



*Improving Schools,  
Engaging Students*

## *Leadership Institute*

### **Mental Health in Schools: Becoming an Integrated Part of the School Improvement Agenda**

- I Why Mental Health *in Schools*?
- II What's the Current Status of Mental Health in Schools?
- III About Mental Health in Schools & School Improvement Policy and Practice
- IV Becoming an Integrated Part of School Improvement

The national Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspice of the School Mental Health Project in UCLA's Dept. of Psychology.

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## *Part III*

### About Mental Health in Schools & School Improvement Policy and Practice

- > Reframing Mental Health in Schools to Fit Major School Improvement Concerns
- > Three Lenses for Viewing Why Current School Improvement Efforts Are Too Limited
- > School Improvement Policy & Practice: What's Missing?



## **About Mental Health in Schools & School Improvement**

Making significant progress in advancing mental health in schools is dependent on fully appreciating the implications of two realities:

(1) *the mission of schools is education*

and thus the focus of school improvement policy and practice primarily is on educational outcomes

(2) *schools are not in the mental health business*

and thus matters related to mental health are marginalized in school improvement policy and practice.

At best, they are tangentially included in ways that mix them together in piecemeal and fragmented ways with other matters related to providing student support and promoting healthy development.

## Reframing Mental Health in Schools to Fit Major School Improvement Concerns

It is essential to make the case that school improvement policy and practice cannot afford to continue to marginalize efforts designed to support students and teachers.

This requires stressing that:

- Teachers shouldn't be expected to, never mind being held accountable for, *doing it alone!*
- The current focus of school improvement policy and practice is too limited to ensure that *all* students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.
- The limited focus contributes to:
  - >high student dropout rates
  - >high teacher dropout rates
  - >continuing achievement gap
  - >so many schools designated as low performing
  - >high stakes testing taking its toll on students
  - >the plateau effect related to achievement gains



## **Three Lenses for Viewing Why Current School Improvement Efforts Are Too Limited**



**While current policy says no child is to be left behind, viewing prevailing approaches to school improvement through the lens of the full range of learners underscores what's missing.**

***Lens #1 = The full range of learners***

**Not some –**

***ALL* youngsters  
are to have an equal  
opportunity to succeed at school**

# Range of Learners

(categorized in terms of their response to academic instruction)

**I = Motivationally ready and able\***

**II = Not very motivated/  
Lacking prerequisite knowledge & skills/  
Different learning rates and styles/  
Minor vulnerabilities\*\***

**III = Avoidant/  
Very deficient in current capabilities/  
Has a disability  
Major health problems**

\*Few youngsters start out with internal problems that interfere with learning what schools teach. There can be little doubt that external factors are primarily responsible for the majority of learning, behavior, and emotional problems encountered in schools.

\*\*All learners have *assets/strengths/protective factors* that can contribute to success; all have *differences* that require some degree of personalization by instructional systems; any may *internalize negative experiences* that interfere with learning at school.

