



*A Center Policy & Practice Report**

District Superintendents and the School Improvement Problem of Addressing Barriers to Learning

(September, 2011)

Abstract

This report begins with conclusions drawn from a wide range of research, reports, and other sources that convey what superintendents say is driving their work. The focus first is on what they identify as the challenges and frustrations of the job and what they say are factors interfering with student progress. Then, discussion turns to the insufficient way the majority of districts appear to address barriers to learning and teaching, and what some trailblazing superintendents are doing to be more productive in this arena. Finally, implications are outlined for a central office organization that can more effectively enhance equal opportunity for all students to succeed at school and beyond.

*The Center co-directors are Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor; it operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA,

Write: Center for Mental Health in Schools, Box 951563, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563
Phone: (310) 825-3634 email: smhp@ucla.edu website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

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District Superintendents and the School Improvement Problem of Addressing Barriers to Learning

After investing so much in enhancing instruction, many schools are experiencing a plateau in achievement gains. Why? Because of the reality that significant numbers of students still are not productively connecting with instructional improvements. Of particular concern are students who come to school unready to benefit from what is being taught on a given day. This includes an increasing number of students who teachers indicate have become actively disengaged from classroom learning. And, of course, the link between such students and the achievement gap and dropout rates (among students and staff) has long been recognized. All this underscores why it is imperative that school improvement decision makers and planners place a higher priority on addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

This report stems from our continuing efforts to work with districts across the country to *transform* how schools address barriers to learning and teaching. Given the key to moving forward in a district is the superintendent, our Center launched a *Superintendents' Initiative* in 2008. Its focus is on catalyzing action for pioneering efforts across the country that are moving in new directions to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. The initiative is one of several approaches designed to enhance discussion, sharing, learning, and systemic changes related to unifying and developing a comprehensive system of student and learning supports for schools.

We begin this report with conclusions drawn from a wide range of research, reports, and other sources that convey what superintendents say is driving their work (see list of references reviewed). We begin with what they identify as the challenges and frustrations of the job and what they say are factors interfering with student progress. Then, we discuss the insufficient way the majority of districts appear to address barriers to learning and teaching, and what some trailblazing superintendents are doing to be more productive in this arena. Finally, we stress implications for central office organization that can more effectively enhance equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school and beyond.

What Superintendent Surveys Conclude about the Job's Challenges and Frustrations

In 2010, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) reported findings from a survey of 1,800 district superintendents from all 50 states (Kowalski, et al., 2010). The report emphasizes:

“The work portfolio of America’s superintendents is increasingly diverse, encompassing not only student achievement, but the diversification of student and staff populations, the explosion of technology, expanded expectations from the government, the school board and the community, and the globalization of society.”

At the same time, data from several surveys over the last decade support findings that indicate superintendents continue to devote the largest proportion of their time to management. Thus, while the job demands are changing, the day-to-day reality is not too different from what was reported a decade ago by Farkas and colleagues (2001a):

“When superintendents look back at how they spent their time over the last school year, half say legal issues and litigation got too much of their attention, 48% point to parents with complaints or special interests; and 43% point to issues of having to do with unions and collective bargaining.”

As the job changes, stress is described as increasing and job satisfaction decreasing. Superintendents are clear in pointing to many stressors. Prominent examples are increased accountability and high stakes testing; insufficient funds and unfunded mandates; time demands; curriculum and instruction improvements; other complexities related to federal and local education reform agendas; limited opportunities for enhancing system capacity to reduce the achievement gap; personnel issues; and constant demands from community and special interest stakeholders, including governance conflicts, diversity concerns, and litigation. Researchers have concluded that superintendents live in a culture of “conflict, insecurity and uncertainty (Trevino, Braley, Brown, & Slate, 2008).

Superintendents continue to live in a culture of “conflict, insecurity and uncertainty.”

Superintendents also emphasize a decrease in traditional factors associated with job satisfaction (e.g., respect for the position and recognition for competence, a positive work environment -- including congenial working relationships, career support and development). Prior to 2010, a high percentage of superintendents indicated a good degree of job satisfaction; the downturn in the economy probably has affected this finding.

All this is seen as contributing to superintendent turnover and the anticipated shortage of superintendents and other education administrators. In the 2010 AASA study, only 51% of the respondents planned to still be a superintendent in 2015.

