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Building Comprehensive, Multifaceted, and Integrated Approaches To Address Barriers to Student Learning

I t is easy to say that schools must ensure that *all* students succeed. If all students came ready and able to profit from "high standards" curricula, then there would be little problem meeting that goal. Unfortunately, many students are experiencing external and internal barriers that too often interfere with learning. Thus, providing *all* students with an equal opportunity to succeed requires more than raising standards, demanding better teaching and accountability for achievement, imposing stricter discipline measures, reducing school violence, and ending social promotion. It also requires a comprehensive, multifaceted approach that addresses barriers to learning and teaching.

For over 30 years, our work group at UCLA has focused on youngsters with a wide range of learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Much of the early work was conducted in a university laboratory school. In the 1980s, we left the "ivory tower" and moved into the "real" (often surreal) world of large, urban, as well as rural, school districts serving students from poor families. We began to focus broadly on factors that get in the way of students benefiting from instruction. Increasingly, the work has centered on the need for major systemic changes to ensure that all youngsters have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Our analyses indicate the failure of prevailing school reform initiatives to adequately address barriers to learning and teaching. In our efforts to correct this deficit, we have developed frameworks designed to guide expansion of current reforms.

ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO LEARNING, DEVELOPMENT, AND TEACHING

Prevailing approaches to school reform do not address barriers to learning, development, and teaching in comprehensive and multifaceted ways, especially in schools where large proportions of students are not doing well. Rather, the current emphasis is mostly on intensifying the attention paid to curriculum, instruction, and classroom management. As long as this is the primary emphasis, student success rates are unlikely to increase.

The Reality of Barriers to Learning, Development, and Teaching

Barriers to student learning can be both external and internal. It is clear that too many youngsters are growing up and going to school in situations that not only fail to promote healthy development, but are antithetical to that process. Some youngsters, of course, also have intrinsic conditions that make learning difficult.

In some areas, many youngsters bring a wide range of problems associated with poverty and low income, difficult family circumstances, high transience rates, lack of English language skills, violent neighborhoods, substance abuse, inadequate health care, and lack of enrichment opportunities. As a result, teachers at every grade level encounter students who are not ready to meet the school's demands.

Youngsters' problems are exacerbated as they internalize the frustrations of confronting these barriers and the debilitating effects of performing poorly at school.

In some locations, more than half of the students manifest forms of behavioral, learning, and emotional problems. Unfortunately, teachers in schools are ill-prepared to address the problems. Thus, when students are not doing well, the trend increasingly is to refer them directly for counseling or for assessment, in the hopes that they will receive special help—perhaps even a special education assignment.

In some schools and classrooms, the number of referrals is dramatic. Where special teams have been established to review teacher requests for help, the list grows as the year proceeds. The longer the list, the longer the lag time for review—by the end of the school year, the team often has reviewed only a small percentage of the list. And, no matter how many are reviewed, there always are more referrals than can be served.

One solution might be to convince policymakers to fund more services. However, even if the policy climate favored expanding public services, additional health and social services do not constitute a compre-hensive approach for addressing barriers to learning. Certainly, more services to treat problems are needed, but so are prevention and early-after-onset programs that can reduce the number of students being referred for special assistance.

Ultimately, of course, addressing barriers to learning must be approached from a societal perspective, and will require fundamental systemic reforms. What must be developed is a continuum of community and school programs (see Figure 1) that is comprehensive, multi-faceted, and integrated. This continuum encompasses three overlapping systems: systems for positive development and systems of prevention, systems of early intervention (to address problems as soon after onset as feasible), and systems of care (for those with chronic and severe problems).

Moving to a Three-Component Model for School Reform

Certain initiatives around the United States are demon-

An Interconnected Continuum of Systems for Meeting the Needs of All Students

School Resources
(facilities, stakeholders,
programs, services)

Community Resources
(facilities, stakeholders,
programs, services)

Examples:

- Enrichment and recreation
- General health education
- Promotion of social and emotional development
- Drug and alcohol education
- Support for transitions
- Conflict resolution
- Parent involvement

- Pregnancy prevention
- Violence prevention
- Dropout prevention
- Learning/behavior accommodations
- Work programs

- Special education for learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, and other health impairments

Systems for Positive Development
and
Systems of Prevention
primary prevention
(low end need/low cost
per student programs)

Systems of Early Intervention
early-after-onset
(moderate need, moderate
cost per student)

