



A Center Policy Brief

Turning Around, Transforming, and Continuously Improving Schools: *Federal Proposals are Still Based on a Two- Rather than a Three- Component Blueprint*

(April, 2010)

What the best and wisest parent
wants for his (her) own child
that must the community
want for all of its children.
Any other idea . . . is narrow
and unlovely; acted upon it
destroys our democracy.
John Dewey

The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and 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 Fax: (310) 206-8716 Toll Free: (866) 846-4843
email: smhp@ucla.edu website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

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Executive Summary

Turning Around, Transforming, and Continuously Improving Schools: Federal Proposals are Still Based on a Two- Rather than a Three- Component Blueprint

Clearly, low performing, and especially failing schools, are a high priority concern for policy makers. And it is evident that fundamental systemic changes are necessary. There is, however, inadequate research and no consensus about the blueprint and roadmap to guide such changes. Therefore, it is essential to keep analyzing deficiencies in blueprints and roadmaps guiding current policy and practice.

We begin our analysis with a discussion of the lenses through which systemic problems are viewed by federal policy makers and use the school turnaround models to illustrate the dilemma confronting efforts to enable equity of opportunity. Then, we broaden the analysis to include current priorities for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as outlined in the U. S. Department of Education's *A Blueprint for Reform*. Our findings highlight the ongoing marginalization of practices for directly addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

The problem is discussed as stemming from the two-component framework that dominates school improvement thinking. That is, the essential school improvement thrust is on improving instruction and how schools manage resources. In contrast, student and learning supports usually are considered tangentially, viewed as *auxiliary services*, and planned and implemented in piecemeal and fragmented ways. This reality has been documented previously in analyses of school improvement plans and appears supported by the first analyses of the *Race to the Top* applications.

The federal administration's proposed *Blueprint for Reform* continues to primarily emphasize two-component thinking. The blueprint states that enabling equity of opportunity requires "moving toward comparability in resources between high- and low-poverty schools," "rigorous and fair accountability for all levels," and "meeting the needs of diverse learners ... by providing appropriate instruction and access to a challenging curriculum along with additional supports and attention where needed." However, sparse attention is given to "additional supports and attention where needed." The commitment to equity and opportunity for all students is stated specifically as the third of five priorities. The closest the document comes to delineating supports to meet this priority are sections on

- "Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners and Other Diverse Learners" (i.e., students eligible for compensatory and special education)
- "Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students."

In both instances, what the blueprint indicates amounts mostly to tinkering rather than system transformation. While there is language about a "new approach," there is continuing neglect of extensive systemic deficits related to interventions targeting student diversity, disability, and differences. The limitations of the blueprint with respect to this priority are underscored by applying two lenses that are not widely used:

- (1) how schools try to directly *address barriers* to learning and teaching and
- (2) how they try to *re-engage students* who have become disconnected from classroom instruction.

These two lenses bring into focus the considerable resources currently expended on student and learning supports and illuminate fundamental flaws in how these resources are used. And, they help expand understanding of the full range of systemic changes needed not only to prevent and reduce the problems cited in *A Blueprint for Reform*, but that are essential to reducing student (and teacher) dropout rates, narrowing the achievement gap, countering the plateau effect related to student population achievement scores, and in general, alleviating inequities.

Our analyses highlight the need for federal school improvement policy to shift from a two- to a three-component framework. The intent is to provide a unifying concept and umbrella under which all resources currently expended for student and learning supports are woven together. To illustrate the point, we define the third component as focused on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and designate it as an enabling or learning supports component.

As with the other two components, an enabling or learning supports component needs to be pursued in policy and practice as essential and fully integrated with the other two in order to combat marginalization and fragmentation. As outlined, the component provides a blueprint and roadmap for transforming the many pieces of student and learning supports into a comprehensive and cohesive system at all levels.

It is stressed that the three component framework does nothing to detract from the fact that a strong academic program is the foundation from which all other school-based interventions must flow. Rather, an enabling or learning supports component provides an essential systemic way to address factors that interfere with students benefitting from improvements that are made in academic instruction.

We conclude that only by unifying student and learning supports will it be feasible to develop a *comprehensive system* to directly address many of the complex factors interfering with schools accomplishing their mission. And only by developing such a system will it be feasible to facilitate the *emergence* of a school environment that fosters successful, safe, and healthy students and staff. It is emphasized that *school climate is an emergent quality* that stems from how schools provide and coalesce on a daily basis the components dedicated to instruction, learning supports, and management/governance.

Across the country, pioneering work to enhance student and learning supports heralds movement toward a comprehensive system for addressing factors interfering with learning and teaching. Thus, whether or not the impending reauthorization of the ESEA incorporates a three-component blueprint, we anticipate more and more movement in this direction at state, regional, district, and school levels. The call for ensuring equity and opportunity for all students demands no less.



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Phone: (310) 825-3634 Fax: (310) 206-8716 Toll Free: (866) 846-4843
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**Turning Around, Transforming, and Continuously Improving Schools:
Federal Proposals are Still Based on a Two- Rather than a Three- Component Blueprint**

"If we turn around just the bottom 1 percent, the bottom thousand schools per year for the next five years, we could really move the needle, lift the bottom and change the lives of tens of millions of underserved children."

Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education

As Secretary Duncan recognizes, turning around schools that are not doing well is a formidable task. It is also a task about which many ambiguities and controversies swirl.

Given all the uncertainties associated with turning around, transforming, and continuously improving schools, it is essential to keep analyzing deficiencies in blueprints and roadmaps guiding policy and practice. Such analyses are especially important with respect to low performing and failing schools.

The focus of this report is on how current federal policy and practice mainly tinkers with the need to directly address barriers to learning and re-engage disconnected students. We underscore that the reason for this is that these concerns are marginalized. And the marginalization stems from the two-component framework that dominates school improvement thinking.

**Low Performing
Schools: A High
Priority Concern**

Analysis of data from 2006–07 on 98,905 schools nationwide designated 10,676 schools in need of improvement and 2,302 schools as needing improvement restructuring (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Currently, the bottom 5% of low performing schools are viewed as failing schools and in need of turnaround strategies (Calkins, Guenther, & Belfiore, 2007).

Measures and criteria used to operationally define low-performing schools vary. Under the No Child Left Behind Act these are schools that are classified as “in need of improvement” or “corrective action” or “that do not meet the standards established and monitored by the state board or other authority external to the school (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin, 2008).

While the correlation between neighborhood poverty and low performing schools is widely acknowledged, the specific factors that cause low performance have been more a matter of speculation than rigorous research. The same is true of the various characteristics attributed to the relatively few settings described as “High Performing, High Poverty” schools; and as with low performing schools, the measures and criteria used to operationally define these settings vary.

Any school succeeds or fails as a result of the challenges it faces and its capability for meeting those challenges. Some of this capability is contained within the school, and some comes from the school district and community. Most schools serving high poverty students have not been able to build and muster the level of school and community capacity required for success. That is, they have not established ways to ensure the population attending the school comes each day motivationally ready and able to learn what is on the teaching agenda. Schools that consistently succeed are able to effectively weave together

school and community resources and use them in a highly functional manner that matches the motivation and capabilities of their students. Schools that consistently fail often find demands overwhelm their sparse resources, and over time such schools usually become increasingly dysfunctional.

Low performing, and especially failing schools, are a high priority concern for policy makers. Clearly, fundamental systemic changes are necessary. There is, however, inadequate research and no consensus about the blueprint and roadmap to guide such changes.

Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools

The guidance for School Improvement Grants (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a) defines *Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools* as follows:

“Any Title I school in improvement, corrective, or restructuring that

- < Is among the lowest-achieving five percent of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring or the lowest-achieving five Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in the State, whichever number of schools is greater, or
- < Is a high school that has had a graduation rate ... that is less than 60 percent over a number of years;

and

Any secondary school that is eligible for, but does not receive, Title I funds that

- < Is among the lowest-achieving five percent of secondary schools or the lowest-achieving five secondary schools in the State that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds, whichever number of schools is greater; or
- < Is a high school that has had a graduation rate ... that is less than 60 percent over a number of years.

The Current
Blueprint and
Roadmap for
Turning Schools
Around

While many concerns have been raised about policies and practices for turning around, transforming, and continuously improving schools, those raising such concerns do not want to maintain what clearly is an unsatisfactory status quo. And a shared aim of most critical analyses is to enhance efforts to ensure equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at every school.

The current focus of many critics is on improving the federal blueprint and roadmap. Given the shortcomings of available research, criticisms and disagreements are mostly guided by differences in beliefs and assumptions and are shaped by the lenses through which the systemic problems are viewed.

As evidenced by the prevailing discussion in Washington, D.C., the lenses through which systemic problems are viewed by federal policy makers are beliefs and assumptions about *how best to*

- *turnaround low performing schools*
- *ensure standards and assessments* related to instruction are globally competitive
- *develop and enhance data systems* for accountability, personalizing instruction, and monitoring progress to graduation
- *enhance human capital* (e.g., remove, recruit, and develop leaders and teachers).

These clearly are the core topics found in a variety of school “turnaround” documents that are influencing policy makers. (See, for example, Aladjem, Birman, Harr-Robins, & Parrish, 2010; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2009; Center on Innovation & Improvement, 2007, 2010; Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, & Darwin, 2008; Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2009; Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2007; Murphy & Meyers, 2007; Mazzeo & Berman, 2003; Redding, 2010; Steiner, 2009; Steiner, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2010b; WestEd, 2010).