“Superintendents point to insufficient funding as the biggest challenge they face. Keeping up with local, state and federal mandates takes up too much of their time. Managing politics is the key to survival. ‘Politics and bureaucracy’ are the main reasons colleagues leave the field. In addition to orchestrating all that is needed to run their schools or district, they also juggle complaining parents, cumbersome special education laws, threats of litigation and uninformed press coverage of education.”

Farkas, et al. (2003)

What Superintendents Say are Barriers to Student Progress

In working to improve schools and reduce the achievement gap, superintendents emphasize a variety of factors interfering with good learning at school and effective teaching. These can be organized in terms of contextual conditions (i.e., family neighborhood, school) and learner factors (see below).

****Examples of Risk-Producing Conditions that Can be Barriers to Learning**

| Contextual Conditions | | | Learner Factors |
|--|--|---|---|
| <i>Neighborhood</i> | <i>Family</i> | <i>School and Peers</i> | <i>Individual</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >extreme economic deprivation >community disorganization, including high levels of mobility & unemployment >violence, drugs, crime, etc. >minority and/or immigrant isolation >Lack of positive youth development opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >chronic poverty >domestic conflict/ disruptions/violence >parent/sibling substance abuse or mental illness >modeling problem behavior >abusive caretaking >inadequate provision for quality child care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >poor quality school >negative encounters with teachers >negative encounters with peers &/or inappropriate peer models >many disengaged students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >medical problems >low birth weight/ neurodevelopmental delay >psychophysiological problems >difficult temperament & adjustment problems >inadequate nutrition and health care |

Note: A reciprocal determinist view of behavior recognizes the interplay of environment and person variables with negative environmental conditions exacerbating person factors.

In a climate of “no excuses,” identification of barriers often is not well-received. The problem with treating such realities as if they were merely excuses is that they are too often given short shrift in school improvement policy and practice.

“...28% of the 853 superintendents surveyed say that ‘some school districts face such daunting problems that even the best leadership can’t turn things around.’ ...79% of the superintendents felt that finding a talented principal is the first and most important step to take if you want to fix a troubled school ... but 20% of superintendents said ‘turning a troubled school around is so difficult that it is simplistic to think that one individual is the key.’”

Farkas, et al. (2001a)

What Superintendents Say about Addressing Factors Interfering with Student Progress

The majority of district superintendents, principals, chief state school officers, and education policy makers at the federal level continue to marginalize discussion of systemic changes needed to enhance equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school. Increasingly, they recognize the need to address barriers to learning and teaching, and every district offers some student and learning supports. But in striving to improve outcomes and close the achievement gap, superintendents continue to concentrate mostly on more and improved instruction, with the implication that this is sufficient to turning things around.

For instance, besides direct strategies to improve teaching, the emphasis is on aligning the curriculum with the standards and tests, enhanced teacher training, and extra instruction in the form of before and after school tutoring and remedial summer school for students who do not pass tests. Ironically, in some economically depressed communities, superintendents indicate experiencing resistance to summer school for struggling students because of the need for students to work (Sherman & Grogan, 2003).

What's missing in all this?

Improved instruction is essential, but insufficient for addressing barriers to learning and teaching

The majority of superintendents are not discussing fundamental ways school improvement policy and practice needs to change in order to effectively address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

In contrast, a growing minority of superintendents are realizing they need policy and practices that directly address major barriers to learning and teaching. Their emphasis is on:

- rethinking and coalescing existing student and learning support programs, services and personnel in order to develop a unified and comprehensive system
- reworking operational infrastructure to weave together different funding streams, reduce redundancy, and redeploy available resources at school and from the community.

To these ends, some trailblazing superintendents are designing change that:

- (a) unify all direct efforts to address factors interfering with learning and teaching at a school – starting with rethinking and restructuring the work of district/school-funded student and learning support professionals
- (b) connect families of schools (such as feeder patterns) with each other and with a wider range of community resources
- (c) weave together school, home, and community resources in ways that enhance effectiveness and achieve economies of scale.

These systemic changes are seen as especially essential in schools that desperately need to improve equity of opportunity. And given the lack of balance in cutbacks and the inadequacy of prevailing ideas for using the leftover resources for addressing the many problems undermining student outcomes, the changes are critical to effective school transformation (see Appendix A).

Systemic changes are seen as especially essential in schools that desperately need to improve equity of opportunity

An example is provided by the Gainesville (GA) City Schools. In the August 2011 issue of *The School Administrator*, Superintendent Merrienne Dyer states that her district has moved

from a culture of compliance to one of innovation and have opened up nontraditional avenues informed by research. A prime example is the redesign of our district strategic plan and organization using the Comprehensive System of Learning Supports framework.

