



Executive Summary

Center Report

Summit on New Directions for Student Support

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*School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students.
But when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.*

Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents (1989)

Schools and communities increasingly are being called on to meet the needs of all youngsters – including those experiencing learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Meeting the challenge is difficult. Efforts to do so are handicapped by the way in which student support interventions currently are conceived, organized, and implemented.

Student supports usually are mandated, developed, and function in relative isolation of each other. The result is an ad hoc and fragmented enterprise that does not meet the needs encountered at most schools.

Over the many years that school reform has focused on improving instruction, little or no attention has been paid to rethinking student supports. As a result, many factors that interfere with student performance and progress are not addressed effectively, and major resources are not being used in the most effective ways to assist schools in accomplishing their mission.

In response to widespread interest in mounting a nationwide initiative to stimulate new directions for how schools provide student supports, a national Summit for Student Support Administrators and other key leaders was convened on October 28, 2002. The day was structured around four fundamental problems that must be addressed in order to move forward with new directions: (1) the policy problem, (2) the intervention framework problem, (3) the infrastructure problem, and (4) the systemic change problem. To facilitate the discussion, participants were provided with a preliminary set of resource aids designed to assist in pursuing the recommendation made in the concept paper. (These aids will be revised and the set will be expanded over the next year as part of the initiative's activity.) The aids are too voluminous for inclusion in the report. They are available in a separate document entitled: *Rethinking Student Support to Enable Students to Learn and Schools to Teach* (accessible on the internet <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>).

The report from the summit begins with a concept paper entitled: *New Directions for Student Support* and then highlights key points discussed at the meeting. It discusses

- the need for enhancing how schools address barriers to student learning
- the ways in which current student supports are fragmented and marginalized
- the desirability of reframing student and teacher supports through (a) a policy shift, (b) guidelines for a comprehensive student support component, and (c) redesigning how schools address barriers to learning.

Then, it offers some recommendations and thoughts about next steps. Specifically, it is suggested that policy action is needed to guide and facilitate the development of a potent component to address barriers to learning (and support the promotion of healthy development) at every school. Moreover, it is stressed that the policy should specify that such an enabling (or learning support) component is to be pursued as a primary and essential facet of school improvement and in ways that complement, overlap, and fully integrate with the instructional component. Guidelines to accompany policy are outlined.

When current policy and practice are viewed through the lens of how schools address barriers to learning and teaching, it becomes evident how much is missing in prevailing efforts to close the achievement gap and ensure no child is left behind. Use of such an inclusive lens can help provide policy makers with a rationale for why student supports are an essential component of effective schools. It is also a good frame of reference for gathering and analyzing existing data and proposing ways to broaden the data base buttressing the value of student supports.

In terms of policy, practice, research, and staff preparation, Summit participants concurred that all support activity, including the many categorical programs funded to deal with designated problems, must be seen as embedded in comprehensive and cohesive frameworks. One framework encapsulates the full continuum of interventions; another guides reorganization of current programs and services into well-delineated and delimited clusters. Such frameworks reflect the needs as conceived by stakeholders at a school and do so in ways that balance what each wants from the other with what each can give each other.

Participants also found the notion of a component to address barriers to learning a potentially valuable way to think about the enterprise of student support, with some viewing the term “learning supports component” as a useful alternative term for student supports. Obviously, establishment of such a component at every school is not an easy task. Indeed, it is likely to remain an insurmountable task until policy makers accept the reality that such efforts are essential and do not represent an agenda separate from a school’s instructional mission.

With appropriate policy in place, work can advance with respect to *restructuring, transforming, and enhancing* school-owned programs and services and community resources, and include mechanisms to coordinate and eventually integrate it all. To these ends, the focus needs to be on *all* school resources (e.g., compensatory and special education, support services, adult education, recreation and enrichment programs, facility use) and *all* community *resources* (e.g., public and private agencies, families, businesses; services, programs, facilities; volunteers, professionals-in-training).

The long-range aim is to weave all resources together into the fabric of every school and evolve a comprehensive component that effectively addresses barriers to development, learning, and teaching as a necessary foundation for ensuring all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Once policy makers recognize the essential nature of such a component, it will be easier to braid resources and, in the process, enhance programs that address barriers, promote healthy development, foster caring schools, and strengthen families and neighborhoods

When resources are combined properly, the *end product* can be cohesive and potent *school-community partnerships*. Such partnerships seem essential if society is to strengthen neighborhoods and communities and create caring and supportive environments that maximize learning and well-being.