School Turnaround Models Illustrate the Dilemma Confronting Policy Makers

"The truth is that we don't know exactly how to turn around schools. The truth is also that excuses and inaction don't help students who are trapped in these schools. It's a real dilemma, not a fake one. But at the department, our feeling is that we have some models of success on which to build and we need to step up to the plate and start working on it."

Joanne Weiss, U.S. Department of Education

A fundamental problem with the current blueprint and roadmap is seen in the policy for turning around low performing schools. In the 2010 document *A Blueprint for Reform* and the grant application processes for *Race to the Top* and *School Improvement*, the U. S. Department of Education lays out four models for turning around the lowest performing schools. The latest wording (U. S. Department of Education, 2010c) describes the models as follows:

- **TRANSFORMATION MODEL:** Replace the principal, strengthen staffing, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement new governance and flexibility.
- **TURNAROUND MODEL:** Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the school staff, implement a research-based instructional program, and implement new governance structure.
- **RESTART MODEL:** Convert or close and re-open the school under the management of an effective charter operator, charter management organization, or education management organization.
- **SCHOOL CLOSURE MODEL:** Close the school and enroll students who attended it in other higher-performing schools in the district.*

*Appendix A highlights rationales and recommended practices related to the turnaround models. Also, see Appendix B for details on each model as outlined in the *Race to the Top* application.

Examples of Concerns about the Models

Many analyses have pointed out that the turnaround models are based on ideas derived primarily from the business sector, especially the literature on Total Quality Management (TQM) and Business Process Reengineering (BPR). Unfortunately, available research suggests that both these approaches have been largely ineffective in about two-thirds of the cases studied (Hess & Gift, 2009; Staw & Epstein, 2000).

As Loveless (2009) stresses in the Brown Center Report on how well American students are doing:

“people who say we know how to make failing schools into successful ones but merely lack the will to do so are selling snake oil. In fact, successful turnaround stories are marked by idiosyncratic circumstances. The science of turnarounds is weak and devoid of practical, effective strategies for educators to employ. Examples of large-scale, system-wide turnarounds are nonexistent. A lot of work needs to be done before the odds of turning around failing schools begin to tip in a favorable direction.”

The nation’s teachers’ and principals’ unions and guilds also are vocal critics. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, responds that the federal turnaround approach “places 100 percent of the responsibility on teachers and gives them zero percent of the authority.” Dennis Van Roekel, president of the National Education Association, emphasizes: “We were expecting school turn-around efforts to be research-based and fully collaborative. Instead, we see too much top-down scapegoating of teachers and not enough collaboration. It’s just not a solution to say, ‘Let’s get rid of half the staff.’ If there’s a high-crime neighborhood, you don’t fire the police officers.” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010)

And, in an open letter to the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Gail Connelly, Executive Director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) stresses: “NAESP supports the Secretary’s initiative to identify the lowest performing schools, establish rigorous interventions, provide them sufficient resources over multiple years to implement those interventions, and hold them accountable for improving student performance. However, we fundamentally disagree with the approach to enact this wide-ranging and transformational reform initiative with the simplistic and reactionary step of replacing principals as the first step in turning around low-performing schools. NAESP strongly supports reform models that provide the essential resources existing principals of low-performing schools must have to succeed. These resources include the necessary time, talent and tools” (Letter dated September 25, 2009 cited in Wikipedia).

Moving to mobilize critical reaction, the National Association of Secondary School Principals has encouraged its members to write to Congress. The message is: “Research on turnaround schools and sustained middle level and high school reform does not support the models put forth by ED. Low-performing schools can improve with a sustained effort to build the capacity of school leaders and their teams. ... The Breaking Ranks framework [promoted by NASSP] has been repeatedly validated by ... a set of diverse, high-poverty schools that ... have seen growth over time in ... graduation rates, state assessment scores, and literacy and numeracy achievement. And each school that implements the Breaking Ranks framework reminds us all that turning around a school is three-to-five years of time-consuming, resource-intensive, hard work” (<http://www.principals.org/plac>).

On a pragmatic level, the concern is that many communities simply don’t have the pool of talent to recruit new and better principals and teachers. As noted by Dennis Van Roekel: “One thing is certain: Firing the entire faculty of a school that is on the path to improvement is no recipe for turning around a struggling high school. And relying on a magical pool of ‘excellent teachers’ to spring forth and replace them is naive at best and desperately misguided” (NEA, 2010).

Concerns aside, states are moving forward with implementing the four turnaround models. At the same time, it is obvious that adopting one of these is no more than an awkward beginning in enabling equity of opportunity.

Federal School Turnaround Policy and *Enabling* Equity of Opportunity: Tinkering Toward a Three-Component Approach

“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.”

(From the 2002 mission statement of CCSSO –
the Council for Chief State School Officers – italics added)

In *A Blueprint for Reform*, the U. S. Department of Education (2010c) indicates that enabling equity of opportunity requires “moving toward comparability in resources between high- and low-poverty schools,” “rigorous and fair accountability for all levels,” and “meeting the needs of diverse learners ... by providing appropriate instruction and access to a challenging curriculum along with additional supports and attention where needed.”

The sparse attention to “additional supports and attention where needed” reflects another fundamental problem with the current blueprint and roadmap for turning around, transforming, and continuously improving schools. It is a long-standing policy trend to view student and learning supports in terms of *auxiliary services* and usually as an afterthought. For our policy analysis of the problem with this trend, see *School Improvement Planning: What’s Missing?* (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2005). And in reviewing the first analyses of the *Race to the Top* applications, we find that this continues to be a fundamental systemic deficit in school improvement policy and practice (CCSSO & Learning Point Associates, 2010).

Because student and learning supports are given short shrift in federal, state, and local policy, efforts are *marginalized* when it comes to identifying and correcting fundamental *systemic* deficits in how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and intervene to re-engage disconnected students. The marginalization results in the ongoing relative neglect of this essential facet of any blueprint for enabling all students to have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

Current Federal Priorities: Tinkering Rather than Transforming

In the administration’s blueprint for reform, the commitment to equity and opportunity for all students is stated as the third of five priorities. The closest the document come to delineating supports to meet this priority are the sections on

- (1) “Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners and Other Diverse Learners” (i.e., students eligible for compensatory and special education)
- (2) “Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students.”

In the former, the stated intent is to strengthen the commitment to all students and improve each program “to ensure that funds are used more effectively.” The problem here is the continuing emphasis on categorical problems and funding formulas and too little emphasis on the overlapping nature of the many factors that interfere with learning and teaching.

With respect to the focus on *Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students*, the blueprint indicates a “new approach” focused on

- < Providing a cradle through college and career continuum in high-poverty communities that provides effective schools, comprehensive services, and family supports.
- < Supporting programs that redesign and expand the school schedule, provide high-quality afterschool programs, and provide comprehensive supports to students.

- < Using data to improve students' safety, health, and well-being, and increasing the capacity of states, districts, and schools to create safe, healthy, and drug-free environments.

The road to all this is described as providing

“competitive grants to support states, school districts, and their partners in providing learning environments that ensure that students are successful, safe, and healthy. To better measure school climate and identify local needs, grantees will be required to develop and implement a state- or district-wide school climate needs assessment to evaluate school engagement, school safety (addressing drug, alcohol, and violence issues), and school environment, and publicly report this information. This assessment must include surveys of student, school staff, and family experiences with respect to individual schools, and additional data such as suspensions and disciplinary actions. States will use this data to identify local needs and provide competitive subgrants to school districts and their partners to address the needs of students, schools, and communities.

Grantees will use funds under the Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students program to carry out strategies designed to improve school safety and to promote students' physical and mental health and well-being, nutrition education, healthy eating, and physical fitness. Grantees may support activities to prevent and reduce substance use, school violence (including teen dating violence), harassment, and bullying, as well as to strengthen family and community engagement in order to ensure a healthy and supportive school environment.”

The limitations of this “new approach” and the continuing neglect of extensive systemic deficits related to interventions targeting student diversity, disability, and differences are readily seen when viewed through two lenses that are not widely used: (1) how schools try to directly *address barriers* to learning and teaching and (2) how they try to *re-engage students* who have become disconnected from classroom instruction. These two lenses bring into focus the considerable resources currently expended on student and learning supports (e.g., underwritten by general funds, compensatory and special education, special intra and extramural projects, community contributions). Together, these lenses allow for the type of analyses that illuminates fundamental flaws in how these resources are used. And, they help expand understanding of the full range of systemic changes needed not only to prevent and reduce the problems cited in *A Blueprint for Reform*, but that are essential to reducing student (and teacher) dropout rates, narrowing the achievement gap, countering the plateau effect related to student population achievement scores, and in general, alleviating inequities.