Her district's design document for its Comprehensive System of Learning Supports states:

Our schools have a long-history of assisting teachers in dealing with problems that interfere with school learning. Prominent examples are seen in the range of counseling, psychological, and social service programs, in the implementation of positive behavioral supports and response to intervention strategies, and in initiatives for enhancing students' assets and resiliency. A great deal is done, but efforts have been fragmented and often marginalized. As a result, they have been less effective than they can be. So we have established as a priority the development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach for (a) addressing barriers to learning and teaching and (b) re-engaging disconnected students. Our schools are moving toward implementing a fully integrated system of learning supports into school improvement planning and practice. (For more on this, see Exhibit 1.)

Exhibit 1

Introduction to One District's New Directions for Addressing Barriers to Learning

From Gainesville's *Design Document for a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*.

The full document is available at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/aasagainesville.pdf>

Gainesville City Schools have a history of striving for excellence in education, with strong parent and community-wide support. At the same time, no school and community can be satisfied until all its young people are healthy and socially competent, successful in school, and have an equal opportunity to grow into productive and contributing citizens. ... in order to position our children for the greatest degree of future success, our schools must not only continue to provide the best instruction, but must also play a significant role in addressing factors that interfere with students having an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

Our ongoing analyses indicate some continuing fragmentation and gaps in our efforts to assure no child is left behind. Fortunately, we have the opportunity and are at a place where we can take the next steps in strengthening our student and learning supports systems to better address barriers to learning and teaching. We are moving to do so by reframing our current approach, including doing more to weave together existing school and community resources.

The rationale for policy and systemic changes to enhance student and learning supports stems from the following basic premises:

Schools Must Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching in Order to Accomplish their Instructional Mission

- The mission of education includes a fundamental commitment to and accountability for academic achievement.
- Children/youth must be healthy, safe, and supported if they are to achieve academically and succeed in school.
- Some students experience significant barriers to learning.
- Student achievement is improved and barriers to learning are alleviated through a system of student and learning supports that incorporates a full continuum of evidence-based programs and services which ensure safe, health promoting, supportive, and inclusive learning environments.

School-Community-Family Collaboration is Essential

- A full continuum of programs and services transcends what any one system can provide.
- Children thrive and overcome barriers to learning when families are strengthened and assisted to find pathways to support their children's education and to pursue their own learning.
- Schools are strengthened when the efforts of community organizations and institutions are results-oriented and include policies, programs, practices, and resources that are aligned with those of schools to improve student achievement.
- Efforts to address barriers to learning are enhanced when interveners are willing to coordinate and integrate their efforts to support academic achievement.

Cohesive Leadership and Aligned Policy are Needed at Every Level

- Systems of learning supports require quality leaders at all levels to utilize effective systems of communication and data management, efficient and effective organization of resources, and well articulated planning.

(cont.)

- Cohesive, aligned policies and practices within a district and among its community partners are essential to effect system changes at schools.
- Critical functions for leadership at all levels include aligning, assisting, and supporting school level changes.

In addition to the above premises, available data show both a clear need and a science-base for learning supports. The need is reflected in achievement gaps and high dropout rates for subpopulations of students, such as African Americans and Hispanics, students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch, English language learners, and students with disabilities. The science-base for learning supports is gleaned from a growing volume of research on the value of schools, families, and communities working together to provide supportive programs and services that enable students to learn and teachers to teach. Findings include improved school attendance, fewer behavior problems, improved interpersonal skills, enhanced student engagement and re-engagement in classroom learning, enhanced achievement, and increased bonding at school and at home.

Building on Our History: Using What We've Learned

Everyday a wide range of learning, behavioral, physical, and emotional problems interfere with the ability of students to participate effectively and fully benefit from the instruction teachers provide. Even the best schools find that *too many* youngsters are growing up in situations where significant barriers regularly interfere with their reaching full potential.

The notion of *barriers to learning* encompasses both external and internal factors. Some children bring with them a wide range of problems stemming from restricted opportunities associated with poverty, difficult and diverse family conditions, high rates of mobility, lack of English language skills, violent neighborhoods, problems related to substance abuse, inadequate health care, and lack of enrichment opportunities. Some youngsters also bring with them intrinsic conditions that make learning and performing difficult. As a result, at every grade level there are students who come to school each day not quite ready to perform and learn in the most effective manner. And, students' problems are exacerbated as they internalize the frustrations of confronting barriers to learning and the debilitating effects of performing poorly at school. All this interferes with effective teaching....

