

## Infrastructure for Learning Supports at District, Regional, and State Offices

Online at: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentssupport/toolkit/aidk.pdf>

Ending the marginalization of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching in school improvement planning requires significant changes in the organizational and operational infrastructure at a school. It also requires substantial changes at district, regional, and state offices.

Currently, most units (e.g., divisions, offices, special initiatives and projects) that deal with various facets of student/learning supports are marginalized, fragmented, and often counter productively competitive.

Because so many programs have evolved in a piecemeal manner, it is not unusual for staff to be involved in "parallel play." This contributes to widespread counter productive competition and wasteful redundancy. Effectiveness is compromised. So are efforts to take projects, pilots, and demonstration programs to scale. The problem often is blamed on "silo" funding. While this is a concern, the negatives can be minimized through bringing all the work together under an umbrella intervention concept and rethinking infrastructure.

Minimally, it is important to clarify how all the units, middle managers, and coordinators who focus on student/learning supports integrate and unify their efforts.

- Do they report to one or several top managers?
- With respect to top management, is there leadership for developing a unified and comprehensive systemic approach to addressing barriers to learning and teaching or is the emphasis mainly on administrative matters?

- At the Superintendent's leadership/cabinet table, is there potent leadership for developing a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system to address barriers to learning and re-engage disconnected students?

Optimally, it would be well to integrate all efforts focusing on student/learning supports into one unit (e.g., a Division for a System of Learning Supports – note a "system" of supports, not support "services") headed by an Associate Superintendent.

Such a Division needs to play five key roles:

- (1) A leadership role in designing, implementing, sustaining, and going to scale with respect to a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach to addressing barriers to learning
- (2) A role in gathering and providing information for schools to use in school improvement planning and implementation to effectively address barriers to learning (e.g., ways to end the marginalization, fragmentation, and counter productive competition and use best practices)
- (3) A role in the regular analyses of aggregated and disaggregated data to update and refine information for purposes of identifying priorities; making recommendations for deploying and redeploying resources for system change, school-by-school development, formative and summative evaluation, sustainability, district scale up, and accountability. This includes data on
  - (a) needs
  - (b) resource availability and use (strengths, weaknesses, gaps)
  - (c) system development progress
  - (d) short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes

(4) A role in establishing effective, integrated connections between school and community resources

(5) A role in ensuring all mandates for student support are met in the most effective and integrated way.

These roles encompass a variety of tasks and processes such as

- >enhancing understanding and readiness for necessary systemic changes
- >being a catalyst and advocate for systemic change

>designing and strategically planning systemic changes

>being a coach and facilitator for the systemic changes

>working to enhance an integrated infrastructure for a learning supports component to address barriers to learning and teaching

>mapping and analyzing resource use

>identifying priorities

>planning and helping to implement ways to build capacity for the work

>social marketing of learning supports

>and so forth

For related Center resources, see the toolkit for *Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* – especially Section B on Reworking Infrastructure – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

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