

Whole Child Schooling and the 2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

*Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to enabling equity of opportunity.*

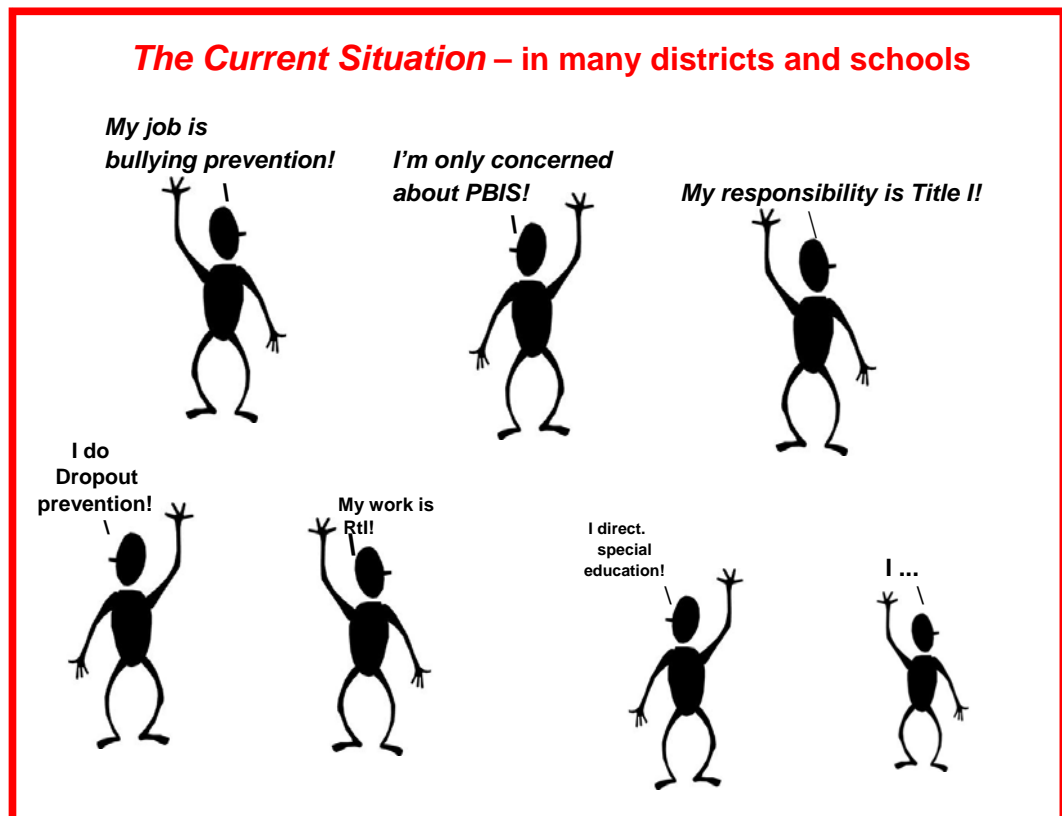
December, 2014: It is reported that the new chairman of the Senate Education Committee, Sen. Lamar Alexander (R TN), will soon introduce a bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act - with hearings as early as January. Among the topics explored will be school improvement strategies. And this will certainly include the topic of whole child learning and development. *Relatedly, discussion needs to focus on fundamentally transforming student and learning supports.* This is a key component in enabling equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond.

Schools, policy makers, and the general public regularly wrestle with matters such as bullying, school shootings, substance abuse, disconnected youth, and the many barriers arising from being raised in poverty, being a newly arrived immigrant, and being homeless. Yet, school improvement guides and various discussions of holistically-oriented schooling tend to address barriers to learning and teaching in superficial ways. The trend is to enhance “what is” rather than facing-up to the type of systemic transformation that is imperative.

The reality is that schools are confronted daily with multiple, interrelated problems that require multiple and interrelated solutions. The problems include a host of neighborhood, family, school, peer, and individual student factors.