Systems of Care
treatment of severe and
chronic problems
(high end need/high cost
per student programs)

Examples:

- Youth development programs
- Public health and safety programs
- Prenatal care
- Immunizations
- Recreation and enrichment
- Child abuse education

- Early identification to treat health problems
- Monitoring health problems
- Short-term counseling
- Foster placement/group homes
- Family support
- Shelter, food, clothing
- Job programs

- Emergency/ crisis treatment
- Family preservation
- Long-term therapy
- Probation/incarceration
- Disabilities programs
- Hospitalization

Adapted from various public domain documents authored by H. S. Adelman & L. Taylor and circulated through the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA.
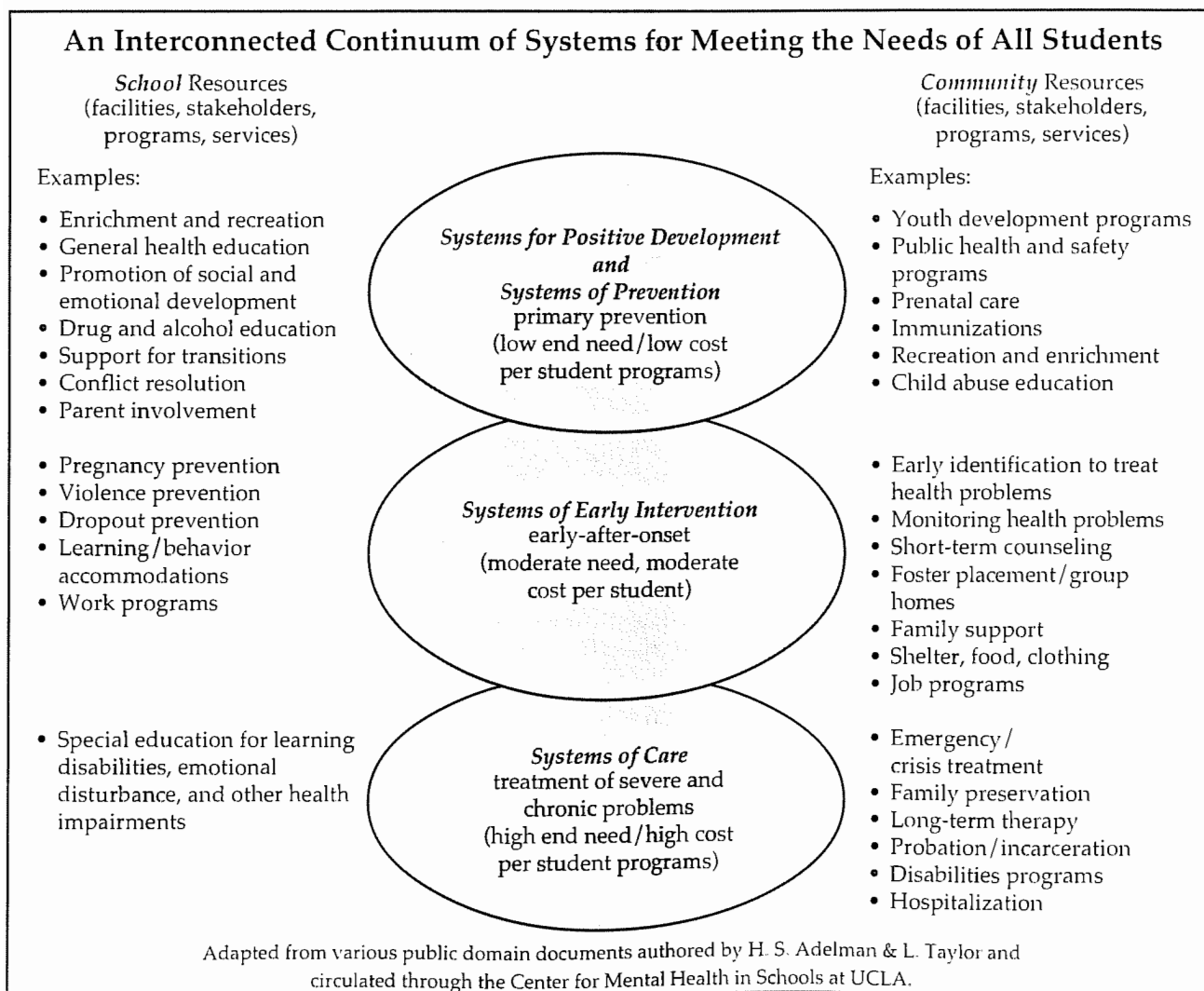
Figure 1

strating the need to rethink how schools and communities can meet the challenge of addressing persistent barriers to student learning (e.g., see Center for Mental Health in Schools, 1999a, 2000a). Such work highlights the need to expand prevailing thinking about school reform (e.g., see Adelman & Taylor, 1997a, 1998). Current reforms are based on an inadequate two-component model for restructuring schools, and movement to a three-component model is necessary if schools are to benefit all young people appropriately (see Figure 2).

