engagement, re-engagement, and achievement and well-being and enhancing school climate.

Enabling all children to succeed requires a school improvement policy that fully addresses factors that interfere with success at school. Although the number of students affected differs depending on whether or not a school is serving an economically disadvantaged population, few schools are devoid of students who are not doing well.

An estimate from the Center for Demographic Policy suggests that 40% of young people are in bad educational shape and therefore will fail to fulfill their promise. The reality for many large urban schools is that well-over 50% of their students manifest significant behavior, learning, and emotional problems. For a large proportion of these youngsters, the problems are rooted in the restricted opportunities and difficult living conditions associated with poverty. Almost every current policy discussion stresses the crisis nature of the problem in terms of future health and economic implications for individuals and for society; the consistent call is for major systemic reforms. Exhibit 1 graphically illustrates the point.

The nature and scope of the problem has made it both a civil rights and public health concern. And as the true dropout figures emerge across the nation, the crisis nature of the problem will become even more apparent. Recent reports indicate that more than half a million young people drop out of high school each year, and the rate at which they drop out has remained about the same for the last 30 years (Dynarski, Clarke, Cobb, Finn, Rumberger, & Smink, 2008). The data confirm that in far too many districts a majority of students lack sufficient supports to enable them to succeed at school and will not graduate.

Every school is confronted with many concerns seen as related to improving students' achievement and well-being and enhancing school climate (e.g., the range of learning problems; bullying, harassment, and other forms of violence and acting out behavior at school; substance abuse; disconnected students; nonattendance; dropouts; teen pregnancy; suicide prevention; and on and on). While the emphasis shifts as to which problem has a policy priority, there is constant pressure to do something about such matters. Clearly, schools and districts that have many students who manifest problems such as these are especially challenged when it comes to increasing achievement test score averages. But the imperative for student and learning supports is a challenge for every school.

As the Carnegie Task Force on Education has stated so well:

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

As noted, to meet the challenge, schools, districts, and state departments across the country are moving in new directions and are finding that, rather than adding another burden, the development of a unified and comprehensive

system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching helps counter a significant set of frustrations reported by principals. This is important given the state of the principalship in many places. While not something found in most survey reports, the honest and understandable bottom line message we hear directly from principals is: *Not another thing!*

What they mean, of course, is not more mandates and inappropriate demands. Principals are willing to do things differently when they are convinced that the changes really can improve outcomes at their schools. And they are appreciative of whatever guidance and support is available to help them move forward. To these ends, we have delineated a set of seven basic steps for how to proceed in developing a unified and comprehensive system of student and learning supports (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011e). These include specific ways to mobilize school stakeholder commitment and how to organize staff to rethink, design, and implement the changes over the next few years as an essential and integrated component of school improvement.

The unsatisfactory state of affairs gleaned from the mouths of principals makes a clear case for initiating the work now.

What Can you Share?

As noted at the beginning, the intent of this report is to stimulate discussion of ways to enhance and enable principal effectiveness with the full range of students at their schools.

We invite comments about:

- (1) The role of principals in developing an enabling/learning supports component
- (2) The current status of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students
- (3) Examples of new directions for providing student and learning supports

Send comments to Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu or to the Center email smhp@ucla.edu

Comments will be synthesized for widespread sharing.

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Attachment A

Some Resources for Principals to Learn More About and for Teaching About a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

(1) One Hour Introductory Webinar. Our Center developed this introduction in collaboration with the American Association of School Administrators and Scholastic. It is entitled: *Strengthening School Improvement: Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching*. <https://scholastic.webex.com/scholastic/lsr.php?AT=pb&SP=TC&rID=489151f2&rKey=09f14db0881f5159&act=pb>

(2) Examples of What Others Already are Doing. Learn from the experiences of those who are designing Comprehensive Systems of Learning Supports and embedding them in school improvement plans. Take time to look at the following examples:

BROCHURES & PAMPHLETS

- > Hawaii - Comprehensive Student Support System (CSSS)
http://doe.k12.hi.us/programs/csss/csss_pamphlet.pdf
- > Louisiana - Overview of the state's Comprehensive Learning Supports System -
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/lalarningsupport.pdf>
- > Ohio - Student Success: A Comprehensive System of Learning Supports
<http://education.ohio.gov/GD/DocumentManagement/DocumentDownload.aspx?DocumentID=54970>
- > Tucson Unified School District - Learning Supports System
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/tusdbrochure.pdf>
- > Indian River County Public School District (FL) - Learning Supports Collaborative
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/irlsc.pdf>

MAJOR DESIGN DOCUMENTS

- > Louisiana Department of Education
<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/15044.pdf>
- > Iowa Department of Education
http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=2588
(For some data related to Iowa's work on developing a comprehensive system of learning supports, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/iaaireval.pdf>)
- > Gainesville City Schools
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/aasagainesville.pdf>

(3) Toolkit of Resources. Includes many resources for Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

A Few Center Resources to Embellish Those Cited as References

- > *Leadership at a School Site for Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports.*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentssupport/toolkit/aidd.pdf>
- > *Learning Supports and Small Schools.*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/learningsupportssmallschools.pdf>
- > *Resource Oriented Teams: Key Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Education Supports*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf
- > *What Might a Fully Functioning Enabling or Learning Supports Component Look Like at a School?* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/whatmightafully.pdf>
- > *Personalizing Personnel Development at Schools: A Focus on Student Engagement and Re-engagement* <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagement.pdf>

Attachment B

A Few Examples of Center Resources That Can Be Adapted for Professional Development Related to Student and Parent Engagement and Re-engagement

Working with Students

Introductory Material

>*About School Engagement and Re-Engagement* – Stresses that engagement is associated with positive academic outcomes, including achievement and persistence in school; and it is higher in classrooms with supportive teachers and peers, challenging and authentic tasks, opportunities for choice, and sufficient structure. <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/reengagestudents.pdf>

>*Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School* – This guide briefly highlights and provides tools and strategies related to the following fundamental concerns related to student (and staff) disengagement and re-engagement:

- Disengaged students and social control
- Intrinsic motivation
- Two key components of motivation: Valuing and expectations
- Overreliance on extrinsics: a bad match
- Focusing on intrinsic motivation to re-engage students

<http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/engagingandre-engagingstudents.pdf>

>*Working with Disengaged Students* –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/practicenotes/disengagedstudents.pdf>

For In Depth Spiral Learning

>*Re-engaging Students in Learning* – Provides a brief overview and fact sheets on re-engaging students in learning, particularly on motivation. It also includes several tools and handouts for use with presentations.

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/quicktraining/reengagingstudents.pdf>

>*Turning Big Classes into Smaller Units* –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/practicenotes/small classes.pdf>

>*Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom-Focused Enabling* – This is a three module continuing education package. Module I provides a big picture framework for understanding barriers to learning and how school reforms need to expand in order to effectively address such barriers. Module II focuses on classroom practices to engage and re-engage students in classroom learning. Module III explores the roles teachers need to play in ensuring their school develops a comprehensive approach to addressing barriers to learning. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/contedu/cfe.pdf>

>*Motivation* – This is one of the 130+ Center's Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds. Each provides links to Center developed resources and other online resources.

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

Regarding Parent and Family Engagement

- >*Fostering School, Family, and Community Involvement* – An overview of the nature and scope of collaboration, explores barriers to effectively working together, and discusses the processes of establishing and sustaining the work. It also reviews the state of the art of collaboration around the country, the importance of data, and some issues related to sharing information. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/44_guide_7_fostering_school_family_and_community_involvement.pdf
- >*What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families* – A guidebook for understanding and meeting some common concerns that confront schools on a regular basis. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/welcomeguide.htm>
- >*Parent and Home Involvement in Schools* – An overview of how home involvement is conceptualized and outlines current models and basic resources. Issues of special interest to under-served families are addressed. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/parenthome/parent1.pdf>

WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ANY OF THIS?

See the various related policy and practice analyses and resources on the Center's website <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

For anyone ready to begin the work described in this report, a good starting point is the guidance document entitled:

*Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School:
Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff*
online at - <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf>

And feel free at any time to email Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu or the center email smhp@ucla.edu