Current Policy is Shaped by a Two Component Framework for School Improvement

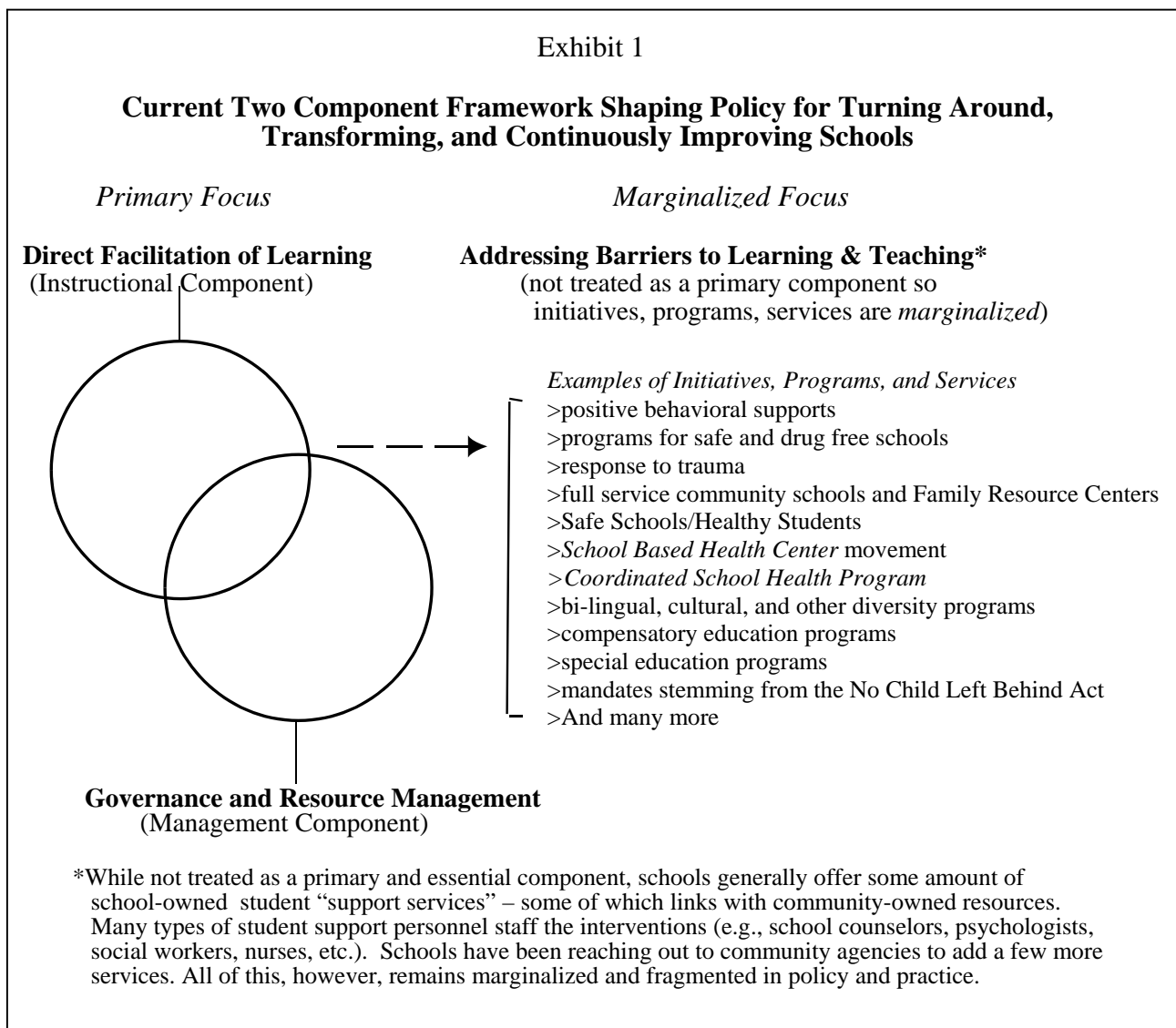
Because the two lenses noted above are not prominently used, policy and plans for turning around, transforming, and continuously improving schools are primarily shaped by a two component framework which marginalizes efforts related to providing “additional supports and attention where needed.” This is graphically illustrated in Exhibit 1. Obviously, the problem is not with the two components, per se. Effective instruction is, of course, fundamental to a school's mission; no one wants to send children to a school where teachers lack high standards, expectations, and competence; and sound governance and management of resources are essential. As Exhibit 1 highlights, the problem is that the many interventions designed to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students are introduced through ad hoc and piecemeal policy and operate in a fragmented manner. The process amounts to tinkering with little focus on systemic transformation.

The reality is that many overlapping factors can interfere with learning and teaching. Teachers in low performing schools point to how few students appear motivationally ready and able to learn what the daily lesson plan prescribes. Teachers in the upper grades report that a significant

percentage of their students have become actively disengaged and alienated from classroom learning. And, “acting out” behavior, especially bullying and disrespect for others, is rampant. (So is passivity, but this attracts less attention.) One result of all this is seen in the increasing number of students misdiagnosed as having learning disabilities (LD) and attention deficit-hyperactivity disorders (ADHD). Another result is too many dropouts and pushouts.

Teachers need and want considerable help in addressing barriers to student and school success. Unfortunately, the help they currently receive is poorly conceived and designed in ways that meet the needs of relatively few students. This inadequate response to their needs is the product of two-component thinking. Such a framework ignores ways to transform student and learning supports by moving toward *a comprehensive system* that enables all students to learn and all teachers to teach effectively.

Those low performing schools Secretary Duncan is referring to as the bottom 1 percent probably are most in need of developing such a system. However, it is evident that all high poverty, low performing schools and most other schools are expending significant resources on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students with too little payoff and accountability.



Ensuring Equity of Opportunity for All Students to Succeed at Every School: What's still Missing in the Federal Approach?

As Judy Jeffrey, chief state school officer for Iowa, stresses in introducing Iowa's design for a comprehensive system of supports for development and learning (Iowa Department of Education, 2004).

“Through our collective efforts, we must meet the learning needs of all students. Not every student comes to school motivationally ready and able to learn. Some experience barriers that interfere with their ability to profit from classroom instruction. Supports are needed to remove, or at least to alleviate, the effects of these barriers. Each student is entitled to receive the supports needed to ensure that he or she has an equal opportunity to learn and to succeed in school. This [design] provides guidance for a new direction for student support that brings together the efforts of schools, families, and communities.

If every student in every school and community in Iowa is to achieve at high levels, we must rethink how student supports are organized and delivered to address barriers to learning. This will require that schools and school districts, in collaboration with their community partners, develop a comprehensive, cohesive approach to delivery of learning supports that is an integral part of their school improvement efforts.”

Our previous analyses of school improvement policies, planning, and practices have documented the systemic deficits in dealing with factors leading to and maintaining students' problems, especially in schools where large proportions of students are not doing well (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2005). The picture that emerges is one of ad hoc and fragmented policies and practices. The tangential solution seen in federal policy (e.g., the *Race to the Top* and *School Improvement* grant applications) continues to be to call for improving coordination and coherence and flexibility in use of resources. This amounts to tinkering with systemic deficiencies rather than recognizing the need to develop a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

Comprehensiveness Involves More than Coordination

Because the federal blueprint for reform's new approach to successful, safe, and healthy students does propose providing *comprehensive supports to students*, it is relevant here to briefly discuss the notion of a comprehensive system. As noted, the widely recognized fragmentation of interventions designed to support students often leads to efforts to enhance coordination. Improving communication, coordination, cohesion, and flexibility in use of resources are important attributes of a comprehensive system. However, these stop short of establishing the type of expanded policy and practice that is needed as a basis for integrating and fully developing student and learning supports.

Too often, what is being identified as *comprehensive* is not comprehensive enough, and generally the approach described is not about *developing a system* of supports but a proposal to enhance coordination of fragmented efforts. Many times the emphasis mainly is on health and social services, usually with the notion of *connecting* more community services to schools. In some instances, the focus expands to include a variety of piecemeal programs for safe and drug free schools, family assistance, after-school and summer programs, and so forth. All these programs and services are relevant. But, most proposals to improve supports still fail to escape old ways of thinking about what schools need both in terms of content and process for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

Comprehensive means more than coordination. The need is for *system building* within and across a *continuum of intervention*. This encompasses integrated *systems* for

- (a) promoting healthy development and preventing problems,
- (b) responding as early after problem onset as is feasible, and
- (c) providing for those whose serious, pervasive, and chronic problems require more intensive assistance and accommodation.

Comprehensive approaches to student and learning supports involve much more than enhancing availability and access to health and social services or limiting the focus to any other piecemeal and ad hoc initiatives for addressing barriers to learning, development, and teaching. Just as efforts to enhance instruction emphasize well delineated and integrated curriculum content, so must efforts to address external and internal factors that interfere with students engaging effectively with that curriculum. At schools, the *content* (or curriculum) for addressing a full range of interfering factors can be coalesced into six classroom and school-wide arenas. These focus on:

- (1) *enhancing regular classroom strategies to enable learning* (e.g., improving instruction for students who have become disengaged from learning at school and for those with mild-moderate learning and behavior problems)
- (2) *supporting transitions* (i.e., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes and many other transitions)
- (3) *increasing home and school connections*
- (4) *responding to, and where feasible, preventing crises*
- (5) *increasing community involvement and support* (outreaching to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
- (6) *facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed.*

School Turnaround and Dropout Prevention

Referring to the nation’s dropout problem, President Obama said. “The stakes are too high – for our children, for our economy, for our country. It’s time for all of us to come together – parents and students, principals and teachers, business leaders and elected officials – to end America’s dropout crisis.”

