

About Improving Student and Learning Supports: New Directions and New Roles for Student Support Staff

The increasing number of learning, behavior, and emotional problems resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic is a widespread concern. This has given renewed impetus to the long-standing call for hiring more student support staff.

Some increases will be made, but budget shortfalls will produce many student support staff lay-offs. The reality is that the future holds little chance that the numbers needed to address the nature and scope of needs will be available to many schools.

What schools need to do is move in new directions to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports and reframe the role and functions of available student support staff to implement and sustain the system.

In 2015, our Center at UCLA issued a call for a *National Initiative to Transform Student and Learning Supports* (see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>). Since then, concerned stakeholders have pursued considerable activity, and we have learned invaluable lessons related to transforming school systems (see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>).

Recently, 14 leaders from the field of clinical psychology issued a proposal for transforming their field because maintaining the status quo cannot meet current needs. In a white paper entitled *Accelerating the Rate of Progress in Reducing Mental Health Burdens: Recommendations for Training the Next Generation of Clinical Psychologists*, they call for fundamental system changes by stressing that:

- “although [clinical psychology] has helped numerous individuals, the burden of mental health conditions has not declined and, in fact, continues to rise more or less unabated.”
- “for clinical psychologists to reduce mental health burdens, they (collectively) need to devote a much larger proportion of their professional efforts to a broader range of activities, particularly prevention.”

Hopefully, their discussion of the reasons for making transformative changes will resonate with student support professionals and school policy makers.

Years ago, our Center prepared a report: *Framing New Directions for School Counselors, Psychologists, & Social Workers* (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/report/framingnewdir.pdf>). We are now revising that report.

We are starting to do so based on what we have learned from (a) our national initiative, as well as (b) the inadequate responses of schools to providing student/learning supports during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (c) the recent proposal to transform clinical psychology. At this time, we are inviting concerned stakeholders to send us comments and suggestions to help shape the revision of the report in ways that will contribute to the transformation of student supports into a system of learning supports that is unified, comprehensive, and equitable. In responding, consider the following question: *What changes do you see as needed in how student support professionals work at school and what are the implications for their pre- and in-service professional development? Please send your comments and suggestions to Ltaylor@ucla.edu and adelman@psych.ucla.edu.*

Our aim, as always, is to enhance equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school (and beyond) by fundamentally changing how schools, working with local communities, address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

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.

Carnegie Task Force on Education

Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to promoting whole child development, advancing social justice, and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.

Recent Resources Prepared by the Center Related to Transforming Student/Learning Supports

> *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>

(While this brief was prepared for California, it has relevance for every state.)

> *Have districts and schools established a leadership team to meet the challenge of the increased number of students manifesting learning, behavior, and emotional problems?* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/leadership.pdf>

> *Finding and Reengaging Students who Went Missing During the COVID Pandemic*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Findingdisconnectedstudents.pdf>

For in-depth presentations, see the following books provided online by the Center at no cost:

> *Improving School Improvement*

> *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*

> *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

all three can be accessed at - http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.htm

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