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***Escaping Old Ideas to More Effectively
Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching:
Some New Resources***

The real difficulty in changing the course of any enterprise lies
not in developing new ideas but in escaping old ones.

John Maynard Keynes

Public education is at a crossroads. Moving in new directions is imperative.
Just tweaking and tinkering with old ideas is a recipe for disaster.

Continuing challenges confronting public education highlight why moving
school improvement policy and practice in new directions is imperative. With a view
to enhancing graduation rates and successful transitions to post-secondary opportunities
and well-being, pressing challenges include:

- Increasing equity of opportunity for every student to succeed, narrowing the achievement gap, and countering the school to prison pipeline
- Reducing unnecessary referrals for special assistance and special education
- Improving school climate and retaining good teachers
- Reducing the number of low performing schools.

As education leaders well know, meeting these challenges requires making sustainable progress in

- improving supports for specific subgroups (e.g., English Learners, immigrant newcomers, lagging minorities, homeless students, students with disabilities)
- increasing the number of disconnected students who re-engage in classroom learning and thus improving attendance, reducing disruptive behaviors (e.g., including bullying and sexual harassment), and decreasing suspensions and dropouts
- increasing family and community engagement with schools
- responding effectively when schools experience crises events and preventing crises whenever possible.

In some schools, continuous progress related to these concerns is being made. For many districts, however, sustainable progress remains elusive – and will continue to be so as long as the focus of school improvement policy and practice is *mainly* on improving instruction. Efforts to expand the use of instructional technology, develop new curriculum standards, make teachers more accountable, and improve teacher preparation and licensing all have merit; but they are insufficient for addressing the many everyday barriers to learning and teaching that interfere with effective student engagement in classroom instruction.

Most policy makers and administrators know that good instruction delivered by highly qualified teachers cannot ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

Even the best teacher can't do the job alone. Teachers need student and learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide in order to personalize instruction and provide special assistance when students manifest learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Unfortunately, school improvement plans continue to give short shrift to these critical matters.

We recognize, as did a Carnegie Task Force on Education, that

school systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students. But as the task force stressed: when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.

The most pressing challenge is to enhance equity of opportunity by fundamentally improving how schools address barriers to learning and teaching. The future of public education depends on moving in new directions to accomplish this.

Now is the time to *fundamentally transform* how schools address factors that keep too many students from doing well at school. And while transformation is never easy, pioneering work across the country is showing the way. Trailblazers are redeploying existing funds allocated for addressing barriers to learning and weaving these together with the invaluable resources that can be garnered by collaboration with other agencies and with community stakeholders, family members, and students themselves.

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The first step in moving forward is to escape old ideas.

The second step is to incorporate a new vision in school improvement planning for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Our analyses envision a plan that designs and develops a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports.

The third step is to develop a strategic plan for systemic change, scale-up, and sustainability.

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This year we have prepared two new resources for moving these steps forward:

- (1) A new (and free) book entitled:
>***Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*** (draft edition)
Download at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/barriersbook.pdf>
- (2) Just published by Cognella:
>***Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System***
<https://titles.cognella.com/transforming-student-and-learning-supports-9781516512782.html>

These resources can help make the rhetoric of the Every Student Succeeds Act a reality.

And our Center can help by providing free coaching and technical assistance.
Feel free to contact at us at adelman@psych.ucla.edu or to Ltaylor@ucla.edu .

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