Based on input from Summit participants, the recommendations in the concept paper have been expanded and embellished. Essentially, the call is for elevating policy to ensure development to full potential of student learning support systems. The specific focus here is on the need for policy makers at all levels to enhance their support for efforts to

- (1) build multifaceted learning support systems that are developed into a comprehensive, cohesive component and are fully integrated with initiatives for improving instruction at every school (see Exhibit 1);
- (2) amass and expand the research-base for building such a learning support component and establish the evaluation processes for demonstrating the component’s long-term

impact on academic achievement (see Exhibit 2).

In addition, policy efforts should be made to ensure

• *boards of education* move toward establishing a standing subcommittee focused specifically on ensuring effective implementation of the policy for developing a component to address barriers to student learning at each school;

• *pre- and in-service programs* for school personnel move toward including a substantial focus on (a) the concept of a component to address barriers to student learning and (b) how to operationalize such a component at a school in ways that fully integrate with instruction.

Exhibit 1

Recommendation #1

Build multifaceted learning support systems that are developed into a comprehensive, cohesive component and are fully integrated with initiatives for improving instruction at every school.

Policy action is needed to guide and facilitate development of a potent component to address barriers to learning at every school. The policy actions should specify that such an enabling or learning support component is to be pursued as a primary and essential facet of effective schools and in ways that complement, overlap, and fully integrate with initiatives to improve instruction and promote healthy development.

Guidelines accompanying policy actions for building a comprehensive component should cover how to:

- (a) *phase-in* development of the component at every school by building on what exists and incorporating best practices into a *programmatic approach*; (Such an approach is designed to [1] enhance classroom based efforts to enable learning – including re-engaging students who have become disengaged from classroom learning and promoting healthy development, [2] support transitions, [3] increase home involvement in schooling, [4] respond to and prevent crises, [5] outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, and [6] provide prescribed student and family assistance.)
- (b) *expand standards and accountability indicators* for school learning supports to ensure this component is fully integrated with the instructional component and pursued with equal effort in policy and practice; (This includes standards and indices related to enabling learning by increasing attendance, reducing tardiness, reducing problem behaviors, lessening suspension and dropout rates, abating the large number of inappropriate referrals for special education, and so forth. It also encompasses expanded standards and accountability related to the goals for increasing personal and social functioning, such as enhancing civility, teaching safe and healthy behavior, and character education.)
- (c) *restructure* at every school and district-wide in ways that
 - redefine administrative roles and functions to ensure there is dedicated and authorized administrative leadership;
 - reframe the roles and functions of pupil services personnel and other student support staff in keeping with the functions that are required to develop the component;

(cont.)

Recommendation #1 -- Guidelines (cont.)

- C redesign school infrastructures to (a) enable the work at each school site and (b) establish formal connections among feeder pattern schools to ensure each supports each other's efforts and achieves economies of scale;
 - C redesign the central office, county, and state-level infrastructures so they support the efforts at each school and promote economies of scale;
 - C establish a mechanism (e.g., a team) at every school, for each feeder pattern, and district-wide that plans, implements, and evaluates how resources are used to build the component's capacity;
 - C build the capacity of administrators and staff to ensure capability to facilitate, guide, and support the systemic changes related to initiating, developing, and sustaining such a component at every school;
 - C broaden accountability at every school and district-wide, assuring that specific measures are (a) consonant with expanded standards and accountability indicators and (b) yield data to evaluate the relationship between student support and academic achievement and enable cost-benefit analyses.
- (d) *weave resources into a cohesive and integrated continuum of interventions over time.* Specifically, school and district staff responsible for the component should be mandated to collaborate with families and community stakeholders to evolve systems to 1) promote healthy development, 2) prevent problems, 3) intervene early to address problems as soon after onset as feasible, and 4) assist those with chronic and severe problems.

Exhibit 2

Recommendation #2

Amass and expand the research-base for building such a learning support component and establish the evaluation processes for demonstrating the component's long-term impact on academic achievement.

Given the need to build on an evolving research based and given the demand by decision makers for data showing that student support activity improves student achievement, it is recommended that a large scale initiative be developed to address these matters.