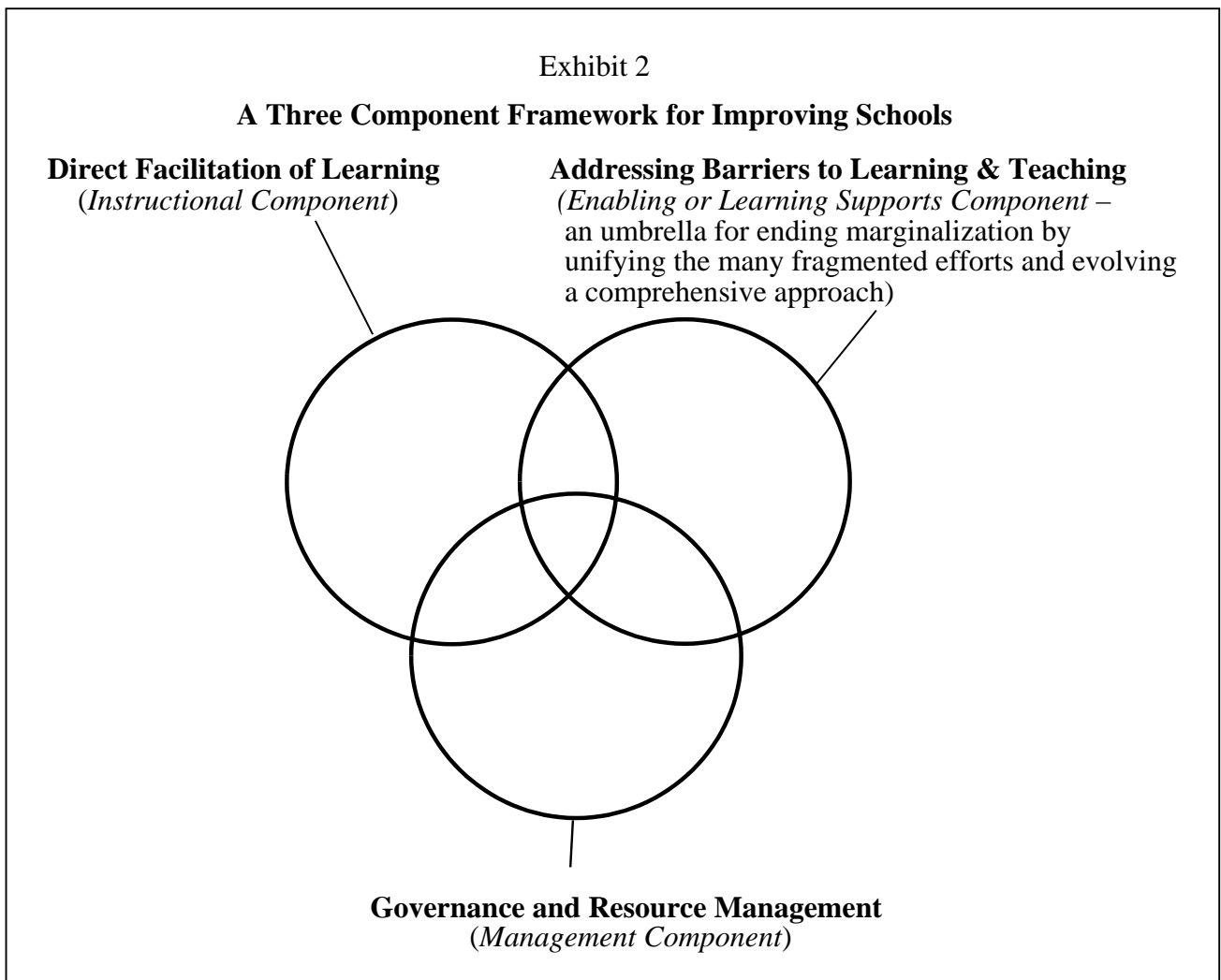
There is no issue about it being time for all of us to come together. But just identifying high schools with poor graduation rates and applying one of the four turnaround models certainly is no more than an awkward first step. And it is one that doesn’t provide a significant focus on bringing school and community stakeholders together nor does it focus enough on addressing barriers to learning and re-engaging disconnected students.

At this juncture, it is unclear how new investments in dropout prevention and recovery strategies will fit into a school’s existing efforts to provide student and learning supports. New investments can contribute to developing a truly comprehensive and systemic enabling component, or they can lead to mission drift. Those developing the system must always ask: “Where does this fit in the broad picture of a comprehensive approach to dealing with factors interfering with a student have an equal opportunity to succeed at school?” Then, if it fits, they must ensure it addresses current priorities for filling gaps and enhancing equity of opportunity.

Moving to a Three Component Framework for School Improvement

As illustrated in Exhibit 1 and in the related discussion, analyses of current policy indicate school improvement initiatives are dominated by a two-component framework. The main thrust is on improving instruction and how schools manage resources. While there are a variety of student support programs and services, they are marginalized in policy and practice, and they are pursued in piecemeal and fragmented ways. Throughout many years of school reform, little or no attention has been paid to rethinking these learning supports. As we stressed above, this state of affairs works against ensuring *all* students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

Exhibit 2 illustrates the notion that federal policy for improving schools needs to shift from a two- to a three-component framework. The third component becomes the unifying concept and umbrella under which all resources currently expended for student and learning supports are woven together. As with the other two components, such an enabling or learning supports component must be treated in policy and practice as primary and essential in order to combat the marginalization and fragmentation of the work. Furthermore, to be effective it must be fully integrated with the other two components. Properly conceived, the component provides a blueprint and roadmap for transforming the many pieces into a comprehensive and cohesive system at all levels.



An Enabling Component: A Transformational Concept

The move to a three component framework is meant to be a paradigm shift. As indicated, the shift is from a *marginalized and fragmented* set of student support *services* to development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive *system*. The intent of the system is to ensure that schools are well-positioned to enable students to get around barriers to learning and re-engage them in classroom instruction (see Exhibit 3). The emphasis on re-engagement recognizes that efforts to address interfering factors, provide positive behavior support, and prevent disengagement and dropouts are unlikely to be effective over time if they are not designed in ways that ensure students re-engage in classroom instruction (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, 2006b, 2008b).

In operationalizing an enabling or learning supports component, the emphasis is on

- a *continuum* of interconnected systems of interventions (see Exhibit 4) and
- a multifaceted set of *content arenas* that are cohesively integrated into classrooms and school-wide interventions (see six arenas listed above and in Exhibit 5 and the brief outline in Appendix C).

Developing the component involves weaving together what schools already are doing and enhancing the effort by inviting in home and community resources to help fill high priority systemic gaps. The matrix illustrated in Exhibit 5 coalesces the continuum with the content to provide a planning tool that can guide school improvement by indicating where current and proposed activity fits and what's missing (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, 2006b, 2008b; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008).

Various states and localities are moving in the direction of a three component approach for school improvement. In doing so, they are adopting different labels for their enabling component. For example, Iowa refers to their's as a "System of Supports for Learning and Development." On the next page see an excerpt from Louisiana's state initiative for a "Comprehensive Learning Supports System." For a discussion of other pioneering initiatives and lessons learned to date, see *Where's it Happening?* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/wheresithappening.htm>).

In general, we find that many are referring to their third component as *learning supports*. And increasingly, learning supports are being defined as the resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports intended to enable all pupils to have an equal opportunity for success at school.

At this point, it is relevant to stress that the three component framework does nothing to detract from the fact that a strong academic program is the foundation from which all other school-based interventions must flow. Rather, an enabling or learning supports component provides an *essential* systemic way to address factors that interfere with students benefitting from improvements in academic instruction.

Louisiana's Comprehensive Learning Supports System

In 2009, the Louisiana Department of Education set out to develop a prototype design with the intent of integrating it into their school improvement process. The following is an excerpt from the completed design document:

“The time is long overdue for escaping old ways of thinking about student supports. Leaders at all levels need to move school improvement efforts in substantively new directions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. The foundation for doing so involves adopting a three-component conceptual framework to guide development of a comprehensive system at every school in Louisiana for enabling/supporting learning:

1. An Instructional Component that provides guidance for best practices for effective instruction
2. A Management Component that guides best practices for site management and administrative capacity
3. A Comprehensive Learning Supports Component that guides the coalescing of resources to address barriers to student engagement in the classroom.

The first two components are already in place and well established in our school improvement process and operational infrastructure. The third component, a Comprehensive Learning Supports Component, needs to be developed and adopted into the infrastructure of our schools.

Adding the Learning Supports component will provide a unifying umbrella concept that:

- Unifies all student and learning supports under an umbrella term such as addressing barriers to student learning
- Builds the work into a primary and essential component of the school improvement process, fully integrated with the instructional and management components at a school and district-wide.”