A three-component model calls for elevating efforts to address barriers to development, learning, and teaching by recognizing a third fundamental facet of education reform. We call this facet an *Enabling Component*. (Enabling here is defined as "providing with the means or opportunity; making possible, practical, or easy; giving power, capacity, or sanction to.")

A comprehensive, multifaceted, integrated continuum of enabling activity is *essential* in addressing the needs of youngsters who encounter barriers that interfere with their benefiting satisfactorily from instruction (Adelman & Taylor, 1994; Adelman, Taylor, & Schneider, 1999). If teachers are to teach effectively, there must be not only effective instruction and well-managed schools, but also comprehensive removal of barriers. All three components (instructional, management, and enabling) are necessary, complementary, and overlapping. Some schools and education agencies around the United States identify the enabling component as *Learning Supports* or a *Supportive Learning*

Environment. The state of Hawaii calls it a *Comprehensive Student Support System*. It appears that more states are recognizing the need to expand current school reform initiatives.

A Framework for an Enabling Component at a School Site

The enabling component provides a unifying concept for responding to a wide range of psychosocial factors interfering with young people's learning and academic performance. Furthermore, the concept calls on reformers to expand the current emphasis on improving instruction and school management to include a comprehensive and multifaceted component for addressing barriers to learning/teaching, and to ensure it is well-integrated with the other two components.

Implementing an enabling component requires: 1) formulating a delimited framework of basic program areas, and then 2) restructuring and enhancing existing resources (e.g., Adelman, 1996; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 1999b). We cluster enabling activity into six interrelated areas (see Figure 3), which focus on:

- Enhancing the classroom teacher's capacity to address problems and foster students' social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral development
- Enhancing the capacity of schools to handle the many transition concerns confronting students and their families
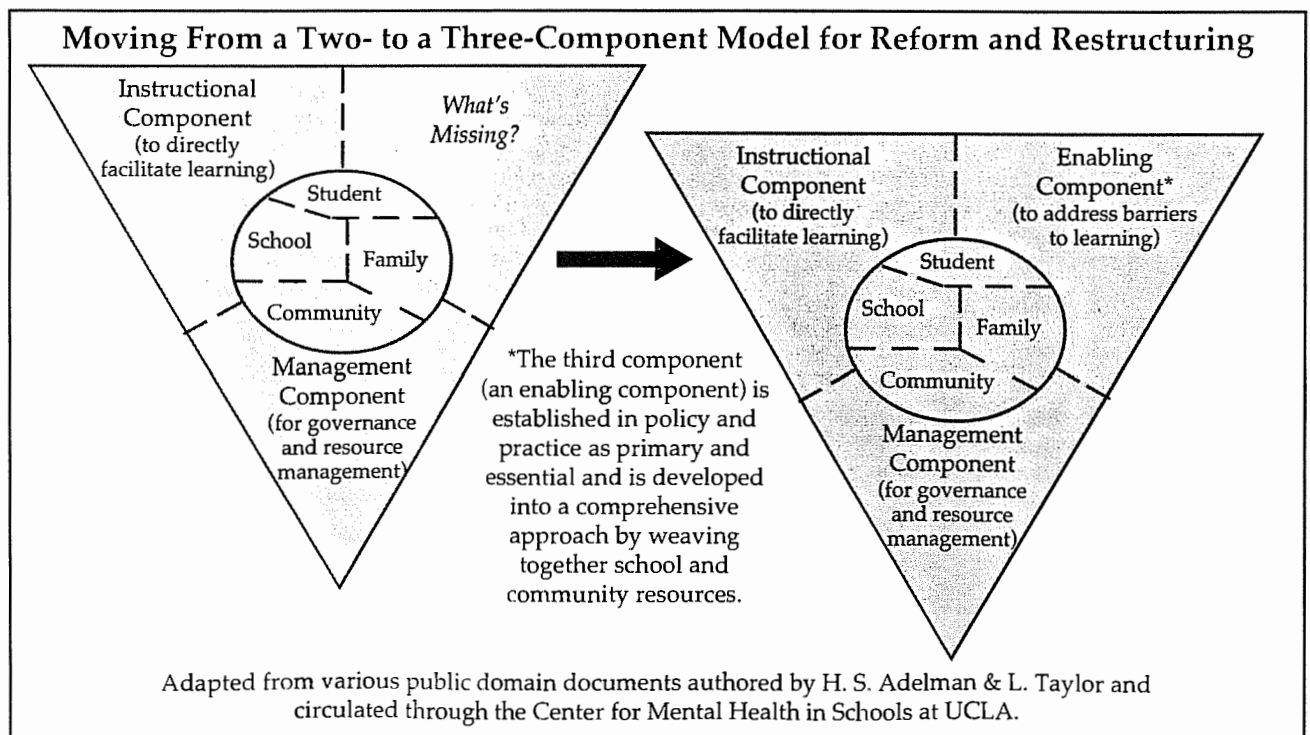

