



*A Center Policy & Practice Brief**

“Not Another Team!”

School Improvement Infrastructure Viewed through the Lens of Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

(November, 2011)

Abstract

This brief underscores the need to rethink the proliferation of school teams, work groups, and committees. While such mechanisms are essential to enhancing school improvement, they must be designed in a delimited way to carry out fundamental functions and must be fully integrated with each other. From a functional perspective, because of current marginalization and fragmentation, particular attention must be paid to mechanisms for developing a comprehensive system of student and learning supports.

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“Not Another Team!”
School Improvement Infrastructure Viewed through the Lens of
Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

*School improvement agenda emphasizing enhanced participation and shared leadership seem to have accelerated the **ad hoc** creation of teams and work groups at all levels of the education system. Teams and work groups are essential mechanisms; problems arise, however, when “another team” is naively added to the operational infrastructure.*

Almost every other new initiative calls for schools to establish a team dedicated to making it happen. A recent example is the call for a *School Climate Team* as a mechanism for enhancing safe and supportive schools.

It should come as no surprise, then, that a common lament at schools is: "Not another team! We don't have the time, there's not enough of us, and many of us already are on the same teams." This is particularly true of student and learning support staff who are assigned to school teams focused on crisis response, student study/assistance, the IEP team, and sometimes to teams to support student transitions and wellness and teams to enhance parent involvement and community engagement, etc. etc. etc."

A robust literature supports the idea that teams, workgroups, committees, and collaboratives can productively enhance organizational functioning (see citations in the reference list). Such mechanisms can meet objectives such as promoting teamwork, stakeholder engagement, and shared leadership; they can improve efforts to carry out a variety of functional tasks; and they can enhance outcomes. However, when these operational infrastructure mechanisms are established in ad hoc and piecemeal ways, they tend to further fragment and marginalize school improvement efforts, especially development of a comprehensive and systemic approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

This brief underscores the need to rethink the proliferation of school teams, work groups, and committees. We stress that such mechanisms clearly are essential to enhancing school improvement; however, they must be designed in a delimited way to carry out fundamental functions and must be fully integrated with each other. And from this perspective, particular attention must be paid to mechanisms for developing a comprehensive system of student and learning supports.

Toward
Rethinking
the Essential
Operational
Infrastructure
Mechanisms
for a School

The fundamental principle in designing an operational infrastructure is that *structure follows function*. Thus, before creating another team, decision makers and planners need to have a clear picture of the full set of functions that must be carried out at a school and priorities and strategies for pursuing them effectively.

As a guide for organizing major functions related to school improvement, we stress a three- component functional framework (e.g., see the Center's recent policy and practice brief entitled

School Improvement: A Functional View of Enabling Equity of Opportunity – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/functions.pdf>). From the perspective of such a framework, three direct and overlapping functional components are essential to school improvement.

These components focus on:

Three direct and overlapping functional components are essential to school improvement.

- (1) *facilitating learning and development* (e.g., enhancing instruction and curriculum); in our work we designate this the instructional component;
- (2) *addressing barriers to learning and teaching* (e.g., enabling learning by addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students); in our work we designate this the enabling or learning supports component;
- (3) *governing schools and managing resources*; in our work we designate this the management/governance component.

To enable equity of opportunity, school improvement decision makers and planners must engage available personnel and other resources in ways that treat *each* of the three components as fundamental (i.e., primary and essential). This may seem obvious but the prevailing approach to school improvement marginalizes the component focused on addressing barriers to learning.

Given a three component framework for school improvement, specific sets of functions and major tasks can be delineated for each component and for overall system cohesion and continuous improvement. Then, essential mechanisms can be conceived to ensure leadership, including leadership teams, workgroups, committees, and collaboratives. Properly designed, such an operational infrastructure will be able to incorporate new initiatives without establishing another team.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

Sample of Researchers' Statements about Teams

"At a time when schools are adopting reforms and new strategies to adapt to the constraints and needs of students in modern society, many have reached the conclusion that teamwork is necessary to ensure the achievement of school goals (Newmann et al., 2000). It seems that outcomes that are best and most effective for students and communities can be achieved when experts work together, learn together, and suggest improvements and changes to ensure advancement of ... methods. Teams play a central role in identifying the needs of students, planning and developing policies at the class and school levels, and implementing innovation.... Teams seem more than merely a structure for individuals who work together. Teams have to learn how to exchange information, learn, negotiate with each other, and motivate each other so that they can utilize their heterogeneity properly and work innovatively" (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007).