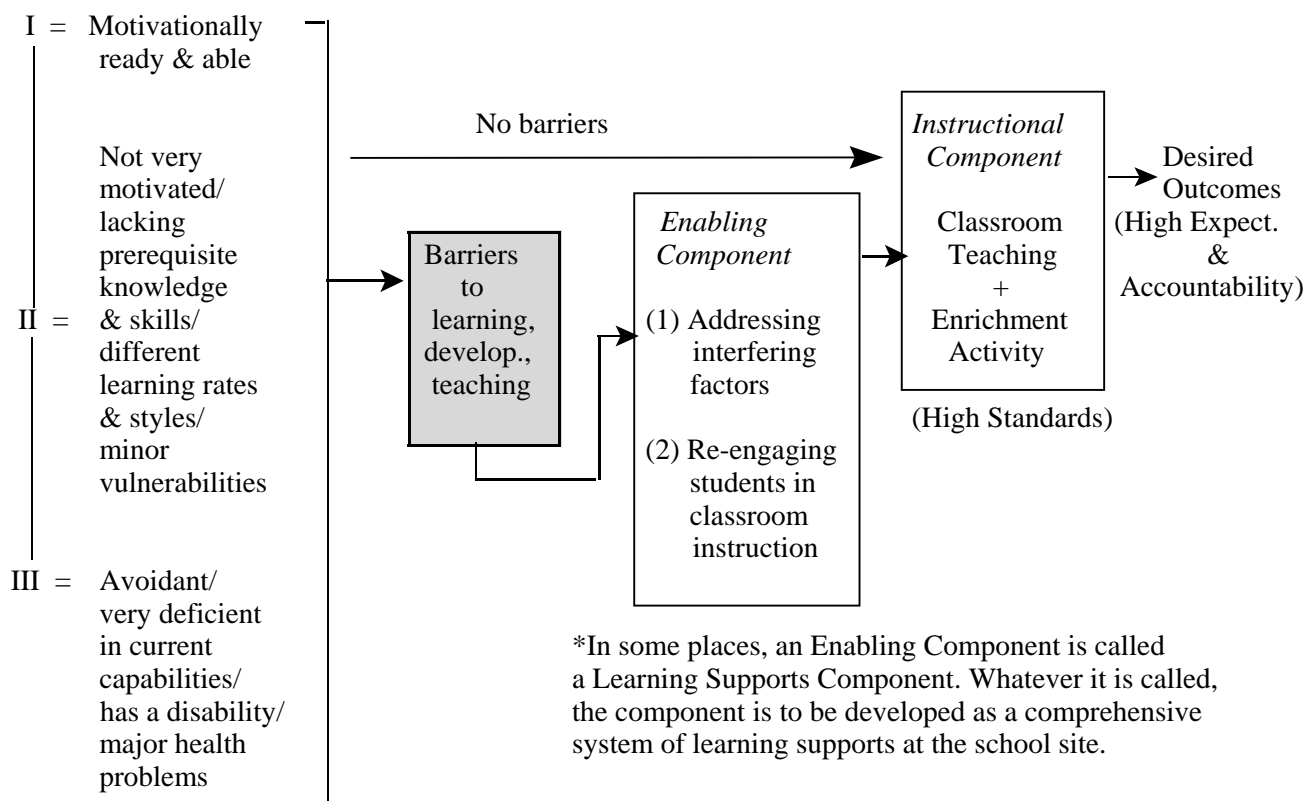
From: *Louisiana's Comprehensive Learning Supports System: The Design Document for Addressing Internal and External Barriers to Learning and Teaching*
<http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/uploads/15044.pdf>

Exhibit 3

An Enabling or Learning Supports Component to Address Barriers and Re-engage Students in Classroom Instruction*

Range of Learners

(categorized in terms of their response to academic instruction at any given point in time)



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

E n v i r o n m e n t a l C o n d i t i o n s**			P e r s o n F a c t o r s**
<i>Neighborhood</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>School and Peers</i>	<i>Individual</i>
>extreme economic deprivation	>chronic poverty	>poor quality school	>medical problems
>community disorganization, including high levels of mobility	>conflict/disruptions/violence	>negative encounters with teachers	>low birth weight/ neurodevelopmental delay
>violence, drugs, etc.	>substance abuse	>negative encounters with peers &/or inappropriate peer models	>psychophysiological problems
>minority and/or immigrant status	>models problem behavior		>difficult temperament & adjustment problems
	>abusive caretaking		>inadequate nutrition
	>inadequate provision for quality child care		

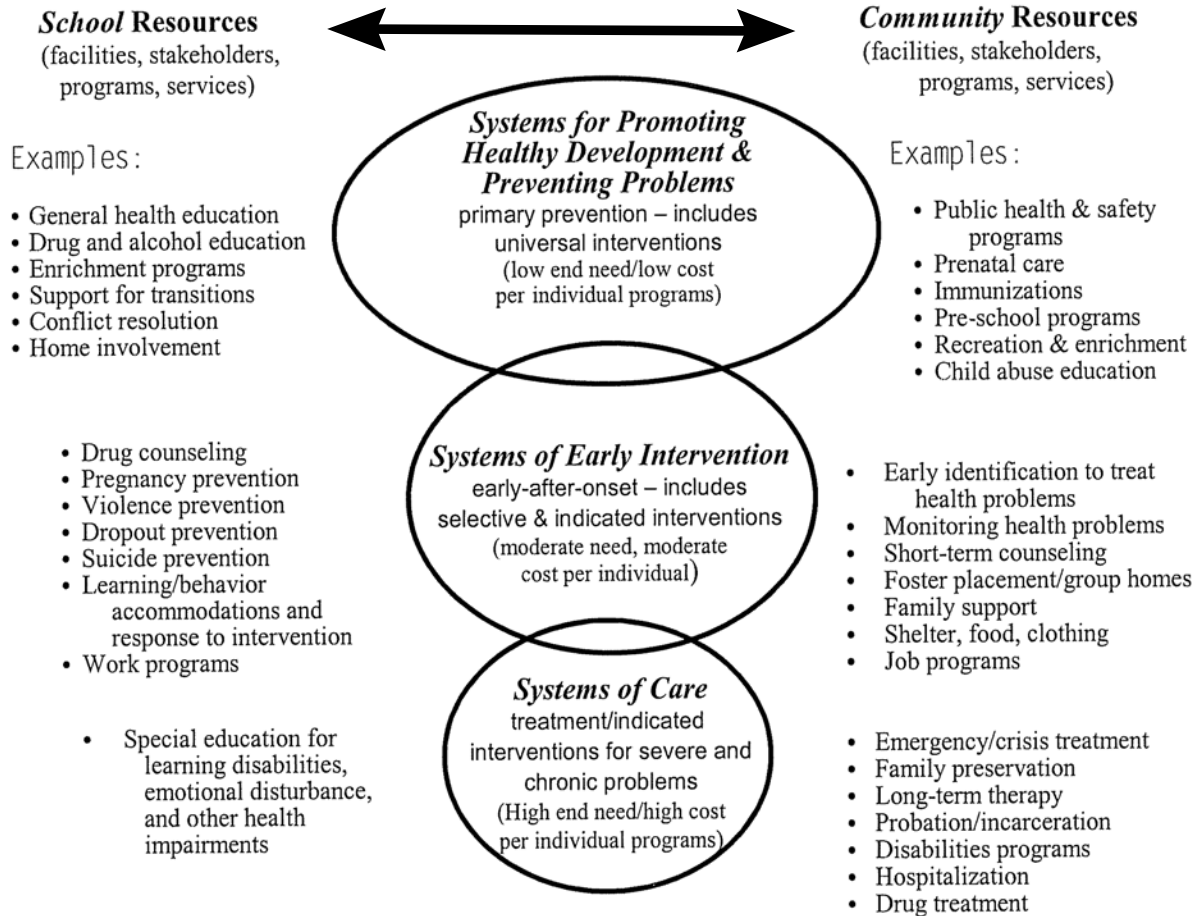
**A reciprocal determinist view of behavior recognizes the interplay of environment and person variables.

Exhibit 4

Continuum of Interconnected Systems for Meeting the Needs of All Students

Providing a *CONTINUUM OF SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PROGRAMS & SERVICES*

Ensuring use of the *LEAST INTERVENTION NEEDED*



Systemic collaboration* is essential to establish interprogram connections on a daily basis and over time to ensure seamless intervention within each system and among *systems of prevention, systems of early intervention, and systems of care.*

*Such collaboration involves horizontal and vertical restructuring of programs and services
 (a) within jurisdictions, school districts, and community agencies (e.g., among departments, divisions, units, schools, clusters of schools)
 (b) between jurisdictions, school and community agencies, public and private sectors; among schools; among community agencies

Exhibit 5

Matrix for Reviewing Scope and Content of a Component to Address Barriers to Learning*

		Scope of Intervention		
		System for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems	System for Early Intervention (Early after problem onset)	System of Care
Organizing around the Content/ "curriculum" (for addressing barriers to learning & promoting healthy development)	Classroom-Focused Enabling			
	Crisis/ Emergency Assistance & Prevention			
	Support for transitions			
	Home Involvement in Schooling			
	Community Outreach/ Volunteers			
	Student and Family Assistance			
		Accommodations for differences & disabilities	Specialized assistance & other intensified interventions (e.g., Special Education & School-Based Behavioral Health)	

*Note that specific school-wide and classroom-based activities related to positive behavior support, "prereferral" interventions, and the eight components of Center for Prevention and Disease Control's Coordinated School Health Program are embedded into the six content ("curriculum") arenas.