Moving From a Two- to a Three-Component Model for Reform and Restructuring

Instructional Component (to directly facilitate learning)

What's Missing?

Student — School — Family — Community

Management Component (for governance and resource management)

*The third component (an enabling component) is established in policy and practice as primary and essential and is developed into a comprehensive approach by weaving together school and community resources.

Instructional Component (to directly facilitate learning)

Enabling Component* (to address barriers to learning)

Student — School — Family — Community

Management Component (for governance and resource management)

Adapted from various public domain documents authored by H. S. Adelman & L. Taylor and circulated through the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA.

Figure 2

- Responding to, minimizing the impact of, and preventing crises
- Enhancing home involvement
- Reaching out to the surrounding community to build links
- Providing special assistance for students and families.

Each of these areas is briefly highlighted in Table 1 and should be viewed as the "curriculum" of a school's component to address barriers to learning.

Unfortunately, *most* reformers seem unaware that schools must play a major role in developing such programs and systems if all students are to benefit from higher standards and improved instruction. Therefore, it is important to ensure that reform advocates expand their emphasis to include a comprehensive component for addressing barriers to learning. This means accomplishing systemic changes that ensure this third component is not *marginalized*, but rather pursued, in policy and daily practice, with the same priority devoted to improving instruction and school management.

GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE

The "curriculum areas" of the enabling component (see Table 1) guide program planning, implementation, evaluation, personnel development, and stakeholder involvement. The intent is to create a cohesive set of programs and services that are thoroughly integrated with the instructional and management components. Such a component evolves by building a continuum of programs/services—from primary prevention to treatment of chronic problems (see Figure 1)—using a continuum of interveners, advocates, and sources of support (e.g., peers, parents, volunteers, nonprofessional staff, professionals-in-training, professionals). Building such a component requires weaving resources together.