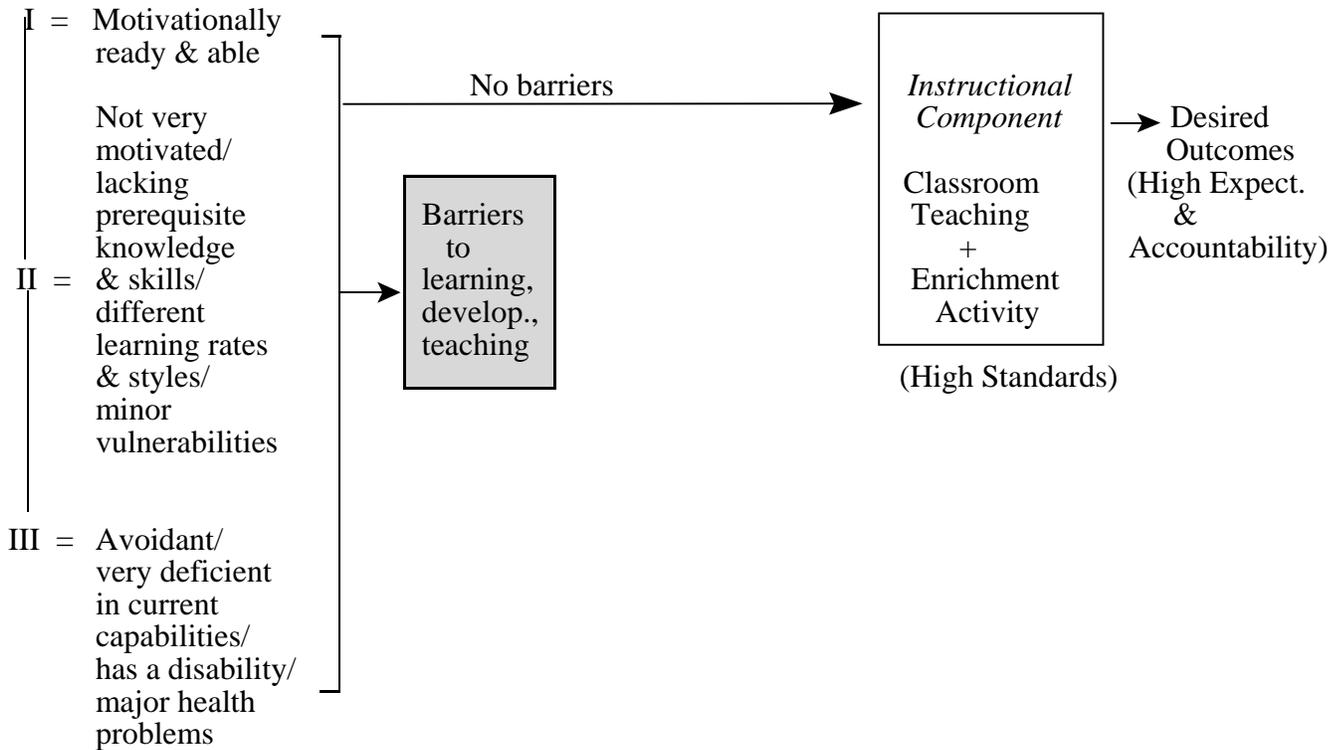
***Lens #2 = How does school improvement  
address barriers to learning and teaching?***

**Is the emphasis on ensuring**

***ALL* youngsters  
have an equal opportunity  
to succeed at school?**

## Barriers to Learning and School Improvement

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\*\*

##### *Neighborhood*

- >extreme economic deprivation
- >community disorganization, including high levels of mobility
- >violence, drugs, etc.
- >minority and/or immigrant status

##### *Family*

- >chronic poverty
- >conflict/disruptions/violence
- >substance abuse
- >models problem behavior
- >abusive caretaking
- >inadequate provision for quality child care

##### *School and Peers*

- >poor quality school
- >negative encounters with teachers
- >negative encounters with peers &/or inappropriate peer models

##### *Individual*

- >medical problems
- >low birth weight/ neurodevelopmental delay
- >psychophysiological problems
- >difficult temperament & adjustment problems
- >inadequate nutrition

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

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Caution: Don't misinterpret the term

- *Barriers to Learning*

It encompasses much more than a deficit model of students.

And, it is part of a holistic approach that emphasizes the importance of

- *Protective Buffers*  
(e.g., strengths, assets, resiliency, accommodations)

and

- *Promoting Full Development*
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## Examples of *Risk-Producing Conditions* that Can be Barriers to Development and Learning