Concluding Comments

As the Carnegie Task Force on Education has stressed:

*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.*

In this time of change and as the reauthorization process for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) resumes, it is essential that policy makers move to a *three-component framework* for turning around, transforming, and continuously improving schools. The third component will provide a unifying concept and an umbrella under which districts and schools can weave together all interventions specifically intended to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

Only by unifying student and learning supports will it be feasible to develop a *comprehensive system* to directly address many of the complex factors interfering with schools accomplishing their mission. And only by developing such a system will it be feasible to facilitate the *emergence* of a school environment that fosters successful, safe, and healthy students and staff. (It is important to remember that *school climate is an emergent quality* that stems from how schools provide and coalesce on a daily basis the components dedicated to instruction, learning supports, and management/governance.)

Across the country, pioneering work to enhance student and learning supports heralds movement toward a comprehensive system for addressing factors interfering with learning and teaching. Thus, whether or not the impending reauthorization of the ESEA incorporates a three-component blueprint, we anticipate more and more movement in this direction at state, regional, district, and school levels. The call for ensuring equity and opportunity for all students demands no less.

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Appendices

A. Rationales and Recommended Practices Offered for the Federal Turnaround Models

B. Details About the Federal Turnaround Models

C. Examples of “Content” Arenas for a Component to Address Barriers to Learning

Appendix A

Rationales and Recommended Practices Offered for the Federal Turnaround Models

Examples of Rationales

(1) The following statement of rationale for school turnaround models begins the 2010 report *Achieving dramatic school improvement: An exploratory study* issued by the Department of Education:*

“...The pressure to meet *NCLB's* 2014 deadline has motivated many policymakers to question this widely held consensus that it takes at least three to five years to improve failing schools enough to produce substantial gains in student achievement. Some policy analysts have asked what can be learned from the private sector about quick and dramatic organizational improvement. Recent literature draws lessons from failing businesses and corporations that have turned around. This literature suggests that schools can accelerate reform efforts and see the same sort of quick, dramatic improvement if they engage in a process—characterized by strong leadership, a clear focus on improving instruction, achievement of “quick wins,” and building of a committed staff—similar to that used by successful corporations. The business-model literature suggests that much more rapid-improvement is possible in less time than the usual three to five years.

With respect to the findings from this exploratory study, it is well to note that the report offers the following cautions:

“The findings of this study must be interpreted with caution. First, we studied only 11 schools. Furthermore, the sample of schools did not include any comparison sites (despite attempts to include such schools in the study), making it impossible to determine whether the factors we observed as being associated with rapid and dramatic school improvement were not also present in schools that did not experience appreciable achievement gains. Nor did the study include any examples in which fundamental school structural arrangements were altered such as might occur through state takeover or reconstitution or charter school conversion. Shifts in the composition of student populations in many study schools also made it difficult to distinguish whether achievement changes were attributable to school-specific efforts or to the demographic changes. In addition, each of the study schools engaged in unique, complex, and multifaceted improvement efforts, making it both difficult and ill-advised to relate changes in achievement to any single critical factor. For these reasons, we cannot discern the degree to which specific, individual school factors are systematically related to the academic improvement patterns observed at these schools. We also cannot generalize the conditions and factors we report for these particular sites to other schools—similar actions at other schools will not necessarily lead to similar results. All of the schools we visited, however, achieved some degree of success in improving student achievement, and the factors we report appeared to have contributed to that success.”

What did the researchers find?

“... we want to emphasize that this study examines quick-and-dramatic as well as slow-and-steady school improvement retrospectively, seeking to understand the policies, programs, and practices that contributed to ‘turning around’ these schools’ performance.

* Note: The exploratory study and report were done for the U.S. Department of Education under a contract with the American Institutes for Research and WestEd and contain the usual disclaimer that the content “does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education.”

This stands in contrast to current federal policy objectives that aim to prospectively identify the lowest-performing schools in each state as targets for concerted turnaround interventions. The findings of this study strongly support this proactive approach and can inform the development of high quality school turnaround designs and programs in these sites.”

Not surprisingly, they found that both “*rapid-improvement and slow-and-steady schools that were studied consistently addressed factors long identified in school reform research as contributors to improved student outcomes.* The schools reported adopting and implementing new leadership styles, practices to improve school climate, new instructional strategies and practices, and strategies to secure external support.” They also found that both sets of schools had “*much in common, but there were differences as well.* For example, in most of the rapid-improvement schools with sustained achievement gains, improvements in student achievement were credited to new principals who were viewed as change leaders and who continued to lead the school through the study period. In contrast, two of the three schools with slow-and-steady increases in student achievement had multiple principals during the study’s five-years.”

They conclude: “This study’s findings draw attention to the fact that turning schools around is not just about adopting a set of effective or promising practices. It is about recognizing that “one best system” does not exist—that no single approach can guarantee improvement in a particular school. It is also about implementing practices well, while at the same time navigating and adapting to a constantly changing landscape.”

(2) The rationale stated in *Turning around chronically low performing schools: A practice guide* (2008) simply notes the unsatisfactory status quo and asserts:

“All failing schools, especially those that persistently fail, need guidance on what will work quickly to improve student outcomes. These schools generally have explored a variety of strategies to improve student achievement, but without rapid, clear success. They now need to look beyond slow, incremental change and examine practices that will raise and sustain student achievement within one to three years. The need to quickly improve student achievement is most pressing for low performing schools that serve disadvantaged students. ... School improvement and school turnaround both aim to improve student outcomes by changing how schools and classroom operate. They differ in that school turnaround involves quick, dramatic improvement within three years...”

As to the evidence-base for the recommended practices, they state it “ranges from expert analyses of turnaround practices to case studies of seemingly effective schools and to correlational studies and longitudinal studies of patterns of school improvement.”

Here are the recommendations:

1. *Signal the need for dramatic change with strong leadership.* Schools should make a clear commitment to dramatic changes from the status quo, and the leader should signal the magnitude and urgency of that change. A low-performing school that fails to make adequate yearly progress must improve student achievement within a short timeframe—it does not have the luxury of years to implement incremental reforms.

2. *Maintain a consistent focus on improving instruction.* Chronically low performing schools need to maintain a sharp focus on improving instruction at every step of the reform process. To improve instruction, schools should use data to set goals for instructional improvement, make changes to immediately and directly affect instruction, and continually reassess student learning and instructional practices to refocus the goals.

3. *Make visible improvements early in the school turnaround process (quick wins).* These can rally staff around the effort and overcome resistance and inertia.

4. *Build a committed staff.* The school leader must build a staff that is committed to the school's improvement goals and qualified to carry out school improvement. This goal may require changes in staff, such as releasing, replacing, or redeploying staff who are not fully committed to turning around student performance and bringing in new staff who are committed.

Recommendations for Practice

School turnarounds: A review of the cross-sector evidence on dramatic organizational improvement (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2007) includes a broad set of practices for “quick, dramatic, and sustained change in the performance of an organization.” Recognizing the sparse research base on successful turnarounds in the education sector, they synthesized literature from several arenas, especially the business sector. Given this, it is not surprising that they begin by emphasizing:

“While not necessarily a defining characteristic, turnarounds in other sectors typically entail replacement of the primary leader, but not all staff. Approximately 70% of successful turnarounds in the business sector include changes in top management (Hoffman, 1989). Turnaround literature differs from the vast body of literature about organizational change in general, which focuses on continuous, incremental improvement over longer time periods. Incremental change is important and arguably the correct strategy for good organizations interested in becoming great ones. According to the literature, however, efforts to turn around organizations that are failing on multiple metrics require more dramatic change to become successful, change that looks different from incremental improvement over time.”

Here are the factors they emphasize from their literature review:

- (1) Environmental factors that the cross-sector literature suggests influence the prospects for successful turnaround, include
 - < Timetable (i.e. planning, implementing, and sustaining a turnaround)
 - < Freedom to Act (i.e., sufficient latitude to implement substantial changes, freedom from regulations related to scheduling, transportation, discipline and curriculum).
 - < Support and aligned systems (i.e., support from higher levels of the organization to create the conditions for change)
 - < Performance monitoring
 - < Community engagement (i.e. creating a sense of ownership in the local community)

- (2) Turnaround Leadership – Leader actions
 - < Concentrate on achieving a few tangible wins in year one (e.g., improve physical plant by cleaning and painting, ensure students have required materials, reduce discipline by altering class transition schedules, reduce truancy by locking superfluous entrances)
 - < Implementing practices even when they deviate from norms to achieve goals (e.g., adjust teachers schedules to align with late buses to create opportunity for one on one instruction, carve out additional time for instruction beyond the school day; assign assistant principals and instructional assistants to work in classrooms)
 - < Analysis and problem solving (collect and personally analyze organization performance data)

- < Driving for results (implementing strategies even when they deviate from established organizational practices; requiring all staff to change, rather than making it optional; making necessary but limited staff replacements; funneling more time and money into successful tactics while halting unsuccessful tactics; relentless pursuit of goals, rather than touting progress as ultimate success)
- < Influencing inside and outside (win the support of both staff and external stakeholders for the changes the organization needs – e.g., communicating a positive vision for the future; helping staff personally see and feel the problems their "customers" face; getting key influencers to support change)
- < Measuring and reporting data frequently and publically (gathering staff in frequent open air meetings, requiring all involved in decision making to disclose results and problem solve)

Governors' Association Policy Recommendations

The federal government's approach is reflected in efforts to provide governors with guidelines for state policies. In *Reaching New Heights: Turning Around Low Performing Schools* staff at the National Governors' Association offer the following principles as a guide for developing "succinct policy options for turning around schools" and highlight "best practices from states, districts, and schools." The work represents a synthesis based on review of recent state efforts to assist low-performing schools and the literature on school improvement.