Gainesville City Schools have implemented an on-going process of identifying barriers to learning and teaching affecting our students. Many problems are not discrete and must be addressed holistically and developmentally and with attention to root causes. An appreciation of these matters points to the importance of minimizing tendencies to develop separate programs for each observed problem. In turn, this enables coordination and integration of resources which can increase impact and cost-effectiveness. Thus, our emphasis is not just on identifying individuals but on clarifying and addressing common factors that contribute to learning, behavior, and emotional problems of significant numbers of young people.

Clearly, addressing barriers is not at odds with the emphasis on strengths, resilience, assets, and protective factors. Efforts to enhance positive development and improve instruction clearly can improve readiness to learn. However, it is frequently the case that preventing problems also requires direct action to remove or at least minimize the impact of barriers, such as hostile environments and intrinsic problems. Without effective direct intervention, such barriers can continue to get in the way of development and learning. ...

A Note About Community Schools and Going Beyond the Full Service Model

In recognizing the need to more directly and effectively address barriers to learning, some superintendents and national and state “blueprints” are proposing adoption of a community school approach.

We love the idea of a *Comprehensive* Community School, but we continue to worry about how people understand what that is.

It is well to remember there is great variability among what are called Community Schools. In particular, it is essential to differentiate those that are mainly interested in enhancing connections with community agencies from those committed to a vision for developing a comprehensive school-family-community collaborative. It is the latter that have the greatest potential for addressing the whole child and for doing so in ways that strengthen families, schools, and neighborhoods. In contrast, focusing primarily on linking community services to schools colludes with tendencies to downplay the role of existing school and other community and family resources. It also contributes to perpetuation of approaches that overemphasize individually prescribed services, further fragment intervention, and underutilize the human and social capital indigenous to every neighborhood. All this is incompatible with developing the type of unified and comprehensive system needed to effectively address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.*

And please note: All this goes beyond just improving coordination of existing programs, services, and personnel. While coordination certainly is part of the picture, the essence of a comprehensive system of learning supports is on transforming student and learning supports involves development of a unified and comprehensive system. This calls for (1) integrating existing school resources into an enabling/learning supports component, (2) integrating the component fully into school improvement planning, and (3) integrating with community resources to fill gaps in the component. With this accomplished, the concern then becomes that of ensuring coordinated implementation within and across school and community.

Dictionary definitions help clarify the distinction between coordination and integration:

- > "**Coordinate**: to act in harmonious combination, to work together"
- > "**Integrate**: to bring together or incorporate parts into a whole; to combine into one unified system"

With this distinction in mind, it seems clear that enhancing equity of opportunity for success at school involves much more than coordinating interventions and linking with and collocating agency resources. The critical need is for integrating all the resources, people, and programs focused on enabling learning into a unified system to more effectively address barriers and re-engage students to enable school learning. The need is exacerbated by the economic downturn because (1) those student support staff who are not laid off will continue to be asked to help far more students than is feasible, and (2) despite limited and dwindling agency resources, there will be increased emphasis on schools making better connections with whatever limited public services are still available.

*For more on this, see the Center policy briefs:

- *Understanding Community Schools as Collaboratives for System Building to Address Barriers and Promote Well-Being* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/communitycollab.pdf>
- *Pursuing Promise Neighborhoods: With or Without the Grant Program* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/purpromneig.pdf>

How Superintendents Organize the Central Office to Address Factors Interfering with Student Progress

Another way to look at how superintendents address barriers to learning is to analyze how they organize the central office. We sampled 15 districts by downloading relevant information from the district website and/or requesting them directly from the districts. We reviewed district line-authority hierarchy charts, descriptions of unit organization, and, where available, detailed descriptions of infrastructure organizational and operational mechanisms. We then analyzed the prevailing trends to clarify how districts organize to provide interventions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and estimated whether prevailing infrastructure designs are likely to lead to development of comprehensive systems of learning supports.