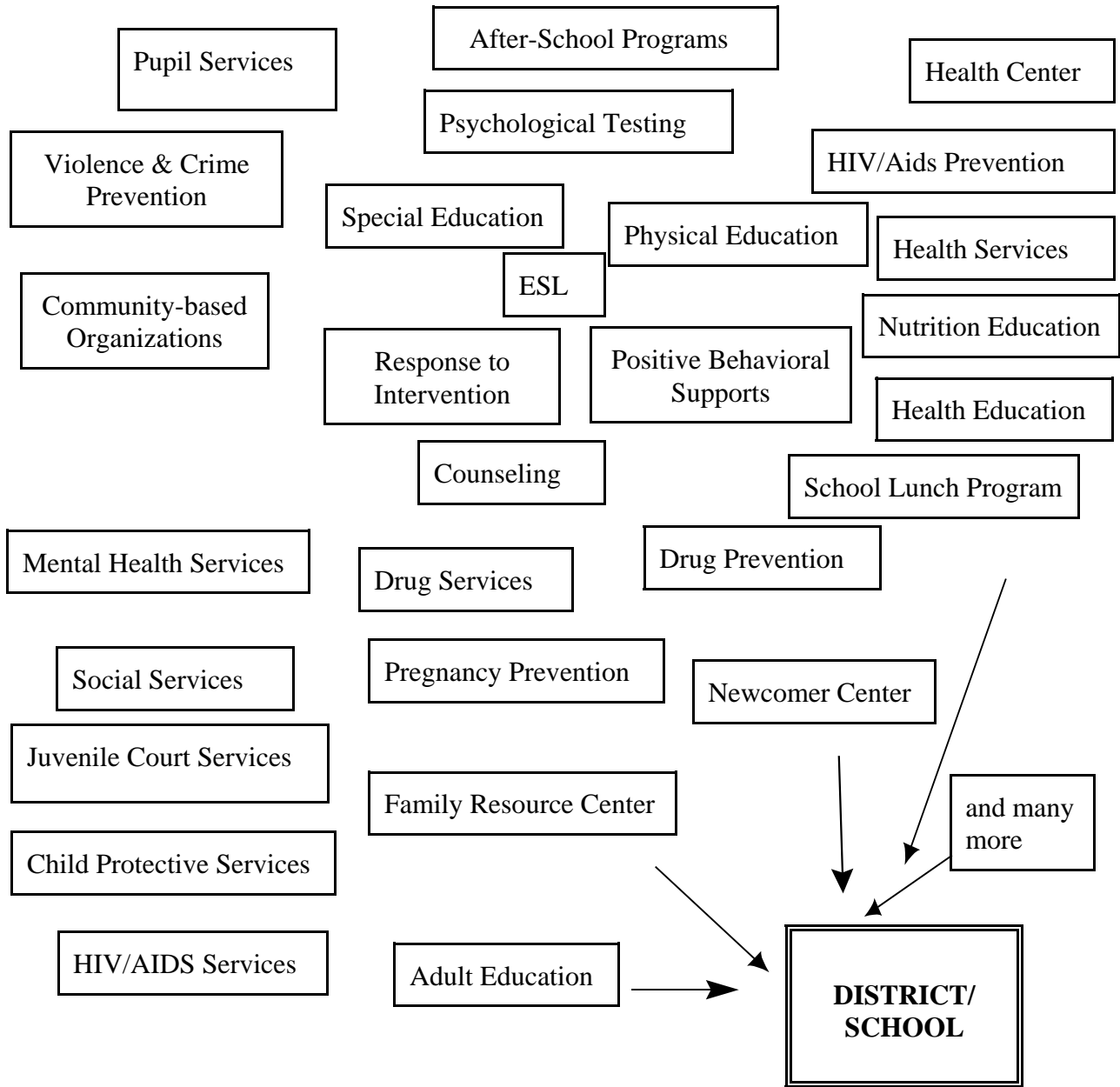
Interrelated solutions require various forms of collaboration and weaving together of resources. To accomplish this, schools must transform how they connect with homes and communities and work together in pursuing shared goals related to the general well-being of the young and society.

Current approaches to *student and learning supports* generally are not collaborative.



Mapping a district's existing efforts to address problems yields a consistent picture of many practices and fragmented, piecemeal, and usually disorganized and counterproductively competitive activity (as illustrated below). The range of such learning and student supports generally is extensive and expensive.

Exhibit A
Student and Learning Supports: Much Activity, Much Fragmentation!*



*Learning and student supports are the resources, strategies, and practices that aim at enabling all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school and beyond by directly addressing external and internal barriers to learning and teaching.

Schools differ, of course, in what learning and student supports are offered; some have few; some have many. Some have connected with community services (e.g., health and social services, after-school programs). Given the sparsity of community services, however, agencies endeavoring to bring their services to schools usually must limit activity to enhancing supports at a couple of schools in a neighborhood.

Moreover, there often is not a good connection between community services and the work of the many school and district-based student support staff whose roles include preventing, intervening early, and treating students with learning, behavior, emotional, and physical problems. Such school-employed personnel include psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses, dropout/graduation support staff, special educators, and others. When school and community efforts are poorly connected, community and school personnel may be working with the same students and families with little shared planning or ongoing communication. And there is almost no attention paid to systemic improvement.

Ironically, some policy makers have developed the false impression that community resources are ready and able to meet all the support needs of students and their families. In the struggle to balance tight school budgets, this impression already has contributed to serious cuts related to student supports (e.g., districts laying off student support personnel). Such cuts further reduce the amount of resources available for student and learning supports.

Why the Fragmentation?

Underlying the fragmentation is a fundamental policy problem, namely the long-standing *marginalization* of student and learning supports in school improvement policy and practice. Thus, most efforts to directly use student and learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students are not a primary focus in school improvement planning.

Because of the marginalization, the continuing trend is to establish student and learning supports through piecemeal policies and implement them in a fragmented and sometimes redundant manner. Then, when budgets tighten, many of these supports are among the first cut. All this contributes to a counterproductive job competition among student support staff and between these school personnel and those community professionals involved with bringing services to schools.