"Distributed leadership enhances opportunities for the organization to benefit from the capacities of more of its members; it permits members to capitalize on the range of their individual strengths; and it develops among organization members a fuller appreciation of interdependence and how one's behavior effects the organization as a whole. Through increased participation in decision making, greater commitment to organizational goals and strategies may develop....The increased self-determination arising from distributed leadership may improve members' experience of work" (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

A Leadership Team to Develop the Component for Addressing Barriers to Learning

As already noted, teams frequently associated with addressing barriers to learning and teaching are student study/assistance and IEP team. Such teams focus on individual students. For example, they triage, refer, formulate intervention objectives, monitor, manage, and conduct student progress reviews.

Clearly, an emphasis on specific students is warranted. However, as the primary focus associated with student and learning supports, this approach tends to sidetrack development of improvements at schools that can prevent many individual problems and help many more students. As stressed below, critically missing are mechanisms devoted to the functions and tasks necessary for developing a comprehensive, multifaceted, coherent, and cohesive system of student and learning supports.

Component Development Functions & Tasks

Examples of currently unattended key functions and tasks:

- aggregating data across students and from teachers to analyze school needs re. addressing barriers to learning
- mapping student and learning supports activity and resources (including personnel) at the school and those working with the school from the community

Needed: an administrative lead, a leadership team, and work groups focused on functions related to component development

- analyzing resources and doing a gap analysis using a comprehensive intervention framework that covers prevention and amelioration of problems
- identifying the most pressing program development needs at the school
- coordinating and integrating school resources
- setting priorities and planning for system development (e.g., for strengthening existing efforts, including filling gaps through development and connecting with community resources)
- recommending how resources should be deployed and redeployed (e.g., clarifying which activities warrant continued support and suggesting better uses for nonproductive resources)
- reaching out to connect with and weave together additional resources in a feeder pattern (or family of schools), in the school district, and in the community
- developing strategies for increasing resources and social "marketing" for development of a *comprehensive system* of student and learning supports.
- enhancing processes for information and communication among school staff and with the home
- establishing standing and ad hoc work groups to carry out tasks involved in system development and individual student and family assistance
- performing formative and summative evaluation of system development, capacity building, maintenance, & outcomes (including expanding the school accountability framework to assess how well schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students)

Clearly, the above set of tasks expands from the current emphasis on a relatively few troubled and troubling individuals to encompass reworking resources to ensure attention is given to the needs of all students. Initially, a leader for an enabling or learning supports component, working with a leadership team, can reduce fragmentation and enhance cost-efficacy by ensuring existing programs and services are coordinated and increasingly integrated. Over time, the group can provide school improvement leadership to guide stakeholder work groups in evolving the school's vision for student and learning supports. The aims are not only to prevent and correct learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems, but contribute to classroom and schoolwide efforts to foster academic, social, emotional, and physical functioning and promote an increasingly positive school climate. (For more on the leadership team for learning supports, see Appendix A.)

Leadership Team and Work Group Composition and Capacity Building

At a school, the leadership team and work groups focused on developing a comprehensive system of learning and student supports draw on a wide range of stakeholders. This might include, for example, guidance counselors, school psychologists, nurses, social workers, attendance and dropout counselors, health educators, special education staff, after school program staff, bilingual and Title I program coordinators, health educators, safe and drug free school staff, and union reps. They can also include representatives of any community agency that is significantly involved with schools. And, schools are well-advised to add the energies and expertise of regular classroom teachers, non-certificated staff, parents, and older students. Some individuals will end up on several work groups.