In general, the tendency is for districts to organize around:

- (a) levels of schooling (e.g., elementary, secondary, early education),
- (b) traditional arenas of activity, discipline affiliations, funding streams, and categorical programs (e.g., curriculum and instruction; assessment; student supports including counseling and guidance, attendance, psychological and social services, health; specific types of support personnel such as counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses; professional development; special education; specific types of compensatory education such as Title I and English language learners; gifted and talented; safe and drug free schools; athletics, youth development, and after school programs; homeless education; alternative schools; dropout prevention; adult education),
- (c) operational concerns (e.g., finances and budget, payroll and business services, facilities, human resources, labor relations, enrollment services, information technology, security, transportation, food, emergency preparedness and response, grants and special programs, legal considerations).

Programs, services, and initiatives to address barriers to learning usually are divided among too many administrators

All the school districts we sampled have administrators, managers, and staff who have roles related to the districts' various efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching. However, the programs, services, and initiatives often are divided among several associate or assistant superintendents, their middle managers (e.g., directors or coordinators for specific programs), and a variety of line staff.

The result is that activities related to the function of addressing barriers to learning and teaching are dispersed, often in counterproductive ways, over several divisions or departments. These include units designated “Student Services,” “Teaching and Learning,” “Title I,” “Parent/Community Partnerships,” “Grant and Special Projects,” “Youth Development,” and so forth. Special education may be embedded in a “Student Support” unit, in a “Teaching and Learning” unit, or organized as a separate unit.

For instance, in one district, they have an Office of Student Services which includes a student placement center, wellness program, and guidance, counseling, and related services and an Office of Instructional Services which houses special education, Title I, ESL, and a major demonstration pilot program that features learning supports.

Another district has a Division of Education Services that encompasses three departments: Academic Advancement, Learning Supports, and Special Assignments; special education, however, is organized into a separate division.

Still another district reports having one assistant superintendent for Student Support Services (which includes guidance, social work, teen parenting, dropouts, community involvement, homeless), and an assistant superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction who has responsibility for special education, after school programs, social emotional learning. At the same time, this district’s deputy superintendent (who oversees the assistant superintendents) has direct responsibility for all special grant and federal programs, health services, and safe schools.

The fragmentation is counterproductive

Regardless of the units involved, we find that the work being carried out primarily tends to center around allocating and monitoring resources, assuring compliance and accountability, providing some support for school improvement, generating some ongoing staff development, offering a few district wide programs and services for students, and outreaching to a minimal degree to community agencies.

In general, districts tend not to organize in effective ways for moving toward a comprehensive system of learning supports. Of particular concern is how little attention appears to be given to

- (1) enhancing the policy framework for school improvement in ways that incorporate all efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching under a broad and unifying umbrella concept that is established as a primary and essential component of a school’s mission,

- (2) reframing interventions in ways that are consistent with such a broad, unifying concept,
- (3) rethinking organizational and operational *infrastructure* at a school, for the feeder pattern of schools, and at the district level,
- (4) facilitating major systemic change in organizations such as schools and school districts that have well established institutional cultures.

Needed:

>an expanded policy framework

>a unifying and comprehensive intervention framework

>a reworked operational infrastructure

>support for major systemic change

It is not surprising, then, how rare it is to find

- a *system design* focusing on coalescing all learning supports into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated component that is fully integrated with school improvement efforts in ways that not only help students around barriers but also help to reconnect or re-engage them in classroom learning
- a *strategic plan* for implementing such a new design (e.g., capacity building to ensure effective implementation at every school, redeployment and integration of existing resources, professional development of staff at all levels –encompassing leadership/change agent training, developing understanding and motivational readiness for implementation of systemic changes, cross-content and cross-disciplinary training, etc.)*

*An earlier Center survey and report discusses superintendents' responses about (1) the need for learning supports to address barriers to learning and (2) the current status of learning supports in their districts. (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008). Featured in that report are examples of what district superintendents say what would help them in developing a comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching at every school. Also emphasized is the imperative for doing so. Key strategies highlighted are adoption of a unifying concept as a basis for integrating resources and enhancing student outcomes and revisiting school improvement policy and planning to ensure the work is pursued as a high-level priority.

The report was widely distributed to district superintendents and school boards and played a role in establishing our current collaboration with the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) – see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/aasa.htm>

Implications for District Organization

As districts reexamine how they organize learning supports, one trend is to elevate the focus on learning supports by assigning responsibility and accountability to one high level administrator. That's a good start in improving the organizational structure. At the same time, greater attention must be paid to the content and processes involved in moving toward a comprehensive system of learning supports.

