

Board Adopts Policy for Universal Learning Supports as Part of a Comprehensive Set of Policies Related to the Whole Child

While many places around the country are exploring how to rethink learning supports, few have gotten to the point of establishing new school board policy designed to promote the development of comprehensive systems of learning support at every school. One place that has moved that far is the Berkeley Unified School District in California.

Board member Shirley Issel reports that the board has adopted a: “new policy on Universal Learning Supports (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/bsb-SULSS.pdf>) that is part of a more comprehensive group of policies related to the whole child. We passed this group of policies at the last meeting before the retirement of [the previous Superintendent]. I also attach a copy of our ULSS guidelines.... The Guidelines (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/busd-ULSS_guidelines.pdf) show that we have been very busy implementing the vision outlined in the attached policy. (ULSS, or Universal Learning Supports is the name we give to the work we are doing to provide a comprehensive system of learning supports in Berkeley Unified.)

Our approach is unique in that we have developed a group of policies that combine [the UCLA Center’s] model of a comprehensive student learning supports system with the 8 component public health coordinated school health model.* I have sent only some of the policies that comprise the group. Mainly I wanted to share the ULSS policy. When we get the group compiled into one document, I will forward.

I think it is worth noting that in our case, policy development at the School Board level came after the development of a strategic plan and well after the implementation of the plan had begun. The need to introduce policy became evident during the implementation phase as we saw that there was a lack of understanding about what we were trying to accomplish. Different schools and groups within the schools were heading off in different directions and it was my belief that the development of Board policy would be helpful to move us toward a common understanding. I was especially interested in deepening the understanding of the policy makers—School Board, Superintendent and key administrators and this policy work did help to do that. ... the School Board now has a deep appreciation and commitment to the whole child and all children—what [the UCLA Center] calls the ‘many and the few’.

For quite a while I did not see how the development of policy fit into this work. But I see now that without policy, there can be no clarity about the broad vision and goal nor can the work possibly survive various transitions: the coming of a new Superintendent, the election of new Board members, the addition of new staff, etc. I also believe that the existence of policy documents will help a new Superintendent get up to speed. ...”

*Note from the UCLA Center: The Center’s intervention framework for a Comprehensive Learning Support System is described in various online documents (e.g., see Chapters 8 and 9 of the online book entitled: *Mental Health in School & School Improvement: Current Status, Concerns, and New Directions* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/mhbook/mhbooktoc.htm>). As formulated, the intent is to integrate all categorical programs into the framework. This includes the 8 component public health coordinated school health model formulated by CDC, as well as such initiatives as positive behavioral supports, programs for safe and drug free schools, programs for social and emotional development and learning, full service community schools and family resource and school based health centers, Safe Schools/Healthy Students projects, CDC’s Coordinated School Health Program, bi-lingual, cultural, and other diversity programs, compensatory education programs, special education programs, mandates stemming from the No Child Left Behind Act, and many more.