- (1) Not all low-performing schools are the same
Action: Governors should encourage state education leaders to conduct detailed assessment of the instructional programs of all schools "in need of improvement." The state should then use this analysis to prioritize and tailor its technical assistance resources and effectively communicate its expectations for low performing schools.
- (2) Capacity building must be part of the solution
Action: Governors should work with state education leaders to build capacity in their state's low performing schools, focusing on the weakest schools. States can draw on the experience of states that have successfully implemented capacity building strategies while asserting greater quality control in selecting and monitoring assistance providers
- (3) Districts are essential collaborators in efforts to turn around schools
Action: States should partner with districts to build the capacity of low performing schools and encourage districts to develop systems of instructional support to serve these and other schools.
- (4) Be prepared for the long haul
Action: States should provide technical assistance and support to low performing schools for several years and continue to offer support to schools no longer designed as "in need of improvement." State should ensure their accountability system has the flexibility to identify when and how schools are improving and provide support to those schools accordingly.
- (5) Assistance to low performing schools should be part of a larger strategy of school improvement
Action: Governors should work to build capacity in schools by developing a comprehensive state policy strategy that aims to enhance the quality of teachers and principals, expand school choice options, and develop the state's capacity to promote school improvement.

Private Sector Support Influencing the Federal Approach

A variety of think tanks and foundations have indicated their support for the type of school turnaround models the federal government is calling for. In 2005, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awarded the Mass Insight Education & Research Institute a grant “to produce a framework for states and districts seeking a flexible, systemic approach for swift, significant improvement in schools that have clearly failed their mission, producing track records of under-achievement that are indefensibly poor.” The 2007 document *The Turnaround Challenge* and related resources were products of that grant. Subsequently, the Gates Foundation “supported a Mass Insight-led effort to inform national and state leaders around the issue of school turnaround, and to carry out a research and development process to create tools and reports that would help school, district, and state leaders implement the report’s turnaround framework.” The resulting resources from this *Meeting the Turnaround Challenge* initiative are currently being used to design and implement policies in a variety of states.

With a 2-year, 1.5 million dollar grant, from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Mass Insight Education & Research Institute is now in the process of launching an intensive initiative to transform the *The Turnaround Challenge* framework into practice in a “selective group of states, and districts within those states, that have the capacity, leadership consensus, and readiness to reinvent the district model by transforming clusters of turnaround schools through the creation of Partnership Zones.” They also are continuing to create “practice-based tools and reports on school turnaround, advocate at the national and state level for optimal policies and conditions, and support a broader network of states and districts through proprietary consulting work.”

In Mass Insight’s document *The Turnaround Challenge: Why America’s Best Opportunity to Dramatically Improve Student Achievement Lies in Our Worst Performing Schools*, school turnaround is defined as “a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low performing school that produces significant gains in student achievement within two academic years.” Successful school turnaround is presented as requiring:

- *Recognition of the challenge.* Turnaround is a different and far more difficult undertaking than school improvement. It should be viewed within education, as it is in other sectors, as a distinct professional discipline that requires specialized experience, training, and support.
- *Dramatic, fundamental change.* Turnaround requires transformation. Schools that effectively serve high-poverty, highly-diverse student enrollments similar to those that typically attend our lowest-performing schools tend to operate very differently from traditional models.
- *Urgency.* Turnaround should produce significant achievement gains within two years, while readying the school for subsequent maturation into a high-performance organization.
- *Supportive operating conditions.* Turnaround leaders must be empowered to make decisions regarding staff, schedule, budget, and program based on mission, strategy, and data.
- *New-model, high-capacity partners.* Turnaround demands skillful change management at the ground level. States, districts, and foundations must develop a new resource base of external, lead turnaround partners to integrate multiple services in support of clusters of turnaround schools.
- *New state and district structures.* Turnaround requires innovation from policymakers at all levels. States and districts should create special turnaround offices that – like turnaround schools themselves – have the flexible set of operating rules and the resources necessary to carry out their mission.

See the Exhibit on the next page for the ways in which they see successful high-performing, high-poverty schools as differing from those that fail.

Exhibit

High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

The Mass Insight Education & Research Institute has focused attention on high-performing, high-poverty (HHP) schools. Below are excerpts from their extensive discussion of such schools.

“A small but growing number of high-performing, high-poverty (HHP) schools are demonstrating that different approaches can bring highly challenged student populations to high achievement.

How do they do it? Extensive analysis of HHP school practice and effective schools research revealed nine strategies that turn the daily turbulence and challenges of high-poverty settings into design factors that increase the effectiveness with which these schools promote learning and achievement. These strategies enable the schools to acknowledge and foster students’ Readiness to Learn, enhance and focus staff’s Readiness to Teach, and expand teachers’ and administrators’ Readiness to Act in dramatically different ways than more traditional schools....

Readiness to Learn

1. Safety, discipline & engagement (students feel secure and inspired to learn)
2. Action against adversity (Schools directly address their students’ poverty-driven deficits)
3. Close student-adult relationships (students have positive and enduring mentor/teacher relationships.)

Readiness to Teach

4. Shared responsibility for achievement (Staff feel deep accountability and a missionary zeal for student achievement)
5. Personalization of Instruction (Individualized teaching based on diagnostic assessment and adjustable time on task)
6. Professional Teaching Culture (Continuous improvement through collaboration and job-embedded learning)

Readiness to Act

1. Resource Authority (School leaders can make mission driven decisions regarding people, time, money and program)
2. Resource Ingenuity (Leaders are adept at securing additional resources and leveraging partner relationships)
3. Agility in the face of turbulence (Leaders, teacher and systems are flexible and inventive in responding to constant unrest).”

Appendix B

Details About the Federal Turnaround Models

From the *Race to the Top* application – http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/_Toc245553795

SCHOOL INTERVENTION MODELS (Appendix C in the Notice of Final Priorities, Requirements, Definitions, and Selection Criteria; and in the Notice Inviting Applications)

There are four school intervention models referred to in Selection Criterion (E)(2): turnaround model, restart model, school closure, or transformation model. Each is described below.

(a) Turnaround model.

(1) A turnaround model is one in which an LEA must—

- (i) Replace the principal and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach in order to substantially improve student achievement outcomes and increase high school graduation rates;
- (ii) Use locally adopted competencies to measure the effectiveness of staff who can work within the turnaround environment to meet the needs of students,
 - (A) Screen all existing staff and rehire no more than 50 percent; and
 - (B) Select new staff;
- (iii) Implement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions that are designed to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in the turnaround school;
- (iv) Provide staff with ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development that is aligned with the school’s comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff to ensure that they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies;
- (v) Adopt a new governance structure, which may include, but is not limited to, requiring the school to report to a new “turnaround office” in the LEA or SEA, hire a “turnaround leader” who reports directly to the Superintendent or Chief Academic Officer, or enter into a multi-year contract with the LEA or SEA to obtain added flexibility in exchange for greater accountability;
- (vi) Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and “vertically aligned” from one grade to the next as well as aligned with State academic standards;
 - (vii) Promote the continuous use of student data (such as from formative, interim, and summative assessments) to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the academic needs of individual students;
 - (viii) Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time (as defined in this notice); and
 - (ix) Provide appropriate social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports for students.

(2) A turnaround model may also implement other strategies such as—

- (i) Any of the required and permissible activities under the transformation model; or
- (ii) A new school model (*e.g.*, themed, dual language academy).

(b) Restart model.

A restart model is one in which an LEA converts a school or closes and reopens a school under a charter school operator, a charter management organization (CMO), or an education management organization (EMO) that has been selected through a rigorous review process. (A CMO is a non-profit organization that operates or manages charter schools by centralizing or sharing certain functions and resources among schools. An EMO is a for-profit or non-profit organization that provides “whole-school operation” services to an LEA.) A restart model must enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend the school.

(c) School closure.

School closure occurs when an LEA closes a school and enrolls the students who attended that school in other schools in the LEA that are higher achieving. These other schools should be within reasonable proximity to the closed school and may include, but are not limited to, charter schools or new schools for which achievement data are not yet available.

(d) Transformation model.

A transformation model is one in which an LEA implements each of the following strategies:

(1) Developing and increasing teacher and school leader effectiveness.

(i) Required activities. The LEA must–

- (A) Replace the principal who led the school prior to commencement of the transformation model;
- (B) Use rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation systems for teachers and principals that–
 - (1) Take into account data on student growth (as defined in this notice) as a significant factor as well as other factors such as multiple observation-based assessments of performance and ongoing collections of professional practice reflective of student achievement and increased high-school graduations rates; and
 - (2) Are designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement;
- (C) Identify and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who, in implementing this model, have increased student achievement and high-school graduation rates and identify and remove those who, after ample opportunities have been provided for them to improve their professional practice, have not done so;
- (D) Provide staff with ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development (*e.g.*, regarding subject-specific pedagogy, instruction that reflects a deeper understanding of the community served by the school, or differentiated instruction) that is aligned with the school’s comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff to ensure they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies; and
- (E) Implement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions that are designed

to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in a transformation school.