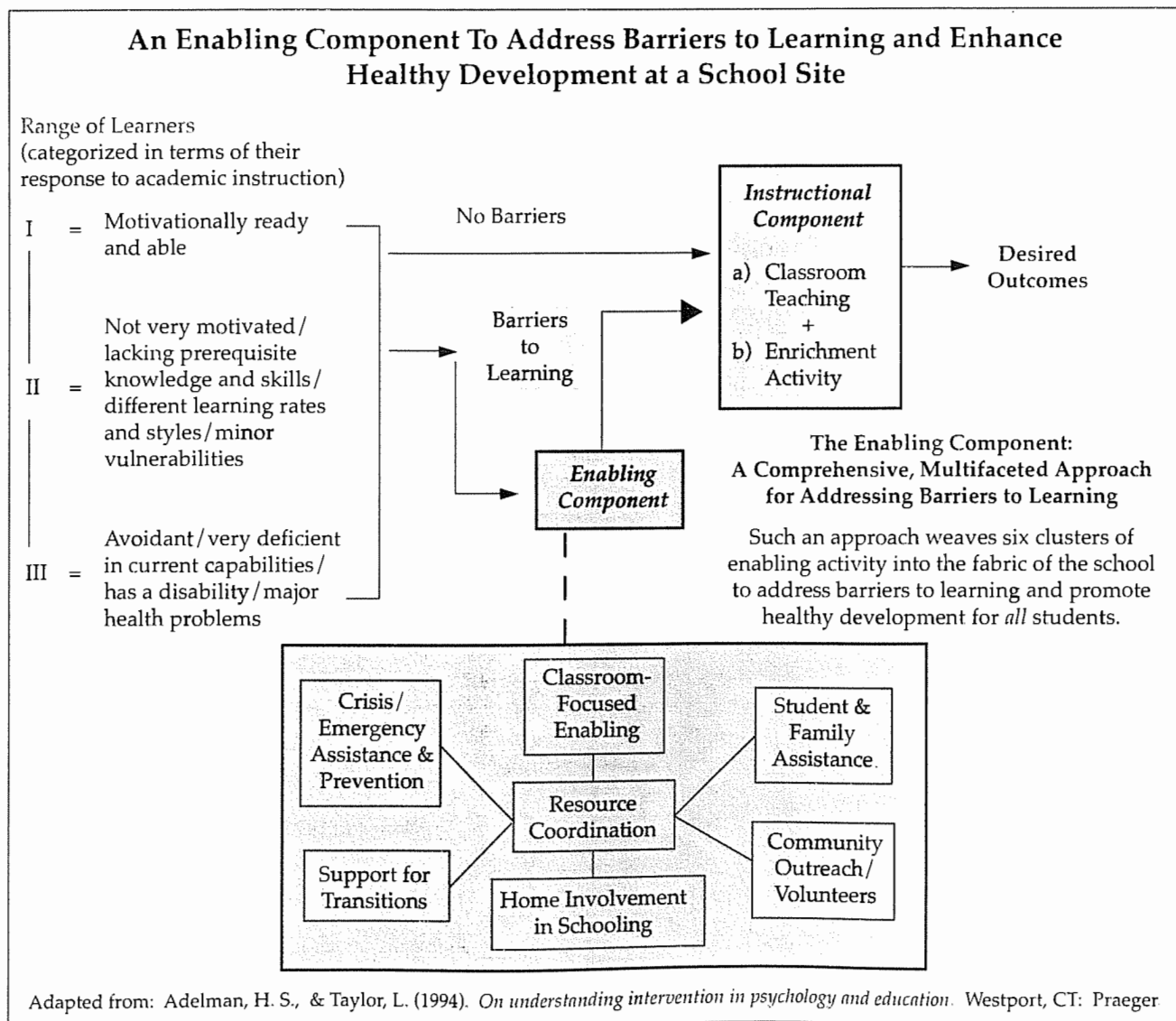

An Enabling Component To Address Barriers to Learning and Enhance Healthy Development at a School Site

Range of Learners
(categorized in terms of their
response to academic instruction)

I = Motivationally ready and able — No Barriers

II = Not very motivated/ lacking prerequisite knowledge and skills/ different learning rates and styles/minor vulnerabilities — Barriers to Learning

III = Avoidant/very deficient in current capabilities/ has a disability/major health problems

Instructional Component
a) Classroom Teaching
+
b) Enrichment Activity

Desired Outcomes

Enabling Component

The Enabling Component:
A Comprehensive, Multifaceted Approach for Addressing Barriers to Learning

Such an approach weaves six clusters of enabling activity into the fabric of the school to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development for *all* students.

Crisis/ Emergency Assistance & Prevention

Classroom-Focused Enabling

Student & Family Assistance

Resource Coordination

Support for Transitions

Home Involvement in Schooling

Community Outreach/ Volunteers

Adapted from: Adelman, H. S., & Taylor, L. (1994). *On understanding intervention in psychology and education.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

Figure 3

"Curriculum" Areas for an Enabling Component

1. **Enhancing teacher capacity for addressing problems and for fostering social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral development.** When a classroom teacher encounters difficulty in working with a youngster, the first step is to see whether the problem can be addressed within the classroom, and perhaps with added home involvement. It is essential to enable teachers to respond to everyday learning, behavior, and emotional problems with more than social control strategies for classroom management. Teachers need to learn many ways to enable the learning of such students, and schools must develop school-wide approaches to help teachers with this fundamental work. The literature offers many relevant practices, including pre-referral intervention efforts, tutoring, enhancement of protective factors, and assets building (including use of curriculum-based approaches to promoting social emotional development). Outcome data indicate that such practices do make a difference.