E n v i r o n m e n t a l   C o n d i t i o n s *			Person Factors*
<i>Neighborhood</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>School and Peers</i>	<i>Individual</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;extreme economic deprivation</li> <li>&gt;community disorganization, including high levels of mobility</li> <li>&gt;violence, drugs, etc.</li> <li>&gt;minority and/or immigrant status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;chronic poverty</li> <li>&gt;conflict/disruptions/violence</li> <li>&gt;substance abuse</li> <li>&gt;models problem behavior</li> <li>&gt;abusive caretaking</li> <li>&gt;inadequate provision for quality child care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;poor quality school</li> <li>&gt;negative encounters with teachers</li> <li>&gt;negative encounters with peers &amp;/or inappropriate peer models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;medical problems</li> <li>&gt;low birth weight/ neurodevelopmental delay</li> <li>&gt;psychophysiological problems</li> <li>&gt;difficult temperament &amp; adjustment problems</li> <li>&gt;inadequate nutrition</li> </ul>

## Examples of *Protective Buffers*

Conditions that prevent or counter risk producing conditions – strengths, assets, corrective interventions, coping mechanisms, special assistance and accommodations

E n v i r o n m e n t a l   C o n d i t i o n s *			Person Factors*
<i>Neighborhood</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>School and Peers</i>	<i>Individual</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;strong economic conditions/ emerging economic opportunities</li> <li>&gt;safe and stable communities</li> <li>&gt;available &amp; accessible services</li> <li>&gt;strong bond with positive other(s)</li> <li>&gt;appropriate expectations and standards</li> <li>&gt;opportunities to successfully participate, contribute, and be recognized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;adequate financial resources</li> <li>&gt;nurturing supportive family members who are positive models</li> <li>&gt;safe and stable (organized and predictable) home environment</li> <li>&gt;family literacy</li> <li>&gt;provision of high quality child care</li> <li>&gt;secure attachments – early and ongoing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;success at school</li> <li>&gt;safe, caring, supportive, and healthy school environment</li> <li>&gt;positive relationships with one or more teachers</li> <li>&gt;positive relationships with peers and appropriate peer models</li> <li>&gt;strong bond with positive other(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;higher cognitive functioning</li> <li>&gt;psychophysiological health</li> <li>&gt;easy temperament, outgoing personality, and positive behavior</li> <li>&gt;strong abilities for involvement and problem solving</li> <li>&gt;sense of purpose and future</li> <li>&gt;gender (girls less apt to develop certain problems)</li> </ul>

## Examples of Conditions for *Promoting Full Development*

Conditions, over and beyond those that create protective buffers, that enhance healthy development, well-being, and a value-based life

E n v i r o n m e n t a l   C o n d i t i o n s *			Person Factors*
<i>Neighborhood</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>School and Peers</i>	<i>Individual</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;nurturing &amp; supportive conditions</li> <li>&gt;policy and practice promotes healthy development &amp; sense of community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;conditions that foster positive physical &amp; mental health among all family members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;nurturing &amp; supportive climate school-wide and in classrooms</li> <li>&gt;conditions that foster feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;pursues opportunities for personal development and empowerment</li> <li>&gt;intrinsically motivated to pursue full development, well-being, and a value-based life</li> </ul>

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

For more on this and for references to relevant literature, see:

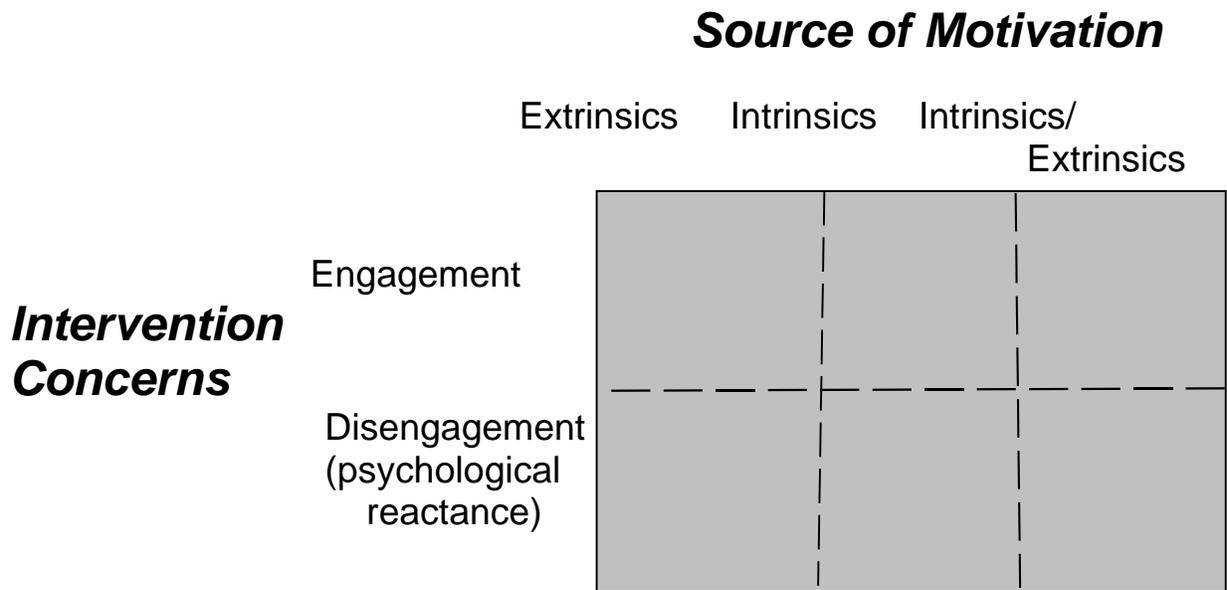
Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006). *The school leader's guide to student learning supports: New directions for addressing barriers to learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

**Lens #3 = *How do school improvement practices re-engage students who have become disengaged from classroom instruction?***

**Is the emphasis on ensuring**

***ALL* youngsters  
have an equal opportunity  
to succeed at school?**

# Engagement & Disengagement\*



***\*Avoiding Over-reliance on Extrinsics,  
Maximizing Intrinsic Motivation, and  
Minimizing Behavior Control Strategies***

# Engaging & Re-engaging Students in Classroom Learning

How are schools

>maximizing Intrinsic Motivation?

>minimizing Behavior Control Strategies?

*Motivation,*

*and especially Intrinsic Motivation*

are fundamental intervention considerations

related to student (and staff) problems.

## Addressing Barriers Requires Enhancing How a School Approaches ***Motivation***

Motivation, and Especially *Intrinsic* Motivation is a Fundamental Intervention Consideration Related to Student (and Staff) Problems

First Concern –

Enhancing understanding of *intrinsic motivation* as related to academic achievement and the achievement gap

Second Concern –

Reducing overemphasis on behavior/social *control* & enhancing appreciation of the impact of *psychological reactance*

Third Concern –

*Re-engaging* students who have become actively disengaged from classroom instruction

Fourth Concern –

*Teacher motivation*

## **School Improvement Policy & Practice: What's Missing?**

### ***Missing: A Comprehensive Focus on:***

- all students*
- addressing barriers to learning & teaching*
- re-engaging disengaged students in  
classroom learning*

## ***Study Questions***

What are the many external and internal barriers that interfere with students learning and teachers teaching and how does all this affect the school?

What do schools do to address barriers to development, learning, and teaching *and* also (re-)engage students in classroom learning?

## **Some Relevant References & Resources**

>In addition to the book *Mental Health in School & School Improvement: Current Status, Concerns, and New Directions*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/mhbook/mhbooktoc.htm>

browse the following online Center resources:

>*Addressing Barriers to Student Learning & Promoting Healthy Development: A Usable Research-Base*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/BarriersBrief.pdf>

>*School Improvement Planning: What's Missing?*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsmissing.htm>

>*Legislation in Need of Improvement: Reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act to Better Address Barriers to Learning*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/nclbra.pdf>

>Resources and Publications –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/resources.htm>

>Quick Find Search Topic Menu –

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/websrch.htm#quick>

**In Part IV, we explore how efforts to enhance how schools address mental health and psychosocial concerns can and must become an integrated part of school improvement.**