- (ii) Permissible activities. An LEA may also implement other strategies to develop teachers' and school leaders' effectiveness, such as–
 - (A) Providing additional compensation to attract and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in a transformation school;
 - (B) Instituting a system for measuring changes in instructional practices resulting from professional development; or
 - (C) Ensuring that the school is not required to accept a teacher without the mutual consent of the teacher and principal, regardless of the teacher's seniority.

(2) Comprehensive instructional reform strategies.

- (i) Required activities. The LEA must–
 - (A) Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and “vertically aligned” from one grade to the next as well as aligned with State academic standards; and
 - (B) Promote the continuous use of student data (such as from formative, interim, and summative assessments) to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the academic needs of individual students.
- (ii) Permissible activities. An LEA may also implement comprehensive instructional reform strategies, such as–
 - (A) Conducting periodic reviews to ensure that the curriculum is being implemented with fidelity, is having the intended impact on student achievement, and is modified if ineffective;
 - (B) Implementing a schoolwide “response-to-intervention” model;
 - (C) Providing additional supports and professional development to teachers and principals in order to implement effective strategies to support students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and to ensure that limited English proficient students acquire language skills to master academic content;
 - (D) Using and integrating technology-based supports and interventions as part of the instructional program; and
 - (E) In secondary schools–
 - (1) Increasing rigor by offering opportunities for students to enroll in advanced coursework (such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate; or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics courses, especially those that incorporate rigorous and relevant project-, inquiry-, or design-based contextual learning opportunities), early-college high schools, dual enrollment programs, or thematic learning academies that prepare students for college and careers, including by providing appropriate supports designed to ensure that low-achieving students can take advantage of these programs and coursework;
 - (2) Improving student transition from middle to high school through summer transition programs or freshman academies;
 - (3) Increasing graduation rates through, for example, credit-recovery programs, re-engagement strategies, smaller learning communities, competency-based

instruction and performance-based assessments, and acceleration of basic reading and mathematics skills; or

(4) Establishing early-warning systems to identify students who may be at risk of failing to achieve to high standards or graduate.

(3) Increasing learning time and creating community-oriented schools.

(i) Required activities. The LEA must–

(A) Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time (as defined in this notice); and

(B) Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement.

(ii) Permissible activities. An LEA may also implement other strategies that extend learning time and create community-oriented schools, such as–

(A) Partnering with parents and parent organizations, faith- and community-based organizations, health clinics, other State or local agencies, and others to create safe school environments that meet students’ social, emotional, and health needs;

(B) Extending or restructuring the school day so as to add time for such strategies as advisory periods that build relationships between students, faculty, and other school staff;

(C) Implementing approaches to improve school climate and discipline, such as implementing a system of positive behavioral supports or taking steps to eliminate bullying and student harassment; or

(D) Expanding the school program to offer full-day kindergarten or pre-kindergarten.

(4) Providing operational flexibility and sustained support.

(i) Required activities. The LEA must–

(A) Give the school sufficient operational flexibility (such as staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student achievement outcomes and increase high school graduation rates; and

(B) Ensure that the school receives ongoing, intensive technical assistance and related support from the LEA, the SEA, or a designated external lead partner organization (such as a school turnaround organization or an EMO).

(ii) Permissible activities. The LEA may also implement other strategies for providing operational flexibility and intensive support, such as–

(A) Allowing the school to be run under a new governance arrangement, such as a turnaround division within the LEA or SEA; or

(B) Implementing a per-pupil school-based budget formula that is weighted based on student needs.

If a school identified as a persistently lowest-achieving school has implemented, in whole or in part within the last two years, an intervention that meets the requirements of the turnaround, restart, or transformation models, the school may continue or complete the intervention being implemented.

Examples of “Content” Arenas for a Component to Address Barriers to Learning*

(1) Classroom-Based Approaches

- Opening the classroom door to bring available supports in (e.g., peer tutors, volunteers, aids trained to work with students-in-need; resource teachers and student support staff work in the classroom as part of the teaching team)
- Redesigning classroom approaches to enhance teacher capability to prevent and handle problems and reduce need for out of class referrals (e.g. personalized instruction; special assistance as necessary; developing small group and independent learning options; reducing negative interactions and over-reliance on social control; expanding the range of curricular and instructional options and choices; systematic use of prereferral interventions)
- Enhancing and personalizing professional development (e.g., creating a Learning Community for teachers; ensuring opportunities to learn through co-teaching, team teaching, and mentoring; teaching intrinsic motivation concepts and their application to schooling)
- Curricular enrichment and adjunct programs (e.g., varied enrichment activities that are not tied to reinforcement schedules; visiting scholars from the community)
- Classroom and school-wide approaches used to create and maintain a caring and supportive climate

(2) Support for Transitions

- Welcoming & social support programs for newcomers (e.g., welcoming signs, materials, and initial receptions; peer buddy programs for students, families, staff, volunteers)
- Daily transition programs for (e.g., before school, breaks, lunch, afterschool)
- Articulation programs (e.g., grade to grade – new classrooms, new teachers; elementary to middle school; middle to high school; in and out of special education programs)
- Summer or intersession programs (e.g., catch-up, recreation, and enrichment programs)
- School-to-career/higher education (e.g., counseling, pathway, and mentor programs; Broad involvement of stakeholders in planning for transitions; students, staff, home, police, faith groups, recreation, business, higher education)
- Broad involvement of stakeholders in planning for transitions (e.g., students, staff, home, police, faith groups, recreation, business, higher education)
- Capacity building to enhance transition programs and activities

(3) Home Involvement and Engagement in Schooling

- Addressing specific support and learning needs of family (e.g., support services for those in the home to assist in addressing basic survival needs and obligations to the children; adult education classes to enhance literacy, job skills, English-as-a-second language, citizenship preparation)
- Improving mechanisms for communication and connecting school and home (e.g., opportunities at school for family networking and mutual support, learning, recreation, enrichment, and for family members to receive special assistance and to volunteer to help; phone calls and/or e-mail from teacher and other staff with good news; frequent and balanced conferences – student-led when feasible; outreach to attract hard-to-reach families – including student dropouts)
- Involving homes in student decision making (e.g., families prepared for involvement in program planning and problem-solving)
- Enhancing home support for learning and development (e.g., family literacy; family homework projects; family field trips)
- Recruiting families to strengthen school and community (e.g., volunteers to welcome and support new families and help in various capacities; families prepared for involvement in school governance)
- Capacity building to enhance home involvement

(cont.)

(4) Community Outreach for Involvement and Collaborative Support

- Planning and Implementing Outreach to Recruit a Wide Range of Community Resources (e.g., public and private agencies; colleges and universities; local residents; artists and cultural institutions, businesses and professional organizations; service, volunteer, and faith-based organizations; community policy and decision makers)
- Systems to Recruit, Screen, Prepare, and Maintain Community Resource Involvement (e.g., mechanisms to orient and welcome, enhance the volunteer pool, maintain current involvements, enhance a sense of community)
- Reaching out to Students and Families Who Don't Come to School Regularly – Including Truants and Dropouts
- Connecting School and Community Efforts to Promote Child and Youth Development and a Sense of Community
- Capacity Building to Enhance Community Involvement and Support (e.g., policies and mechanisms to enhance and sustain school-community involvement, staff/stakeholder development on the value of community involvement, “social marketing”)

(5) Crisis Assistance and Prevention

- Ensuring immediate assistance in emergencies so students can resume learning
- Providing Follow up care as necessary (e.g., brief and longer-term monitoring)
- Forming a school-focused Crisis Team to formulate a response plan and take leadership for developing prevention programs
- Mobilizing staff, students, and families to anticipate response plans and recovery efforts
- Creating a caring and safe learning environment (e.g., developing systems to promote healthy development and prevent problems; bullying and harassment abatement programs)
- Working with neighborhood schools and community to integrate planning for response and prevention
- Capacity building to enhance crisis response and prevention (e.g., staff and stakeholder development, enhancing a caring and safe learning environment)

(6) Student and Family Assistance

- Providing extra support as soon as a need is recognized and doing so in the least disruptive ways (e.g., prereferral interventions in classrooms; problem solving conferences with parents; open access to school, district, and community support programs)
- Timely referral interventions for students & families with problems based on response to extra support (e.g., identification/screening processes, assessment, referrals, and follow-up – school-based, school-linked)
- Enhancing access to direct interventions for health, mental health, and economic assistance (e.g., school-based, school-linked, and community-based programs and services)
- Care monitoring, management, information sharing, and follow-up assessment to coordinate individual interventions and check whether referrals and services are adequate and effective
- Mechanisms for *resource* coordination and integration to avoid duplication, fill gaps, garner economies of scale, and enhance effectiveness (e.g., braiding resources from school-based and linked interveners, feeder pattern/family of schools, community-based programs; linking with community providers to fill gaps)
- Enhancing stakeholder awareness of programs and services
- Capacity building to enhance student and family assistance systems, programs, and services

*In each arena, there is broad involvement of stakeholders in planning the system and building capacity. Emphasis at all times in the classroom and schoolwide is on enhancing feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to others at school and reducing threats to such feelings because this is essential to engagement and reengagement and creating and maintaining a caring supportive climate.