

2015 NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR TRANSFORMING STUDENT & LEARNING SUPPORTS
(11/1/15)

Here's some of the activity we are hearing about from across the country:

Alabama Department of Education (October 2, 2015 press release)

<https://www.alsde.edu/sec/comm/News%20Releases/10-2-15%20Principals%20Path%20to%20Leadership%20Grant%20Press%20Release.pdf>

“As part of the ALSDE’s commitment to an integrated learning supports framework state rollout, 50 districts and approximately 300 principals are currently involved in the initiative,” said Dr. Linda Felton-Smith, director of the Office of Learning Supports. The ALSDE’s Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports addresses risk-producing conditions that can be barriers to student learning and achievement.”

“American Express and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) announced today that the ALSDE is one of five recipients of the Principals Path to Leadership grant ... [and] will receive \$750,000 over a three year period....”

“This funding will expand the work being done by adding in-depth leadership development, coaching and training for 72 principals and their leadership teams as they participate in implementing the department’s integrated leaning supports initiative,” Felton-Smith said.”

In Wisconsin, the School District of La Crosse’s Superintendent, Randy Nelson

reported the following on the district’s website:

(<http://www.lacrossepartnersinlearning.com/rebuilding-for-learning-summit-continues-to-grow/>)

“On August 12, 2015, the School District of La Crosse, in partnership with La Crosse County and the City of La Crosse held its fifth annual Rebuilding for Learning Summit.... This year’s summit grew in size again with more than 230 participants. It’s an opportunity for leaders of the School District ... to work side-by-side with the many community leaders and organizations who supplement the work of our educators by providing community supports for children and families. ... In 2016, the summit will be expanded to include all of our teaching staff as well, ... more than 800.”

In this context, he shared the following metaphor:

“Our overall goal is to provide more than just a ‘safety net’, a hackneyed phrase we use many times to describe the general work that we do in the community to support students and their families. I contend, however, that a ‘safety net’ is no long sufficient to meet the needs of our community’s children. When I think of a safety net, I visualize acrobatics of some sort.....or the circus and that daring young man on the flying trapeze....swinging from one bar to the next some thirty feet from the hard surface of the floor. Just above the floor, is a safety net which will cushion the fall. Knowing the safety net is there, the acrobat may take additional risks knowing that there is safety below.

In reality, the safety net does nothing more than break the fall to the floor. Through our rebuilding for learning efforts, we try to make the safety net more like a trampoline — something so tightly woven that when one falls on to it, they have the capacity to spring back up in to action at the top of the arena. The collaboration that we do together can tighten that fabric.....and it stands as the primary purpose for this collaborative summit.”

“The extent to which we are able to tighten our fabric and make our supports more like a trampoline will directly impact the overall academic performance of our students and close gaps at the same time. ... The work is long and sometimes arduous, but it’s the right work — with our community and its families at the forefront.”

(cont.)

Georgia's Gainesville City Schools has updated the case study of its transformative work on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging students. See <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/face/pdf/my-books/gacasestudy2013.pdf>

A consortium of 15 districts in Massachusetts indicates: “We have been using the Center frameworks to support a multi-district, multi-year project on the topic of mental and behavioral health supports in schools. We have particularly been interested in the survey/assessment tools that your project has created, because the bulk of our work has been studying ways to assess the implementation of the systems of support in schools - and your work is rich and deep in looking at the whole system and how the parts and whole need to work together, along with tending to equity issues and belief systems - in order for an integrated system to function and last. ...

We have invited ourselves to participate and contribute to a statewide Commission ... and we hope to influence the state to tackle inclusive student support more systematically. In the meantime, because we know state wide changes take time, our 15 districts are interested in learning more about what WE can do (even as the state figures itself out) to better improve our systems to be more inclusive and more effective for all of our learners - with a particular investment in students who most typically fall through the cracks due to lack of capacity for districts to meet their social, emotional and behavioral needs.”

In Arizona, a colleague who directs facilities for families experiencing domestic abuse is expanding it's focus on support for the children who come to the facilities. She reports “we are using the Center's frameworks with modifications for application in domestic violence facilities.” “We are making great progress on our vision and strategy. We completed the children's position paper and integrated the Center's input and recommendations. It is a foundational paper that allows us to develop our children focused programming. ... Thank you again for your support and guidance on our work with children.”

For more information on all this, we refer folks to the webpages for the initiative <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html> .

***LET US KNOW WHAT YOU SEE HAPPENING TO TRANSFORM
STUDENT AND LEARNING SUPPORTS***

And if anyone is thinking about increasing the capacity of a district or school with respect to developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student supports, *we can help*. Send all info to ltaylor@ucla.edu .

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We are scanning websites and district power points to see what they have to say about implementing a comprehensive system of learning supports. Here are a few examples of what we found in Iowa:

> Cedar Rapids – <http://www.cr.k12.ia.us/departments-services/learning-supports/>

“The Cedar Rapids Community School District is committed to a vision of Excellence for All. In order to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports has been designed and implemented. ... It encompasses systems to promote healthy development, is preventative in nature, provides assistance in a timely fashion, and addresses the broad range of learning, behavioral, physical and emotional needs found in schools.

Barriers to learning encompass both internal and external factors that may get in the way of the student being able to reach maximum potential. These difficulties can increase as students internalize the frustrations of confronting these barriers and the negative effects of performing poorly at school. It is vital that these barriers to learning be identified and supports put in place to help every student have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.”

>Iowa City School District – See the learning supports power point at http://www.iowacityschools.org/pages/ICCS/Departments/Health_Services/Youth_and_Family_Development

>Grant Wood AEA -- See overview of learning supports – <https://www.gwaea.org/curr/lrngsupports/learningsupportsoverview13-14.pdf>

Here’s a couple examples of messages we are receiving:

>From a District Director of Student Supports: “I cite the Center’s work repeatedly as I advocate for a unified model for student and learning support services that embeds into our existing school settings as one division. This year we have taken the first step and created a division for school support services that houses our counseling services, career pathways, and assessment programs. It is a work in progress to shift mindsets to see how these 3 programs connect to reduce barriers and increase capacity for success with our re-engaged students. I forward the Center emails to the new division team members to engage us in a dialogue about what unification of our programs means to us and how we can work together to strengthen student support. It isn't perfect and is certainly far from done. Your information keeps me on track as I guide us through this period.”

>From a Title 1 Consultant: “We have had a significant change in our demographics over the past 5 years. Last year we developed a plan to transition one of our three eligible Title 1 schools from targeted assistance to school wide. This year we are engaged in the planning process in another district elementary school. Therefore, we could consider a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports in this plan. It is perfect timing. We are meeting this month and I will bring this forward at the meeting. Any suggestions you may have in terms of action steps would be appreciated. I use the information in your newsletter to provide Professional Development and information for teachers.”