2. **Enhancing school capacity to handle the variety of transition concerns confronting students and their families.** Not until recent years have schools begun to establish transition programs. They are an essential facet of the overall effort to reduce levels of alienation and increase levels of positive attitudes toward, and involvement with, school and learning activities. Thus, schools must plan, develop, and maintain a focus on transition concerns confronting students and their families. Examples of relevant practices are readiness to learn programs; before-, during-, and after-school programs to enrich learning and provide safe recreation; welcoming and social support programs; transition to and from special education programs; and school-to-career programs. Enabling successful transitions has made a significant difference in how motivationally ready and able students are to benefit from schooling.

3. **Responding to, minimizing the impact of, and preventing crises.** The need for crisis response and prevention is constant in many schools. Such efforts ensure assistance is provided when emergencies arise and that follow-up care is available so that students are able to resume learning without undue delays. Prevention activity stresses creation of a safe and productive environment and the development of students' and families' capacities for dealing with violence and other threats to safety. Examples of relevant practices are the establishment of a crisis team, to ensure that crisis response and aftermath interventions are planned and implemented; school environment changes and safety strategies; and curriculum approaches to preventing crises (violence, suicide, and physical/sexual abuse prevention). Current trends emphasize school- and community-wide prevention programs.

4. **Enhancing home involvement.** The recent trend is on expanding the nature and scope of the school's focus on enhancing home involvement. Intervention practices encompass efforts to: 1) address specific learning and support needs of adults in the home (e.g., classes to enhance literacy and/or job skills, ESL classes, support groups); 2) help those in the home meet their basic obligations to their children; 3) improve systems to communicate about matters essential to student and family; 4) enhance the home-school connection and sense of community; 5) enhance participation in making decisions that are essential to the student; 6) enhance home support related to the student's basic learning and development; 7) mobilize those at home to solve problems related to student needs; and 8) elicit help (support, collaborations, and partnerships) from those at home with respect to meeting classroom, school, and community needs.

5. **Reaching out to the community to build links and collaborations.** The aim of community outreach is to enhance community involvement in and support for efforts to enable learning. Outreach may be made to public and private community agencies, colleges, organizations, and facilities; businesses and professional organizations and groups; and volunteer service programs, organizations, and clubs. Efforts in this area might include: 1) programs to recruit and enhance community involvement and support (e.g., integration with community health and social services; cadres of volunteers, mentors, and others with special expertise and resources; local businesses that "adopt" a school and provide resources, awards, incentives, and jobs; formal partnership arrangements); 2) systems and programs specifically designed to train, screen, and maintain volunteers (e.g., parents, college students, senior citizens, peer and cross-age tutors/counselors, and professionals-in-training); 3) outreach programs to connect with hard-to-involve students and their families (i.e., those who don't come to school regularly—including truants and dropouts); and 4) programs to enhance community-school connections and a sense of community (e.g., orientations, open houses, performances, cultural and sports events, festivals and celebrations, and workshops).

6. **Providing special assistance for students and families.** Some problems cannot be handled without a few special interventions. The emphasis is on providing personalized special services for a broad range of needs. School-owned, -based, and -linked interventions clearly provide better access for many youngsters and their families. Moreover, as a result of initiatives that enhance school-owned support programs and those fostering school-linked services and school-community partnerships (e.g., full service schools, family resource centers, etc.), more schools have more to offer in the way of student and family assistance. In current practice, available social, physical, and mental health programs in the school and community are used. Special attention is paid to enhancing systems for pre-referral intervention, triage, case and resource management, direct services to meet immediate needs, and referral for special services and special education resources and placements.

Table 1

Thus, the emphasis throughout is on collaboration—cooperation, coordination, and, where viable, integration—among all school and community resource providers.

Understanding the framework for an enabling component is not enough, however. Moving from a two- to a three-component approach to school reform involves major systemic changes, district-wide and at every school. It is not a matter of implementing a project or a few demonstrations; significant changes must be developed and institutionalized at every school. This process often is called diffusion, replication, roll out, or scale-up.

About Systemic Change

For the most part, education researchers and reformers have paid little attention to the complexities of large-scale diffusion. This is evident from the fact that the U.S. research agenda does not include major initiatives to delineate and test models for widespread replication of education reforms (see Replication and Program Services, Inc., 1993; Schorr, 1997; Slavin, 1996). Leadership training also has given short shrift to the topic of scale-up. Thus, it is not surprising when proposed systemic changes are not accompanied by the resources necessary to spread the changes effectively throughout a school district. Common deficiencies include: inadequate strategies for motivating stakeholders, especially principals, teachers, and parents; assignment of change agents with relatively little training in facilitating large-scale systemic change; and unrealistically short time frames in which to accomplish desired institutional changes.

