

Restructuring Schools to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching in the COVID 19 Context and Beyond

The Center co-directors were invited by the Policy Analysis for California Education to prepare the following policy brief:

*Restructuring California Schools to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching
in the COVID 19 Context and Beyond*

<https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/restructuring-california-schools-address-barriers-learning-and-teaching-covid-19>

Here is an exchange we had about the document:

From a colleague:

In the midst of the strangest year in memory, you were able to produce this valuable document. Congratulations....really.

I have just a few thoughts, mostly small stuff but one that might be substantial.

I've been thinking a lot too about fragmentation, in policy, in curriculum, even in the terms of art we use to talk about education, so I welcome this brief on many levels.

1. Simply put, you are on the money. Low-income kids (and poor adults in community colleges and other educational programs) face this maze of disconnected services, interventions, etc. which is problematic because: a. The services often aren't integrated in ways that would increase effectiveness and b. The people using them have huge burdens already with time, transportation, lack of savvy about the system, etc.

2. Your Figure One is a powerful visual illustrating your main claim. You probably do more with it in your full report, but I'd encourage you to maximize your use of it, for it really drives the fragmentation point home. One thought. I'm sure that some people (including legislators) look at the figure and say: My God, we provide ALL THAT? How expensive! And we're not getting results? Or good enough results? Do you need a brief discussion on the reasons for this array of services and how the integration you call for, while involving cost itself, could result not only in better achievement but, as well, in economic savings?

3. Obviously a huge effort will be required to organize the array of services, treatments, and interventions into the continuum and subsystems you suggest. I think another great challenge, and one you might want to address, if only to acknowledge it, is on the level of foundational definitions and beliefs, the level of belief systems and ideologies. What is required but rarely addressed directly is a change in the definitions we hold about "education" and "instruction." Some institutions (e.g., "wrap around" schools) and some teachers (e.g., many of those I write about in "Possible Lives" or those teachers coming out of a program like UCLA's) already hold to an adequately expansive definition of education and instruction to accommodate your recommendations, but a lot of teachers out there will basically say: "I'm a math teacher, not a social worker." We need to be proactive in thinking creatively about how to address this issue.

I hope this feedback is useful. Thank you for including me in the recipients of the report.

Center response:

Thanks for your valuable response to the brief. We certainly understood the points you shared.

We have updated and pulled together our efforts so far related to these matters in three books which we have put online so folks would have free and easy access.

>*Improving School Improvement*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/improve.pdf>
<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5288v1c1>

>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/barriersbook.pdf>
<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/55w7b8x8>

>*Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mh20a.pdf>

(Our earlier books contain some of the material, but we have come to believe that the cost of purchasing from commercial publishers limits who has access.)

In those works, we try to emphasize

- using the existing resources in transforming into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports
- the savings that can be made from stemming the tide of those inappropriately pushed into the subsystem of care (especially those misdiagnosed as LD and ADHD)
- how we approach the problem of getting from here to there (i.e., systemic change) and the lessons we have learned from our efforts across the country.

As to the frequent lament by teachers and administrators about not being social workers, we try to convey what a Carnegie Task Force on Education stated some time ago:

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.

Best wishes and be well,

Linda & Howard

Follow-up from Colleague:

These books are wonderful resources...and good for you and Linda for putting them on-line. As somebody who is a painfully slow writer, I am amazed (and admiring) at the scope and sweep of your activity, and your ability to get it in print.

Your three bullet points below are on the money. The second, especially, grabs me, for we have seen for such a long time now both the over-diagnosis of LD and ADHD (at times a seeming rush-to-judgment diagnoses) and yet missing people who genuinely have something going on. I see the end result in some of the community college older students with whom I've worked.