The aim is to unify the various initiatives, projects, programs, and services employed to address barriers to learning and to integrate this unified component with the instructional component. This includes weaving together resources from the general fund, compensatory education, special education, and special projects (e.g., student support personnel such as school psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses; compensatory and special education staff; special initiatives, grants, and programs for afterschool, wellness, dropout prevention, attendance, drug abuse prevention, violence prevention, pregnancy prevention, parent/family/health centers, volunteer assistance, community resource linkages to schools).

Developing and institutionalizing a comprehensive component for learning supports requires leadership and infrastructure mechanisms that are integrated with each other and are fully integrated into school improvement policy and planning at all levels. It is crucial to establish the district's leadership for this work at a high enough level to ensure the administrator is always an active participant at key planning and decision-making tables.

From our perspective, facilitating development of a comprehensive system of learning supports at every school requires a district infrastructure that leads and builds capacity for (a) establishing and maintaining an effective learning supports infrastructure at every school and (b) a mechanism for connecting a family of schools. To this end, the infrastructure for a comprehensive system of learning supports should be designed from the school outward. That is, conceptually, the emphasis is first on what an integrated infrastructure should look like at the school level. Then, the focus expands to include the mechanisms needed to connect a family or complex (e.g., feeder pattern) of schools and establish collaborations with surrounding community resources.

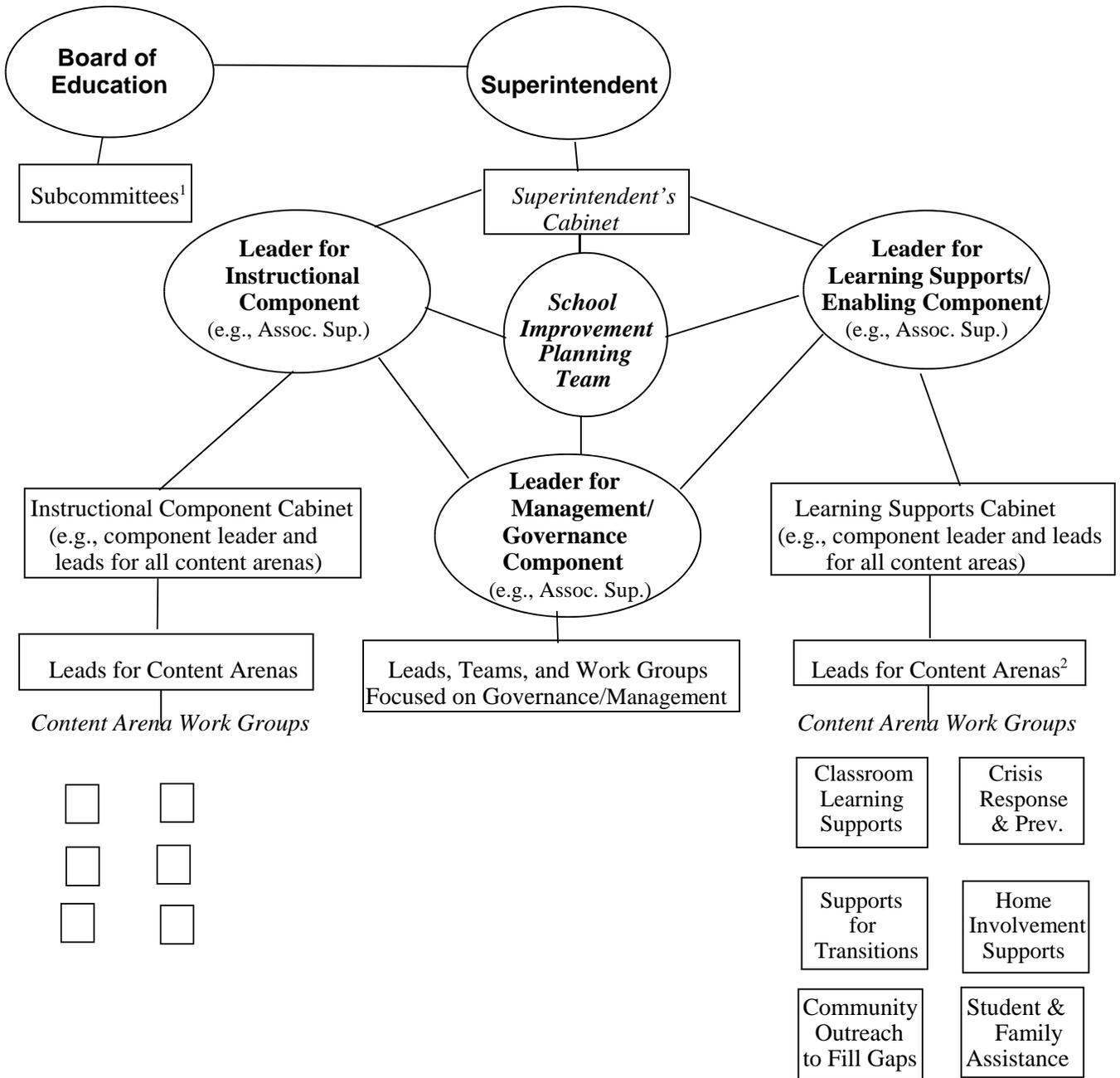
All this involves reframing the work of personnel responsible for student/learning supports, establishing new collaborative arrangements, and redistributing authority (power). With this in mind, those who do such restructuring must have appropriate incentives, safeguards, and adequate resources and support for making major systemic changes.