The vision for "getting from here to there" requires its own framework of steps, the essence of which involves establishing mechanisms to address key phases, tasks, and processes for systemic change (Adelman & Taylor, 1997b; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2000b; Taylor, Nelson, & Adelman, 1999). These include creating an infrastructure of organizational and operational mechanisms for:

- *Creating readiness:* enhancing the climate/culture for change
- *Initial implementation:* adapting and phasing in a prototype with well-designed guidance and support
- *Institutionalization:* ensuring the infrastructure maintains and enhances productive changes
- *Ongoing evolution:* creative renewal.

In the following discussion, we assume that key mechanisms for implementing systemic changes have been established. These mechanisms are essential for carrying out fundamental restructuring throughout a school district.

Building an Enhanced Infrastructure

If the essential programs for addressing barriers to learning and teaching are to be effectively implemented at a school site, policymakers and administrators must put in place an enabling component infrastructure. In most settings, this can be done through proper redeployment of existing resources currently used to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development. One of the ironies of the many school reform initiatives is that so little attention has been paid to restructuring the various education support programs and services to enhance their usefulness and impact (Adelman & Taylor, 1997c).

An infrastructure of organizational and operational mechanisms at a school, for a family of schools, and across the system are required for oversight, leadership, resource development, and ongoing support of an enabling component. Such mechanisms provide ways to: 1) arrive at decisions about resource allocation; 2) maximize systematic and integrated planning, implementation, maintenance, and evaluation of enabling activities; 3) provide outreach to create formal working relationships with the community, thereby securing resources and establishing links; and 4) upgrade and modernize the component to reflect the best thinking on intervention and the use of technology. At each system level, these tasks require that staff adopt some new roles and functions and that parents, students, and other representatives from the community enhance their involvement. Such tasks also call for redeployment of existing resources, as well as identification of new ones.

To maintain the focus on developing a comprehensive continuum of programs/services at every school site, it is a good idea to conceive systemic change from the school outward. That is, first focus on school level mechanisms related to the component that addresses a particular barrier. Then, based on analyses of what is needed to facilitate and enhance school level efforts, conceive mechanisms that enable groups or "families" of schools to work together. From this position, system-wide mechanisms can be designed to support the goals of each school (and those of a family of schools).

At the School Level. From a school's perspective, there are three overlapping challenges in moving from piecemeal approaches to an integrated component for addressing barriers to learning. One involves weaving existing activities together. A second entails building up programs so they are more effective. The third challenge is to reach out for other resources by: forming collaborations with other schools; establishing formal links with community resources; and attracting more volunteers, professionals-in-training, and community resources to work at the school site.

Meeting the above challenges requires development

of well-conceived mechanisms that are appropriately sanctioned and endowed by governance bodies. A good starting place is to establish a *resource-oriented team* (e.g., a Resource Coordinating Team) at a specific school (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2001; Rosenblum, DiCecco, Taylor, & Adelman, 1995). Properly constituted, a resource-oriented team leads and steers efforts to maintain and improve a multifaceted and integrated approach (for example, by developing local partnerships). Such a team helps reduce fragmentation and enhances cost-efficacy by analyzing, planning, coordinating, integrating, monitoring, evaluating, and strengthening ongoing efforts.

To ensure that daily programmatic activity is well-planned, implemented, evaluated, maintained, and evolved, the resource-oriented team, in turn, helps establish and coordinate teams for each of the six curriculum areas of the enabling component. It may be difficult to identify and deploy enough committed and able personnel to form such teams. Initially, a couple of motivated and competent individuals can lead the way in a particular program area—with others recruited over time as necessary and/or interested. Some "teams" might even consist of only one individual. In some instances, one team can address more than one programmatic area.

Because most schools are unable to simultaneously develop many new program areas, they must establish priorities for how to develop and phase in new programs. The initial emphasis, of course, should be on weaving together existing resources and developing program teams designed to meet the school's most pressing needs, such as enhancing programs to provide student and family assistance, crisis assistance, and prevention, and finding ways to enhance teachers' ability to handle students' more common learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

Administrators must take the lead in developing a comprehensive approach to addressing barriers to learning. Most schools do not have an administrator whose job definition outlines such a leadership role and functions; in addition, this is not a role for which most principals have the time. Thus, having a *site administrative leader* is imperative to an enabling component. Such a role may be created by redefining a percentage (e.g., 50 percent) of a vice/assistant principal's day or, in schools that are too small to have such personnel, by delegating some administrative responsibilities to a coordinator. This leader must meet with the resource-oriented team and then represent and advocate the team's recommendations to the administrative team, at governance body meetings, and wherever else decisions are made regarding programs and operations—especially decisions about use of space, time, budget, and personnel.