For the leadership team and its work groups to operate well, they must consist of a delimited nucleus of members who have or will acquire the ability to work together effectively in carrying out identified functions. Building group commitment and competence should be a major focus of school management policies and programs. Too often, teams and work groups are established with little investment in substantive capacity building. Despite the ample literature on forming and building the capacity and motivation of teams, time and deadline pressures often work against pursuing best practices (see citations in the reference list).

Despite the ample literature on building the capacity and motivation of teams, time and deadline pressures often work against pursuing best practices.

Formal leadership of the team belongs to the school's administrative lead for the component. System development is a key facet of that individual's job description and accountability.

Regular and productive meetings are key to group success (see Appendix B). Meetings must be facilitated in ways that keep the group task-focused. Meetings also require someone assigned to record decisions and plan and remind members of planned activity and products. Where available, advanced technology can be used to facilitate communication, networking, program planning and implementation, linking activity, and a variety of budgeting, scheduling, and other management concerns.

Properly constituted, trained, and supported, a leadership team and its work groups complement the work of the site's governance body through providing on-site overview, leadership, and advocacy for all activity aimed at addressing barriers to learning. Having the component's administrative lead at the school's administrative and governance "tables," as well as on the key planning bodies ensures the type of infrastructure connections that are essential if programs and services are to be maintained, improved, and increasingly integrated with classroom instruction.

Sample of Researchers' Statements about Leaders and Capacity Building

"Leadership is consistently recognized as important for initiative and ongoing development of teams and is often included as an important determinant in models of team outcomes. ... [Our] findings call on leaders to invest in enhancing [staff] motivational mechanisms rather than focusing only on the bottom line of the outcomes. ... Leaders need to recognize that ... a sense of self-determination and self-efficacy may be translated into high levels of innovation" (Somech, 2005).

"Team meetings are very difficult to institute because, when the workload, pressure, and other priorities (e.g., the teacher's individual work in the class) increase, they are the first to be canceled because of time constraints.... It is important that the principals' views of the importance of teamwork to improving school effectiveness are reflected in the allocation of time and personnel to implement teamwork.... Given the importance of team interaction processes, it is recommended that any organization into teams be accompanied by suitable training of the team members and coordinators. This type of training, which is very common in business and service organizations, should also be adopted in the education system" (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007)

"Team size was found to affect team effectiveness through its effects on team structures as well as on team processes.... studies typically quoted the numbers seven to ten as an optimal size for obtaining effectiveness. ... Concerning team's frequency of meetings, the literature demonstrated close relationship between the frequency of meetings and the performance of the team... It seems that the more the team meets, the more team-mates are motivated and committed to the team's mission, and hence contribute to the success of the team in achieving its goals" (Drach-Zahavy & Somech, 2002).