Given the marginalization, fragmentation, redundancy, and counterproductive competition related to student and learning supports, schools are not effectively playing their role in addressing barriers to learning and teaching. Systemic changes are imperative.

Years of research by our Center have increased the awareness of state education agencies and school districts about how to improve student outcomes by pursuing new directions for student and learning supports. Now that awareness is widespread, the Center will launch the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*. This is a direct action initiative aimed at moving schools forward in addressing the complex array of factors interfering with students not achieving good outcomes. The focus is on unifying the many discrete practices and developing a comprehensive learning supports component at the school, district, and state levels.

In launching the new initiative, the Center will take an innovative approach to publishing its new book entitled: *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*. The resource will be placed directly online when the initiative is launched in January. The intent is to provide immediate and free access through the initiative's webpages on the Center's website (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>). The book presents frameworks for

- (a) a school improvement policy shift,
- (b) a unified, comprehensive, and equitable learning supports component to replace the existing fragmented and disorganized set of student and learning supports,
- (c) designing and implementing such an approach, and
- (d) systemic change (emphasizing redeployment of existing resources and garnering economies of scale).

Much of what is presented is common sense. However, that, doesn't mean that most policy makers are discussing *transformation*. For example, Congressional discussions have mostly focused on tweaking policy related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching rather than making fundamental changes. Transforming schools is anything but easy; not transforming schools, however, is a recipe for maintaining the inequities found in too many districts.

In addition to the new book, the Center is revising and adding to its online, free resources (e.g., professional development activities, powerpoints, implementation resources, a System Change Toolkit). And the Center also will continue providing free online technical assistance and coaching to states, districts, and schools indicating a desire to move forward in developing a Learning Supports Component.*

*A learning supports component unifies and systematically weaves together all the resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school by directly addressing barriers to learning and teaching. In the classroom and school-wide, such supports encompass efforts to reduce the overemphasis on using extrinsic reinforcers and enhance an emphasis on *intrinsic motivation* to promote engagement and re-engagement.

Learning supports directly address interfering factors and do so in a way that (re-)engages students in classroom instruction. Attention to both these matters is essential because, in general, interventions that do not ensure a student's meaningful engagement in classroom learning are insufficient in sustaining student involvement, good behavior, and effective learning at school. A learning supports component is operationalized as a unified, comprehensive, equitable, and systemic approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. The interventions range from classroom through school-wide to community-school partnerships that are designed to strengthen support at every school and in every community

Equity of opportunity is one of democracy's most elusive goals. Public education has an indispensable role to play in achieving this goal, but schools are hampered by fundamental gaps in school improvement policy and practice. The need is to fill such gaps as discussed above. The time for stressing the critical need to transform student and learning supports is now!

Leading the way to equity requires high levels of dedication and perseverance. The Center's 2015 national initiative is intended both as an invitation and a call to action to all who want to enhance equity of opportunity for students to succeed at school and beyond.

And, remember that whatever Congress does, state and local policy makers can and need to move forward in ending such marginalization.

For more information, email Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu

Ultimately, only three things matter about educational reform. Does it have depth: does it improve important rather than superficial aspects of students' learning and development? Does it have length: can it be sustained over long periods of time instead of fizzling out after the first flush of innovation? Does it have breadth: can the reform be extended beyond a few schools, networks or showcase initiatives to transform education across entire systems or nations?
Andy Hargreaves & Dean Fink (2000)

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End the Marginalization! It's Time for Direct Action!

2015 is the time for everyone concerned about ending the marginalization of student and learning supports to pursue the following courses of action:

1. Work for collaboration among groups recommending changes in education policy so that there is a unified message about
 - >ending the marginalization of student and learning supports
 - >developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports.
2. Participate at decision making and planning tables focused on school improvement so you can clarify the need to expand from a two to a three-component policy framework.
3. Send the message to those shaping school improvement policy (e.g., principals, superintendents, mayors, governors, organizational, business and philanthropic leaders).
4. Communicate with Congress about the need to end the marginalization of student and learning supports and expand from a two to a three-component policy framework for school improvement as a major facet in reauthorizing the ESEA.
5. Focus the attention of governors, mayors, superintendents, principals, and other leaders on the need to help schools unify and develop a comprehensive system of student and learning supports.
6. Let us know who to send information to.

At a minimum, let us know your thoughts about direct action to elevate student and learning supports in policy as a nonmarginalized and unified system. That will help us in mobilizing others.

Send your ideas and any information about what you see happening to Ltaylor@ucla.edu or to adelman@psych.ucla.edu

Here's a few resources to share with colleagues:

- >*Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Trailblazing Initiatives!*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/summer14.pdf>
- >*Introducing the Idea of Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports to a New Superintendent or to One Who May Be Ready to Move Forward*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/introtosups.pdf>
- >*Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, & Equitable System of Learning Supports: First Steps for Superintendents Who Want to Get Started*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/superstart.pdf>
- >*Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School: Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf>

And when the 2015 initiative is launched in January, go to the new section for the initiative on our website and download and share the new book: *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*.