Paralleling the administrative lead is the position of a *staff leader*. This individual can be someone who has expertise in addressing barriers to student learning (e.g., support service personnel). If a site has a center facility (e.g., a family or parent resource center or a health center), the center coordinator might fill this role. This individual also must meet with the resource-oriented team and advocate for the team's recommendations at the administrative and governance body tables. Both the administrative and staff leaders play key roles in daily implementation, monitoring, and problem solving.

At the Feeder Pattern and Neighborhood Level. Neighboring schools have common concerns and thus may be able to draw from the same resources. By sharing, they can eliminate redundancy and reduce costs. Some school districts already pull together clusters of schools (sometimes called complexes or families) to combine and integrate personnel and programs. A multi-locality *resource-oriented council* provides a mechanism to help ensure cohesive and equitable deployment of resources, and can encourage the pooling of resources to reduce costs. Such councils can be particularly useful for pulling together the overlapping work of high schools and their feeder middle and elementary schools, and for integrating neighborhood efforts. Connecting the work of feeder schools is particularly important, since they often represent several levels of a neighborhood's schools. Multi-locality teams are especially attractive to community agencies that do not have the time or personnel to link with individual schools.

To create a council, one to two representatives from each school's resource-oriented team can be chosen to meet at least once a month (more frequently if necessary). The functions of such a mechanism include: 1) coordinating and integrating programs serving multiple schools and neighborhoods, 2) identifying and meeting common needs with respect to guidelines and staff development, and 3) creating links and collaborations among schools and agencies. More generally, the council provides a useful mechanism for leadership, communication, maintenance, quality improvement, and ongoing development of a comprehensive continuum of programs and services. Natural starting points for councils are the sharing of needs assessment, resource mapping, analyses, and recommendations for education reform and restructuring. Specific areas of initial focus may be on such matters as addressing community-school violence and developing prevention programs and plans for establishing safe schools and neighborhoods. Representatives from resource councils can be invaluable members of community planning groups (e.g., service planning area councils and local management boards) because of the informa-

tion they have about specific schools, clusters of schools, and neighborhoods.

System-wide. Matters related to comprehensive approaches best achieved through school-community partnerships also appear regularly on the agendas of school district administrators and local school boards. The problem with this approach is that each item tends to be handled in an ad hoc manner, without sufficient attention to the "big picture," and without an understanding of how programs and services could be better coordinated. This piecemeal structure reflects the marginalized status of such functions, thereby both creating and maintaining the fragmented policies and practices that characterize efforts to address barriers.

To correct the problem, several system-wide mechanisms have been identified to ensure coherent oversight and leadership. One is a *system-wide leader*, who has the responsibility and accountability for a system-wide vision and strategic planning. Large districts may require additional organizational and administrative mechanisms to coordinate resources and to provide a critical mass of system-wide leaders.

Finally, we stress that boards of education need a standing committee that ensures the district is addressing barriers to in-depth, consistent, and effective learning (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 1998). Such a committee can help ensure that policy and practice are formulated in a cohesive way, based on a big-picture perspective of how all the various resources and functions relate to each other.

CONCLUSION

Many schools have become isolated from their surrounding communities, and many teachers have become isolated in their classrooms. In turn, many students and families feel alienated from schools and teachers. Diversity too often is viewed in terms of irreconcilable differences, rather than as a multifaceted base from which to draw resources to accomplish shared goals.

If school reforms are to be effective, schools must work toward becoming integral and integrated parts of their communities. Some leaders for reform suggest that schools need to be a major hub in a neighborhood—a place where people from the neighborhood come to learn and play together; share experiences and wisdom; nurture each other; and strengthen young people, families, and the fabric of community life. Some have a vision of a school as the heart of a neighborhood and the classroom as the student's home away from home.

The concept of an enabling component helps ensure that students and families feel a positive bond with their school and its teachers, that teachers work collegially in support of each other and the school's mission, and that schools are precious resources

throughout the neighborhood of which they are a part. The various facets of such a component focus on the barriers that must be addressed, and do so in ways that build on the diverse strengths found in all schools and communities.

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