Prototype of an Integrated School Operational Infrastructure

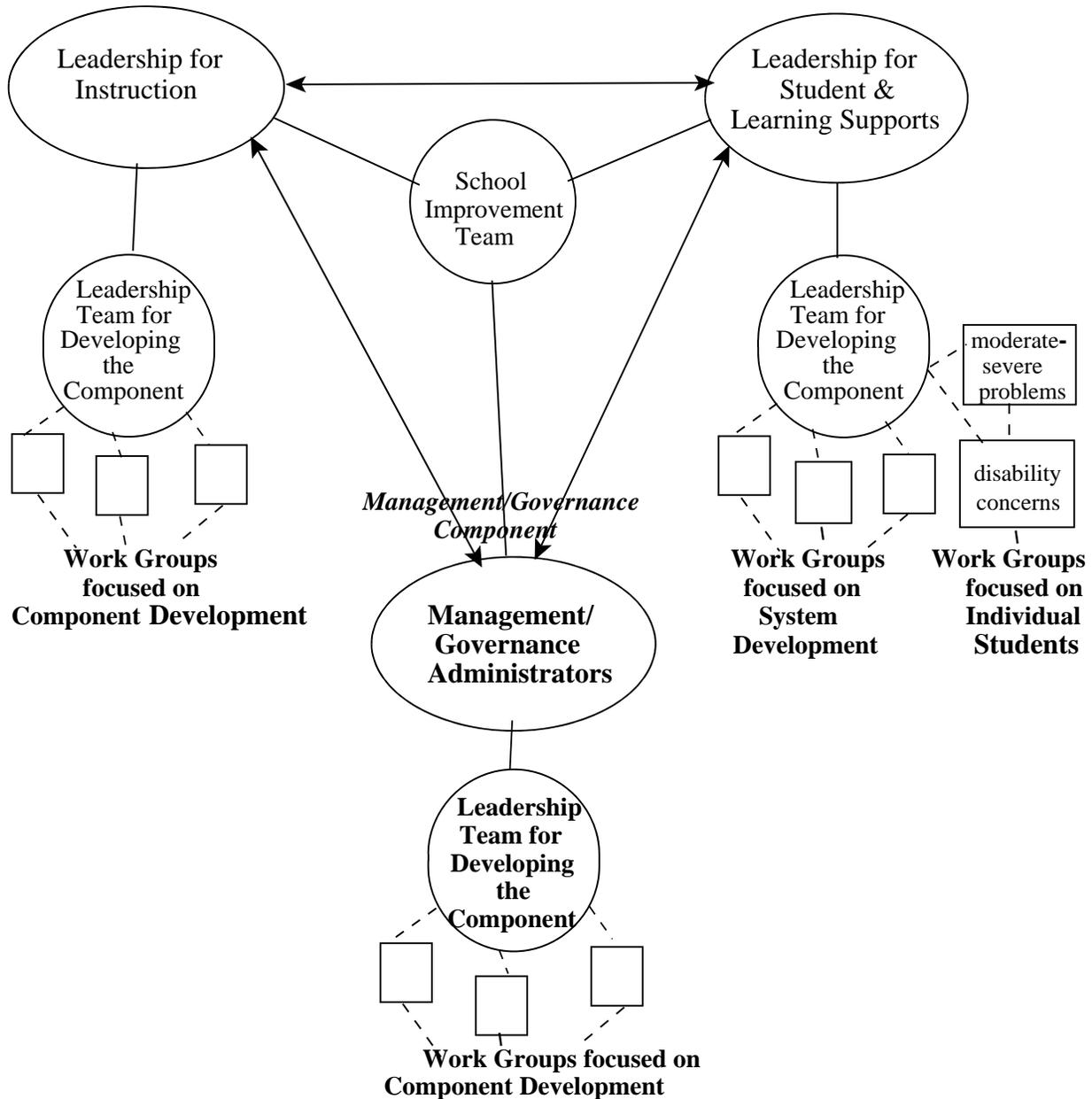
As illustrated in the figure on the following page, each of the three primary and essential components for school improvement requires (1) administrative leadership, (2) a leadership team to work with the leader on system development, and (3) standing and occasionally ad hoc work groups to accomplish specific tasks. The leaders for the instructional and enabling components are part of the management/governance component to ensure all three components are integrated and that the enabling/learning component is not marginalized. If a special team is assigned to work on school improvement planning, implementation, and evaluation, the leaders for all three components must be on that team.

With specific reference to the component to address barriers to learning, the administrative leader has responsibility and accountability for continuous development of a comprehensive

Example of an Integrated Infrastructure at the School Level*

Facilitating Learning/Development
Instructional Component

Addressing Barriers to Learning
Enabling or Learning Supports Component



*The infrastructure for a comprehensive system of learning supports should be designed from the school outward. That is, conceptually, the first emphasis is 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. Ultimately, central district units need to be restructured in ways that best support the work at the school and school complex levels.

and cohesive system of student and learning supports. In regular meetings with a leadership team, the agenda includes guiding and monitoring daily implementation and development of all programs, services, initiatives, and systems intended to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

Standing work groups are established to pursue tasks related to developing and implementing the component's schoolwide and classroom programs. In our work (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2006), we organize them around six major intervention arenas (often with a work group focused on two at a time). The six arenas cover:

Teams and work groups focus on schoolwide & classroom efforts designed to enable equity of opportunity

- (1) in-classroom approaches designed to enhance how teachers enable learning through prevention and intervening as early after problem onset as feasible
- (2) home involvement approaches to enhance engagement in schools and schooling
- (3) supports for the many transitions experienced by students and their families
- (4) outreach programs to enhance community involvement and engagement (e.g., volunteers, businesses, agencies, faith-based organizations, etc.)
- (5) crisis response and prevention (encompassing concerns about violence, bullying, substance abuse, etc.)
- (6) specialized student and family assistance when necessary – includes two standing work groups that focus on the needs of specific individual students who are manifesting problems. One group (e.g., a student assistance team) focuses on those with moderate-severe problems that are not the result of disabilities; the other (i.e., an IEP team) focuses on disability concerns.