Exhibit 2 lays out a framework to consider in reworking district infrastructure in ways that promote development of a comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching.

Note: In working with superintendents and districts across the country, we have developed a range of resources to assist in developing policy and practices for implementing a comprehensive system of learning supports. See the sample of resources in Appendix B.

Exhibit 2

Prototype for an Integrated Infrastructure at the District Level with Mechanisms for Learning Supports That Are Comparable to Those for Instruction



1. If there isn't a board subcommittee for learning supports, one should be created to ensure policy and supports for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports at every school (see *Restructuring Boards of Education to Enhance Schools' Effectiveness in Addressing Barriers to Student Learning* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/boardrep.pdf> .

2. All resources related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., student support personnel, compensatory and special education staff and interventions, special initiatives, grants, and programs) are integrated into a refined set of major content arenas such as those indicated here. Leads are assigned for each arena and work groups are established.

Concluding Comments

As we have noted, some superintendents are trailblazing new directions for addressing barriers to learning. In doing so, they are recognizing what the Carnegie Council on Education stressed many years 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.

This position also is reflected in the 2002 mission statement of the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) which emphasizes the necessity of a “system that *enables*” student success:

It is not enough to say that all children can learn or that no child will be left behind; the work involves . . . achieving the vision of an American education system that enables all children to succeed in school, work, and life.

We suggest that it has become essential to all efforts to improve schools for districts to facilitate development of a unified and comprehensive system for directly addressing factors that are getting in the way of student learning at school. And we are pleased to report that an increasing number of superintendents are expressing interest in initiating steps to move in new directions that weave together school, district, and community resources to develop such a system.

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We also sampled statements and information from a variety of district websites.

Appendix A

Pioneering Initiatives are Underway!

In motion across the country are trailblazing initiatives by state education agencies and school districts (e.g., in Louisiana, Iowa, Georgia, Florida, Arizona – see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>).

For example:

- Over the past two years, Louisiana's Department of Education has developed its design for a *Comprehensive Learning Supports System* and has begun district-level work. The design has been shared widely throughout the state; positions for Regional Learning Supports Facilitators have been created; and implementation is underway with first adopters (<http://www.louisianaschools.net/ldc/uploads/15044.pdf>).
- A nationwide initiative by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in collaboration with our center at UCLA and Scholastic aims at expanding leaders' knowledge, capacity, and implementation of a comprehensive system of learning supports (<http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=7264>).
- In the Tucson Unified School District, the process of unifying student and learning supports into a comprehensive system has begun with the employment of a cadre of Learning Supports Coordinators to help with the transformation at each school (http://www.tusd.k12.az.us/contents/depart/learningsupport_es/index.asp <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/tusdbrochure.pdf>).

Such pioneers are moving forward to better balance cut-backs across all three components and to use remaining resources in ways that begin system building for the future.

