# Prototype Guide for Reframing Fragmented Student and Learning Supports into a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable Learning Supports System

Expanding school improvement policy into a three component framework provides an essential path to ending the fragmentation and marginalization of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and improve school outcomes. Establishing learning supports as a fundamental and primary school improvement component is meant to focus schools on the need to (a) unify all student/learning supports and (b) institutionalize a leadership infrastructure for developing, over time, a comprehensive and equitable system.
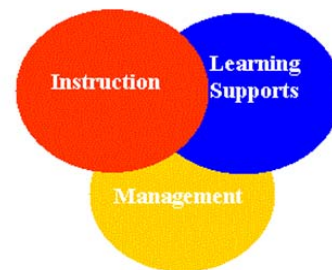
> The aim is to unify and develop a comprehensive and equitable intervention system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Establishing such a system requires coalescing ad hoc and piecemeal policies and practices. Doing so will help end the fragmentation of student and learning supports and related system disorganization and will provide a foundation for weaving together whatever a school has with whatever a community is doing to confront barriers to learning and teaching. Implementation of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports as a primary component of school improvement is essential to the focus on whole child, whole school, and whole community (including fostering safe schools and the emergence of a positive school climate). Properly implemented, the component increases the likelihood that a school will be experienced as a welcoming, supportive place that accommodates diversity, prevents problems, enhances youngsters' strengths, and is committed to assuring equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school.

As defined for policy purposes, *learning supports are the resources, strategies, and practices that support physical, social, emotional and intellectual development and well-being to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school.* Learning Supports are deployed in classrooms and schoolwide.

Students have complex and overlapping learning, behavior, and emotional problems, and schools require a *unified, comprehensive, and equitable system* to address the complexity. To this end, districts and their schools need to unite and consolidate all efforts to prevent and minimize the impact of problems interfering with learning and teaching. This includes bringing together programs, services, initiatives, and projects that provide compensatory and special assistance and promote and maintain safety, physical and mental health, school readiness, early school-adjustment, and social and academic functioning.

Strategically, given limited resources, developing a comprehensive system involves deploying, redeploying, and weaving together all existing resources used for student and learning supports. The focus is on *braiding together all available school and community resources* to equitably strengthen interventions and fill critical gaps at all schools in a district in order to address a wide range of barriers interfering with learning.

A unified, comprehensive, and equitable system to address factors interfering with school success has two facets:
- one facet conceives levels of intervention as a full continuum of integrated intervention subsystems that interweave school-community-home resources

- the second facet organizes programs, services, and activities into a circumscribed set of specific arenas for supportive interventions.

Conceptualizing a Continuum of Intervention as an Integrated System

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) emphasizes a schoolwide tiered model (e.g., a *multitier* system of supports) as a framework for preventing and addressing problems. The tiered model is defined as "a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students' needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making."
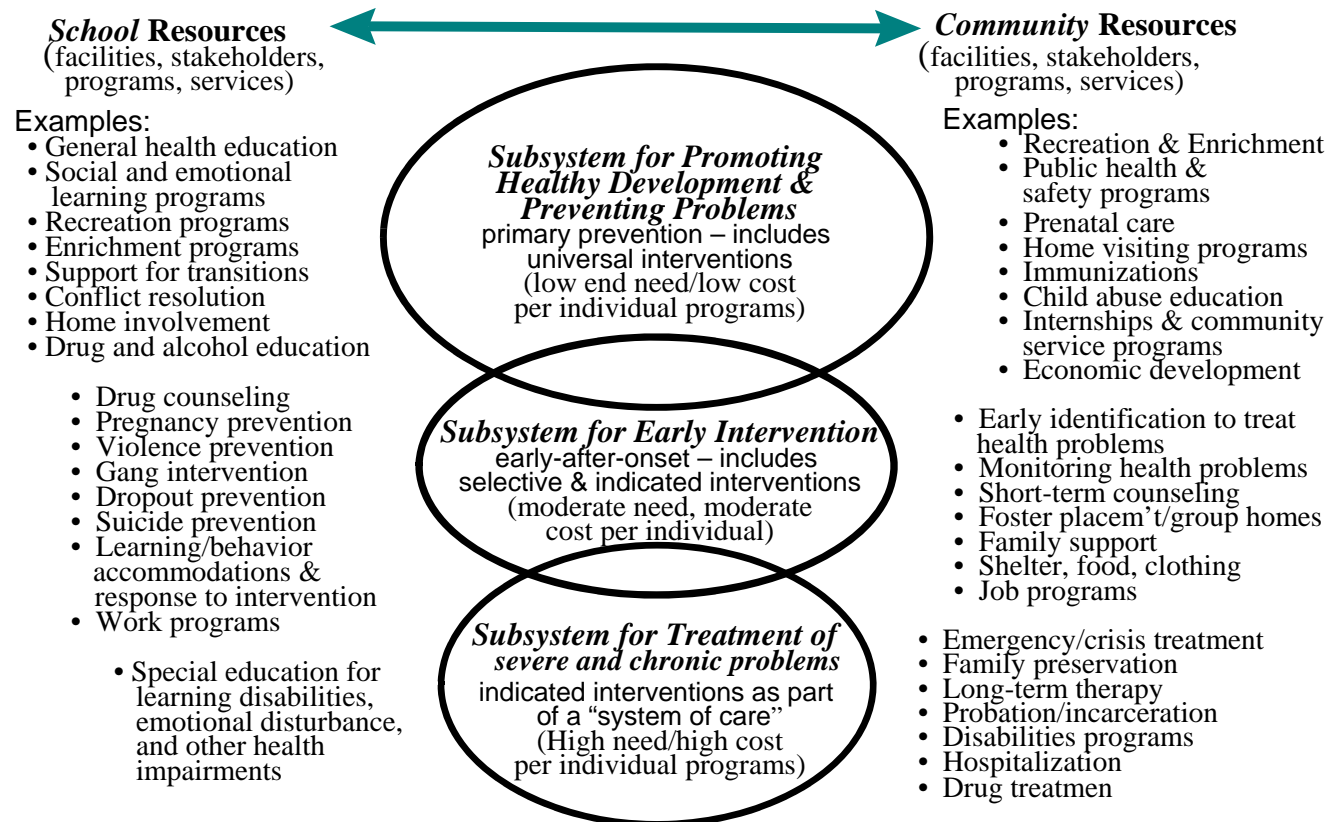
Few will argue against conceiving a continuum of intervention as a *starting point* for framing the nature and scope of student and learning supports. Exhibit 1 portrays such a continuum in ways that take the multitier system referenced in ESSA several steps beyond prevailing conceptualizations.