Additional, ad hoc work groups/committees are formed by the leadership team only when absolutely needed to deal with exceptional matters (e.g., formulating a set of guidelines, developing a specific resource aid). Tasks for ad hoc groups always are clearly defined and the work is time limited.

Small schools, obviously, have less staff and other resources than most larger schools. Thus, in a small school, leadership teams and work groups will consist of fewer members. Nevertheless, the three

major components necessary for school improvement remain the same in all schools. The challenge in any school is to pursue all three components in an integrated and effective manner. The added challenge in a small school is how to do it with so few personnel.

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In a small school, the principal (and whoever else is part of the governance leadership team) will need to ensure that someone is assigned leadership for each of the three components. For the enabling/learning supports component, this may be someone already on the leadership team or someone in the school who has major involvement with student supports (e.g. a pupil services professional, a Title I coordinator, a special education resource specialist). If not already in an administrator's role, the newly designated component leader needs to become part of the administrative team, assigned responsibility and accountability for ensuring the vision for the component is not lost, and provided additional training for the tasks involved in the new leadership assignment.

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

Well-designed, compatible, and interconnected infrastructures at schools, for school complexes, at the district level, and for school-community collaboratives are essential for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports. Each level plays a key role in weaving together existing school and community resources, developing a full continuum of interventions over time, and ensuring that the system operates in an increasingly cohesive, cost-efficient, and equitable way.

Expanding the Infrastructure to Connect with Community Resources

To enhance resource availability and use, schools need to mobilize and weave together school and community resources. This requires connecting the school infrastructure with the community using a collaborative infrastructure. Additional resource enhancement and economies of scale can be garnered by an infrastructure linkage that connects clusters or families of schools, such as feeder patterns (see Adelman & Taylor, 2007; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2005, 2008a,b).

Concluding Comments

The ongoing dilemma for those expected to improve schools is how to meet our society's basic aims for public education in ways that level the playing field. The dilemma is exacerbated by the need to do more with less and to use sparse resources in the most cost-effective ways.

A new team for every new initiative is not cost-effective.

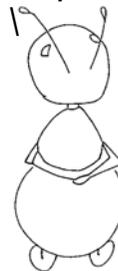
Teams and work groups are an essential facet of a productive operational infrastructure for school improvement. They must be formed to ensure that schools are able to carry out basic functions and tasks related to three fundamental components of school improvement: (1) facilitation of learning and development, (2) addressing barriers to learning and teaching, and (3) managing resources and school governance. An effective operational infrastructure at a school requires that each of these components has a strong leader and leadership team and productive work groups, and each is integrated with the other and fully integrated into school improvement policy and practice.

A properly designed and implemented operational infrastructure enables leaders to steer together and to empower and work effectively with staff. And, it enables them to avoid the problem of naive team proliferation by readily integrating new initiatives into existing teams and work groups.

How many teams does it take to change a light bulb?



Will it really require a team?



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For books on team building, see <http://www.questia.com/search/building-teamwork->

For quick “tips” on team building, see Heathfield, S.M. (2011). *Twelve tips for team building: How to build successful work teams; how to make teams effective*. About.com Guide.

http://humanresources.about.com/od/involvementteams/a/twelve_tip_team.htm

Also see www.buzzle.com/articles/teamwork

For some resource aids for developing a leadership team for an enabling or learning supports component, see the following appended material and the Center’s toolkit for *Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*

Appendix A

WHAT IS A LEARNING SUPPORTS LEADERSHIP TEAM?

Every school that wants to improve student and learning supports needs a mechanism specifically working on system *development* to enhance how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. The goal is to rework existing resources by establishing a unified and comprehensive approach. A *Learning Supports Leadership Team* is a vital mechanism for transforming current marginalized and fragmented interventions into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive *system* that enhances equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school.