Guidelines for such an initiative should specify that it is to

- C clarify the need for learning supports and delineate frameworks that can guide development of a cohesive approach for addressing such needs; (Specific attention should be paid to the need to close the achievement gap, the promise to leave no child behind, and the necessity of addressing barriers to learning.)
- C use the delineated frameworks to amass and extrapolate from existing data the current research-base for the component and for specific programs and services;
- C provide a guide for districts as they refine their information management systems; the guide should delineate the broad base of data essential for evaluation and accountability of learning supports and ensure the data can be disaggregated appropriately;
- C evaluate learning support activity by contrasting a sample of districts using traditional approaches with those pursuing new directions;
- C describe and analyze models for new directions and document best practices.

To ensure the work is done in ways that mobilize the field, local, state, and national support would be invaluable. For example, the U.S. Department of Education could expand the work of its regional centers to encompass this initiative. State education agencies can encourage districts to play a role by expanding the accountability framework for schools and encouraging use of initial findings mainly for formative evaluation purposes until a comprehensive learning support component is in place.

Getting From Here to There

Schools are a classic example of institutions with strong cultures where systemic changes are best initiated through a confluence of top-down, bottom-up, and middle management and peer efforts. Strategies for influencing the actions of the many stakeholders and interested parties should be guided by an appreciation of three phases of systemic change:

- (2) creating readiness for change
- (3) initiating and phasing in infrastructure, operational, and programmatic changes
- (4) maintaining and evolving changes.

With respect to comprehensive new directions, the field is in phase 1. In this phase, the first step involves increasing awareness of need, building consensus, and expanding the base of leadership. The national Summit was designed with this first step in mind. As a next step, this report will be widely disseminated. All who receive this document, of course, are encouraged to copy and send it to superintendents, principals, school board members, and any other interested and concerned parties.

Over the coming year, the Center will organize three regional summits and promote state-wide summits. These will be designed to encourage advocacy for and initiation of new directions and will build a leadership network. The focus will also be on delineating specific action steps for participants related to getting from here to there.

At an appropriate time, we will invite the leadership network to join with us in organizing a national summit on student support for policy makers.

The Center will continue to identify and showcase efforts to move in new directions. In addition, we will enlist other centers, associations, journals, and various media to do the same.

We also will pursue opportunities for encouraging funding sources with respect to the above recommendation on amassing and expanding the research base. And, we will ask those with whom we network to do so as well.

At the same time, the Center and the growing leadership network will provide technical assistance and training for and foster mutual support among localities and states moving in new directions. This will allow for sharing of effective practices, lessons learned, and data on progress. A listserv will be established as one direct linking mechanism. Other sharing will be done through websites.

We invite all who read this to suggest other strategies and action steps for moving the agenda

forward.

Coda

Why Are Learning Supports Essential?

It is not enough to say that all children can learn or that no child will be left behind. As the new (2002) mission statement of the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) clearly recognizes, the work involves “achieving the vision of an American education system that *enables* all children to succeed in school, work, and life” (emphasis added). Or as the Carnegie Task Force on Education stresses: “School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students. But, when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.”

To meet the challenge and enable all children to succeed in school, work, and life, requires (1) enhancing what schools do to improve instruction *and* strengthening how they use the resources they deploy for providing student supports and (2) weaving in community resources to strengthen programs and fill gaps.

- >To ensure no child is left behind, every school and community need to work together to enhance efforts designed to increase the number of students who arrive each day ready and able to learn what the teacher has planned to teach.

- >This involves helping significant numbers of students and their families overcome barriers to development and learning (including proactive steps to promote healthy development).

- >Most barriers to learning arise from risk factors related to neighborhood, family, and peers. Many of these external barriers (along with those intrinsic to individual students) can and must be addressed by schools and communities so that youngsters have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

- >School districts usually have resources – people and programs – in place to help address barriers and enhance student readiness for learning each day. Communities also have relevant resources.

- >At school sites, existing school-owned student support resources and community services that are linked to the school often are used in an ad hoc, fragmented, and marginalized way, and as a result, their impact is too limited and is not cost-effective.

- >Reframing and restructuring the way in which these resources are used at a school site and then working with the school feeder patterns to create networks for effectively addressing barriers to learning is essential to enhancing impact and cost-effectiveness.

Frameworks for pulling together these resources at schools (and for working with community resources) are outlined in the concept paper that precedes the Summit highlights and recommendations.

In addition, strategies for moving forward were explored and offers were tendered to aid in organizing three similar regional Summits, as well as promoting state-wide Summits.