As illustrated in Exhibit 1, the continuum is an interconnected, overlapping set of school and community *subsystems.* The intent at each subsystem level is to weave together a wide range of school and community resources. The subsystems focus on promoting effective schooling and whole child development, preventing problems, addressing problems as soon as they arise, and providing for students who have severe and chronic problems.

The interrelated and overlapping subsystems are illustrated as tapering from top to bottom to indicate a cascading effect. That is, it is meant to convey that if the top is well designed and implemented, the numbers needing early intervention are reduced and then, as more are helped through early-after-onset assistance, fewer students will need "deep-end" interventions.

Exhibit 1

Framing a School-Community Intervention *Continuum* of Interconnected *Subsystems*

School Resources
(facilities, stakeholders, programs, services)

Examples:
- General health education
- Social and emotional learning programs
- Recreation programs
- Enrichment programs
- Support for transitions
- Conflict resolution
- Home involvement
- Drug and alcohol education

- Drug counseling
- Pregnancy prevention
- Violence prevention
- Gang intervention
- Dropout prevention
- Suicide prevention
- Learning/behavior accommodations & response to intervention
- Work programs

- Special education for learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, and other health impairments

Community Resources
(facilities, stakeholders, programs, services)

Examples:
- Recreation & Enrichment
- Public health & safety programs
- Prenatal care
- Home visiting programs
- Immunizations
- Child abuse education
- Internships & community service programs
- Economic development

- Early identification to treat health problems
- Monitoring health problems
- Short-term counseling
- Foster placem't/group homes
- Family support
- Shelter, food, clothing
- Job programs

- Emergency/crisis treatment
- Family preservation
- Long-term therapy
- Probation/incarceration
- Disabilities programs
- Hospitalization
- Drug treatmen

Subsystem for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems
primary prevention – includes universal interventions
(low end need/low cost per individual programs)

Subsystem for Early Intervention
early-after-onset – includes selective & indicated interventions
(moderate need, moderate cost per individual)

Subsystem for Treatment of severe and chronic problems
indicated interventions as part of a "system of care"
(High need/high cost per individual programs)

Organizing Activity into a Circumscribed Set of Specific Arenas for Support

A system of student/learning supports requires more than conceiving a continuum of intervention. In addition to the continuum, it is necessary to organize interventions cohesively and coherently into a circumscribed set of well-designed and delimited arenas that reflect the specific focus of activity at each level.