Most schools have teams that focus on individual student/family problems (e.g., a student support team, an IEP team). These teams pursue such functions as referral, triage, and care monitoring or management. In contrast to this case-by-case focus, a school's *Learning Supports Leadership Team*, along with an administrative leader, can take responsibility for developing a unified and comprehensive enabling or learning supports component at a school. In doing so, it ensures that the component is (1) fully integrated as a primary and essential facet of school improvement and (2) outreaches to the community to fill critical system gaps by weaving in human and financial resources from public and private sectors.

What Are the Functions of this Leadership Team?

A Learning Supports Leadership Team performs essential functions and tasks related to the implementation and ongoing development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system for addressing barriers to student learning and teaching.

Examples are:

- ◆ Aggregating data across students and from teachers to analyze school needs
- ◆ Mapping resources at school and in the community
- ◆ Analyzing resources & formulating priorities for system development (in keeping with the most pressing needs of the school)
- ◆ Recommending how resources should be deployed and redeployed
- ◆ Coordinating and integrating school resources & connecting with community resources
- ◆ Planning and facilitating ways to strengthen and develop new programs and systems
- ◆ Developing strategies for enhancing resources
- ◆ Establishing work groups as needed

◆ “Social marketing”

Related to the concept of an enabling/learning supports component, these functions and tasks are pursued within frameworks that outline six curriculum content arenas and the full continuum of interventions needed to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to student and learning supports that is integrated fully into the fabric of school improvement policy and practice. (See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/frameworksforsystemictransformation.pdf>)

Who's on Such a Team?

A Learning Supports Leadership Team might begin with only a few people. Where feasible, it should expand into an inclusive group of informed, willing, and able stakeholders. This might include the following:

- Administrative Lead for the component
- School Psychologist
- Counselor
- School Nurse
- School Social Worker
- Behavioral Specialist
- Special education teacher
- Representatives of community agencies involved regularly with the school
- Student representation (when appropriate and feasible)
- Others who have a particular interest and ability to help with the functions

It is important to integrate this team with the infrastructure mechanisms at the school focused on instruction and management/governance. For example, the school administrator on the team needs to represent the team at administrative and governance meetings. A member also will need to represent the team when a Learning Supports Leadership *Council* is established for a family of schools (e.g., the feeder pattern).

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>

Appendix B

Resource Aids for Developing a Leadership Team for an Enabling or Learning Supports Component

- Checklist for Establishing the School-Site Leadership Team
- Examples of Initial and Ongoing Process Tasks for the Team
- Planning and Facilitating Effective Meetings

Checklist for Establishing the School-Site Leadership Team

1. ___ Job descriptions/evaluations reflect a policy for working in a coordinated and increasingly integrated way to maximize resource use and enhance effectiveness (this includes allocation of time and resources so that team members can build capacity and work effectively together to maximize resource coordination and enhancement). See Center toolkit for prototype job descriptions -- <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkitb4.htm> .
2. ___ Every interested staff member is encouraged to participate.
3. ___ Team include key stakeholders (e.g., guidance counselors, school psychologists, nurses, social workers, attendance and dropout counselors, health educators, special education staff, after school program staff, bilingual and Title I program coordinators, health educators, safe and drug free school staff, representatives of any community agency significantly involved with the site, administrator, regular classroom teachers, non-certificated staff, parents, older students).
4. ___ The size of teams reflects current needs, interests, and factors associated with efficient and effective functioning. (The larger the group, the harder it is to find a meeting time and the longer each meeting tends to run. Frequency of meetings depends on the group's functions, time availability, and ambitions. Properly designed and trained teams can accomplish a great deal through informal communication and short meetings).
5. ___ There is a nucleus of team members who have or will acquire the ability to carry out identified functions and make the mechanism work (others are auxiliary members). All are committed to the team's mission. (Building team commitment and competence should be a major focus of school management policies and programs. Because various teams at a school require the expertise of the same personnel, some individuals will necessarily be on more than one team.)
6. ___ Team has a dedicated facilitator who is able to keep the group task-focused and productive.
7. ___ Team has someone who records decisions and plans and reminds members of planned activity and products.
8. ___ Team uses advanced technology (management systems, electronic bulletin boards and E-mail, resource clearinghouses) to facilitate communication, networking, program planning and implementation, linking activity, and a variety of budgeting, scheduling, and other management concerns.

