August, 2008

From: Howard Adelman & Linda Taylor
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Re: Update National Initiative: New Directions for Student Support*

New: SUPERINTENDENTS’ INITIATIVE

In the Spring of 2008, we sent out an inquiry to districts around the country to elicit information about awareness, interest, and suggestions related to the need to expand the focus in school improvement planning and implementation to include developing a comprehensive and systemic approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

Attached is a report entitled: Transforming School Improvement to Develop a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports: What District Superintendents Say They Need to Move Forward. (Also online at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/superintendentssay.pdf)

The report is designed both to provide a context for and a summary of the responses we received. As such, it offers a general conceptual overview and a snapshot of practice considerations and concerns.

We begin by highlighting the importance of adopting a unifying concept for the work and the necessity of reframing how the many interventions can be woven together to develop a comprehensive system of learning supports. Then, we report what district superintendents tell us about what would help them in developing a comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching at every school. And, as a beginning response to district needs, we highlight a range of resources that have been developed specifically to enhance school improvement policy and practice to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

Our intent is to use this report as the beginning of a superintendents’ initiative across the country designed to stimulate discussion, sharing, learning, and systemic changes related to new directions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. To this end, we have attached a brief response form. Please take a few minutes to return it to us.

We hope you will forward the report to colleagues to stimulate widespread discussion about these important matters. (The response form also invites you to indicate any other folks to whom you think we should send the report.)

We look forward to continuing to work with you in the best interests of children, their families, neighborhoods, and schools.

*ABOUT THE NATIONAL INITIATIVE:
NEW DIRECTIONS FOR STUDENT SUPPORT

For details about the National Initiative: New Directions for Student Support, go to http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ndannouncement.htm

A brief overview of the national initiative is provided below:

In 2002, our Center at UCLA launched the National Initiative: New Directions for Student Support. We began with a national Summit and followed this (in 2003) with
several regional Summits to raise awareness and create readiness for change. In 2003 we also began a targeted set of state Summits (these have occurred in 13 states to date).

Then, in 2005, we added strategies not only to enhance dissemination but to encourage and support diffusion as we provide indepth follow up for those places indicating readiness to move forward in developing a comprehensive new directions approach. To date, this work has included providing (1) Leadership Institutes for district teams and (2) onsite capacity building with specific state departments of education and districts.

In 2006, encouraged by the growing success of the New Directions initiative, the Center at UCLA established a public-private collaboration with Scholastic, Inc. as part of Scholastic’s Community Affairs Rebuilding for Learning initiative. In 2007 and the first part of 2008, Scholastic has been (1) preparing a handbook based on our work related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging students and (2) developing a special website. In the last part of 2008, we will begin to conduct a series of Leadership Institutes beginning in the Gulf states and also for national and state superintendents/administrators associations, Council of Chief State School Officers, etc.

Over 2007 and 2008, we increased our outreach to district superintendents/leaders and began to focus on higher education’s role in personnel preparation for educators.

Superintendents Initiative. With respect to district leaders, widespread outreach mailings were sent including a range of brief resources and with follow up materials sent to those who responded. As of August, 2008, the focus on connecting with superintendents will be expanded into a formal Superintendents Initiative. The initiative will be inaugurated with national distribution of a Center report entitled: Transforming School Improvement to Develop a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports: What District Superintendents Say They Need to Move Forward.

Higher Education Initiative. With respect to higher education’s role in personnel preparation for educators, July 2008 inaugurated a Higher Education Initiative. This began with a first Leadership Institute for Higher Education Personnel Preparation and with national distribution of the report entitled: Preparing All Education Personnel to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching – online at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/preparingall.pdf

In addition to policy makers, a key audience for this report is deans, department chairs, and faculty in personnel preparation and leadership programs, district personnel responsible orientation/induction, inservice, and continuing education.

Each year, the Center has continued to produce resources and tools for those ready to move in New Directions for Student Support (e.g., see the online toolkit at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm )

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