SEE THE BROCHURES & PAMPHLETS

- > Hawaii - Comprehensive Student Support System (CSSS)
http://doe.k12.hi.us/programs/csss/csss_pamphlet.pdf
- > Louisiana - Overview of the state's Comprehensive Learning Supports System -
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/lalearningsupport.pdf>
- > Ohio - Student Success: A Comprehensive System of Learning Supports
<http://education.ohio.gov/GD/DocumentManagement/DocumentDownload.aspx?DocumentID=54970>
- > Tucson Unified School District - Learning Supports System
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/tusdbrochure.pdf>
- > Indian River County Public School District (FL) - Learning Supports Collaborative
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/irlsc.pdf>

REVIEW THE MAJOR DESIGN DOCUMENTS

- > Louisiana Department of Education – <http://www.louisianaschools.net/ldc/uploads/15044.pdf>
- > Iowa Department of Education –
http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=2588
- > Gainesville City Schools – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/aasagainesville.pdf>

Appendix B

Center Developed Resource Aides for Developing and Implementing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

One Hour Introductory Webinar

Our Center developed this introduction in collaboration with the American Association of School Administrators and Scholastic. It is entitled: *Strengthening School Improvement: Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching*. <https://scholastic.webex.com/scholastic/lsr.php?AT=pb&SP=TC&rID=48915112&rKey=09f14db0881f5159&act=pb>

Online Leadership Institute

If the presentation whets your appetite, you and your colleagues can go into greater depth on the various topics by accessing the online Leadership Institute modules we developed in collaboration with Scholastic's Rebuilding for Learning initiative as aids in planning and system building for better addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. These webinar sessions are online at - <http://rebuildingforlearning.scholastic.com/>

The six module online institute currently includes discussion of:

- I. Why new directions for student and learning supports is an imperative for school improvement.
- II Framing a comprehensive intervention system to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.
- II Reworking school and district operational infrastructure and policy to effectively build such a system.
- IV Expanding professional development related to engagement and re-engagement to include an enhanced understanding of intrinsic motivation.
- V. School transformation in terms of systemic change phases and tasks.
- II Planning and strategically pursuing implementation of a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports as an integrated part of school improvement.

Books

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006a). *The implementation guide to student learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide: New directions for addressing barriers to learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006b). *The school leader's guide to student learning supports: New directions for addressing barriers to learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Handbook

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2008). *Rebuilding for learning: Addressing Barriers to learning and teaching, and re-engaging students*. NY: Scholastic, Inc. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/RebuidlingV11RD28.pdf>

Center Documents Online

Toward next steps in school improvement: Addressing barriers to learning and teaching.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/towardnextstep.pdf> .

Frameworks for systemic transformation of student and learning supports.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/frameworksforsystemictransformation.pdf>

Funding stream integration to promote development and sustainability of a comprehensive system of learning supports. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fundingstream.pdf>

Improving Outcomes for Students and Schools Requires a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/improvingoutcomes.pdf>

Cut-Backs Make it Essential to Unify and Rework Student and Learning Supports at Schools and Among Families of Schools. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/cutbacks.pdf>

What every leader for school improvement needs to know about student and learning supports.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/whateveryleader.pdf>

Moving beyond the three tier intervention pyramid: Toward a comprehensive framework for Student and learning supports. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/threetier.pdf>

Establishing a comprehensive system of learning supports at a school: Seven steps for principals and their staff. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf>

Leadership at a School Site for Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentsupport/toolkit/aidd.pdf>

Turning Around, Transforming, and Continuously Improving Schools: Federal Proposals are Still Based on a Two- Rather than a Three- Component Blueprint
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/turning.pdf>

Toward a School District Infrastructure that More Effectively Addresses Barriers to Learning and Teaching [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs//briefs/toward a school district infrastructure.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs//briefs/toward%20a%20school%20district%20infrastructure.pdf)

Implementing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports: A Brief District Guide for Moving Forward <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/implementingls.pdf>

Infrastructure for Learning Supports at District, Regional, and State Offices
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentsupport/toolkit/aidk.pdf>

Learning Supports and Small Schools.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/learningsupportssmallschools.pdf>

Resource Oriented Teams: Key Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Education Supports
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf

What Might a Fully Functioning Enabling or Learning Supports Component Look Like at a School? <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/whatmightafully.pdf>

Personalizing Personnel Development at Schools: A Focus on Student Engagement and Re-engagement. <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagement.pdf>

Toolkit

Includes many resources for Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ANY OF THIS?

For additional resources related to understanding how schools can better address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

The resources cited can be used for professional development related to system development and specific interventions to enhance equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school.

WANT TO SHARE COMMENTS ABOUT THIS REPORT OR ABOUT NEW DIRECTIONS EFFORTS OTHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT?

Send comments and information to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

And feel free at any time to email Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu or the center email smhp@ucla.edu

Please share this report directly or let us know about anyone to whom you think it should be sent.