Exhibit

Examples of Initial and Ongoing Process Tasks for the Team

- Orientation for representatives to introduce each to the other and provide further clarity of group's purposes and processes
- Review membership to determine if any major stakeholder is not represented; take steps to assure proper representation
- Share and map information regarding what exists (programs, services, systems for triage, referral, case management, etc. – at a site; at each site; in the district and community)
- Analyze information on resources to identify important needs at specific sites and for the complex/family of schools as a whole
- Establish priorities for efforts to enhance resources and systems
- Formulate plans for pursuing priorities
- Each site discusses need for coordinating crisis response across the complex and for sharing complex resources for site specific crises and then explores conclusions and plans at Council meeting
- Discussion of staff (and other stakeholder) development activity with a view to combining certain training across sites
- Discussion of quality improvement and longer-term planning (e.g., efficacy, pooling of resources)

General Meeting format

- Updating on and introduction of membership
- Reports from those who had between meeting assignments
- Current topic for discussion and planning
- Decision regarding between meeting assignments
- Ideas for next agenda

Planning and Facilitating Effective Meetings

Forming a Working Group

- There should be a clear statement about the group's mission.
- Be certain that members agree to pursue the stated mission and, for the most part, share a vision.
- Pick someone who the group will respect and who either already has good facilitation skills or will commit to learning those that are needed.
- Provide training for members so they understand their role in keeping a meeting on track and turning talk into effective action..
- Designate processes (a) for sending members information before a meeting regarding what is to be accomplished, specific agenda items, and individual assignments and (b) for maintaining and circulating record of decisions and planned actions (what, who, when).

Meeting Format

- Be certain there is a written agenda and that it clearly states the purpose of the meeting, specific topics, and desired outcomes for the session.
- Begin the meeting by reviewing purpose, topics, desired outcomes, etc. Until the group is functioning well, it may be necessary to review meeting ground rules.
- Facilitate the involvement of all members, and do so in ways that encourage them to focus specifically on the task. The facilitator remains neutral in discussion of issues.
- Try to maintain a comfortable pace (neither too rushed, nor too slow; try to start on time and end on time but don't be a slave to the clock).
- Periodically review what has been accomplished and move on the next item.
- Leave time to sum up and celebrate accomplishment of outcomes and end by enumerating specific follow up activity (what, who, when). End with a plan for the next meeting (date, time, tentative agenda). For a series of meetings, set the dates well in advance so members can plan their calendars.

Some Group Dynamics to Anticipate

- *Hidden Agendas* – All members should agree to help keep hidden agendas in check and, when such items cannot be avoided, facilitate the rapid presentation of a point and indicate where the concern needs to be redirected.
- *A Need for Validation* – When members make the same point over and over, it usually indicates they feel an important point is not being validated. To counter such disruptive repetition, account for the item in a visible way so that members feel their contributions have been acknowledged. When the item warrants discussion at a later time, assign it to a future agenda.
- *Members are at an Impasse* – Two major reasons groups get stuck are: (a) some new ideas are needed to "get out of a box" and (b) differences in perspective need to be aired and resolved. The former problem usually can be dealt with through brainstorming or by bringing in someone with new ideas to offer; to deal with conflicts that arise over process, content, and power relationships employ problem solving and conflict management strategies (e.g., accommodation, negotiation, mediation).
- *Interpersonal Conflict and Inappropriate Competition* – These problems may be corrected by repeatedly bringing the focus back to the goal – improving outcomes for students/families; when this doesn't work; restructuring group membership may be necessary.
- *Ain't It Awful!* – Daily frustrations experienced by staff often lead them to turn meetings into gripe sessions. Outside team members (parents, agency staff, business and/or university partners) can influence school staff to exhibit their best behavior.