Moving from the typical "laundry listing" of programs and services, our research and development efforts have categorized activities aimed at addressing barriers into six arenas reflecting basic concerns that schools actually are confronted with each day. In organizing the activity, it becomes clearer what supports are needed in and out of the classroom to enable the learning of students who are not doing well. The six arenas encompass:
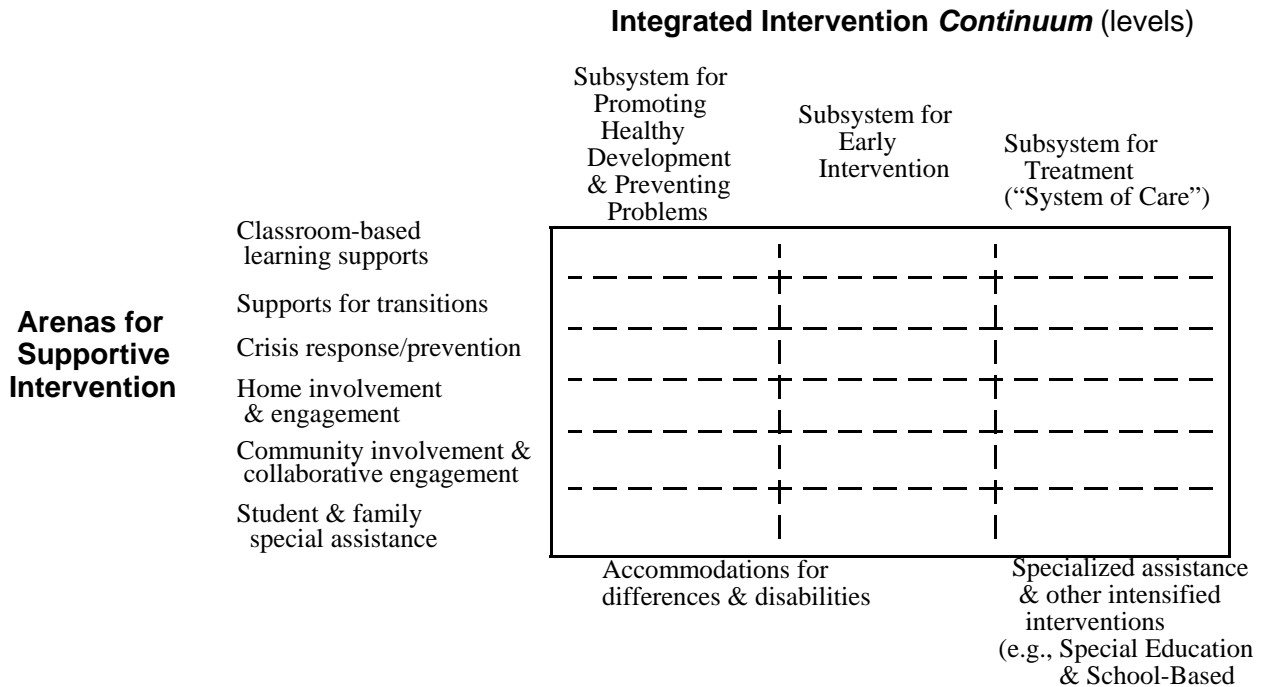
- *Enhancing regular classroom strategies to enable learning* (e.g., improving instruction for students who are manifesting mild-moderate learning and behavior problems and those who have become disengaged from learning at school; includes a focus on prevention, personalization, response to intervention, and early intervening with special assistance in the classroom)

- *Supporting transitions* (i.e., assisting students and families as they negotiate the many transitions encountered daily and throughout the school year, such as school and grade changes, getting to school each day)

- *Increasing home and school connections and engagement*

- *Responding to, and where feasible, preventing crises*

- *Increasing community involvement and support* (e.g., outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)

- *Facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance* as needed

Continuum + Specific Arenas for Supportive Interventions

Combining the continuum and specific arenas provides an intervention framework to guide development of a comprehensive system designed to unify the resources a school devotes to addressing barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., student/learning supports), as well as braiding in community resources to fill critical gaps and strengthen the system. As illustrated in Exhibit 2, the framework for the third component is seen as essential to a school's ability to accomplish its instructional mission; it is not an added agenda to that mission.

Exhibit 2

Intervention Framework for the Third Component

Integrated Intervention *Continuum* (levels)

Arenas for Supportive Intervention	Subsystem for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems	Subsystem for Early Intervention	Subsystem for Treatment ("System of Care")
Classroom-based learning supports			
Supports for transitions			
Crisis response/prevention			
Home involvement & engagement			
Community involvement & collaborative engagement			
Student & family special assistance			

Accommodations for differences & disabilities

Specialized assistance & other intensified interventions (e.g., Special Education & School-Based

Note: The above matrix provides a guide for organizing and evaluating a system of student and learning supports and is a tool for mapping existing interventions, clarifying which are evidence-based, identifying critical intervention gaps, and analyzing resource use with a view to redeploying resources to strengthen the system. The framework can guide efforts to embed supports for compensatory and special education, English learners, psychosocial and mental health problems, use of specialized instructional support personnel, adoption of evidence-based interventions, integration of funding sources, and braiding in of community resources.

Note: In addition to expanding the policy framework, and reframing traditional student and learning supports, moving forward requires reworking the organizational and operational infrastructure and redeploying resources to enable the development, implementation, and sustainability of the new system.