

New Directions for Student Support ... an Initiative for Iowa*



Assuring No Child is Left Behind.**

Enhancing Learning Supports by Building a Comprehensive System to Close the Achievement Gap and Ensure *All* Students have an Equal Opportunity to Succeed at School

*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 Council on Education Task Force

As schools pursue their mission to educate and as communities pursue the aim of improving the quality of life of their residents, major initiatives have been introduced and progress is being made. At the same time, it is evident that there remains considerable fragmentation and significant gaps in some of our efforts to assure no child is left behind. Fortunately, Iowa has the opportunity and is at a place where stakeholders can take the next steps in strengthening systems to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development. Doing so will create a culture of caring and nurturing so that students, families, staff, and the community at large will experience their schools as welcoming and supportive places that accommodate diversity and are committed to promoting equal opportunities for all students to succeed.

*The *New Directions for Student Support* initiative was established in October 2002 in response to widespread interest in mounting a strategic effort to move in new directions. It is designed to encourage advocacy for and establishment of new directions and is building a leadership network to accomplish this. The initiative is hosted and facilitated by the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, and the list of co-sponsoring associations and agencies has grown to over 30. After holding a national and three regional summits, the emphasis is now on state-wide initiatives beginning with a summit and establishment of a state-wide network. For the Report and participant list from the Iowa Summit, progress updates, and information about the state's network, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/currentstatus.htm>.

**The following statement reflects input from participants at Iowa's statewide summit for *New Directions for Student Support*. It also incorporates pioneering work from Hawai'i and proposed legislation in California. It is intended to guide discussion and provide a template that can be adapted by schools, districts, and regional agencies. To provide feedback or request additional copies of this document, contact ltaylor@ucla.edu

Iowa's schools strive for excellence in education, with strong parent and community-wide support. No community, however can be satisfied until all its young people are healthy and socially competent, successful in school, and have an equal opportunity to grow into productive and contributing citizens.

The Challenge

In recent years, there has been increasing concern about a decline in standardized achievement test scores in reading and math and about drop out rates. And, now the accountability requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) challenge us to develop ways to raise academic achievement levels of all students.

As the 2002 mission statement of the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) stresses:

*a system that
enables
all children
to succeed*

It is not enough to say that all children can learn or that no child will be left behind; the work involves . . . achieving the vision of an American education system that enables all children to succeed in school, work, and life.

Iowa's schools recognize the essential nature and challenge of providing effective learning supports to enable the learning and development of all students by preventing and reducing barriers to student success. Given achievement gaps and recent evidence of a plateau effect in many schools, it seems evident that meeting the challenge will require not only improving how we teach, but also will necessitate developing better ways for schools and communities to address factors that interfere with learning and teaching.

Reports from across the country verify earlier predictions that key facets of the *No Child Left Behind* reforms would result in modest immediate test score increases followed by a longer-term plateau. Data show that states reporting a steady few years climb in achievement test scores during the 1990s now indicate faltering levels of achievement (e.g., Florida, Michigan, Texas). California is a recent example of such a fade-out; the state's chief school officer has cautioned that a majority of the state's schools have hit a plateau or worse.

Enhancing learning supports systems is an essential facet of school improvement and for heightening the achievement of more and more students.

Building on
History:
Using What's
Been Learned

Everyday a wide range of learning, behavioral, physical, and emotional problems interfere with the ability of students to participate effectively and fully benefit from the instruction teachers provide. Even the best schools find that *too many* youngsters are growing up in situations where significant barriers regularly interfere with their reaching full potential.

*We understand the
need, and we have
examples and a
science-base upon
which to build.*

Educators recognize, and research supports, that barriers to learning demand consistent, system-wide attention. Iowa's schools have a long-history of assisting teachers in dealing with problems that interfere with school learning. As was learned with IBI and *Success4*, the need is for a focused, research-based effort that engages schools and their communities working collaboratively at all levels to create a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system that supports student learning and addresses barriers that impede it.

Previous initiatives for enhancing student supports, in our schools and around the country, provide a foundation upon which we can build on our efforts to close the achievement gap and ensure all students have equal educational opportunities. Prominent examples are seen in the range of counseling, psychological, and social service programs and in initiatives for enhancing students' assets and resiliency. A great deal is done, but efforts are fragmented and often marginalized. As a result, they are less effective than they can be. It is time to establish as a priority the development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach for addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development. Fortunately, the science-base provides evidence about what needs to be changed and what new directions hold promise.

The notion of *barriers to learning* encompasses both external and internal factors. Some children bring with them a wide range of problems stemming from restricted opportunities associated with poverty, difficult and diverse family conditions, high rates of mobility, lack of English language skills, violent neighborhoods, problems related to substance abuse, inadequate health care, and lack of enrichment opportunities. Some youngsters also bring with them intrinsic conditions that make learning and performing difficult. As a result, at every grade level there are students who come to school each day not quite ready to perform and learn in the most effective manner. And, student's problems are exacerbated as they internalize the frustrations of confronting barriers to learning and the debilitating effects of performing poorly at school. All this interferes with the teacher's efforts to teach.*

*Clearly, addressing barriers is not at odds with the "paradigm shift" that emphasizes strengths, resilience, assets, and protective factors. Efforts to enhance positive development and improve instruction clearly can improve readiness to learn. However, it is frequently the case that preventing problems also requires direct action to remove or at least minimize the impact of barriers, such as hostile environments and intrinsic problems. Without effective direct intervention, such barriers can continue to get in the way of development and learning.

Learning Supports: The Logic and the Science-Base

Iowa's design reflects a commitment to strengthening learning supports for all students. The specific focus is on a system built on a comprehensive and adaptable learning supports framework that can be fully integrated with efforts to improve instruction and management of resources. Such a framework guides essential new directions for establishing a systemic approach to enhance outcomes for students, families, schools, and neighborhoods.

The logic for policy and systemic changes to enhance learning supports stems from the following basic premises:

Schools Must Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching in Order to Accomplish their Instructional Mission

- The mission of education includes a fundamental commitment to and accountability for academic achievement.
- Children/youth must be healthy, safe, and supported if they are to achieve academically and succeed in school.
- Some students experience significant barriers to learning.
- Student achievement is improved and barriers to learning are alleviated through a system of learning supports that incorporates a full continuum of evidence-based programs and services which ensure safe, health promoting, supportive, and inclusive learning environments.

School-Community-Family Collaboration is Essential

- A full continuum of programs and services transcends what any one system can provide and requires a combination of school and community changes.
- Youngsters thrive and overcome barriers to learning when families are strengthened and assisted to find ways to support their children's education and to pursue their own learning.
- Schools are strengthened when the efforts of community organizations and institutions are results-oriented and include policies, programs, practices, and resources that are aligned with those of schools to improve student achievement.
- Efforts to address barriers to learning are enhanced when interveners are willing to coordinate and integrate their efforts to support academic achievement and reduce fragmentation, counterproductive competition for sparse resources, and marginalization of efforts to provide learning supports.

The logic is clear . . .

Cohesive Leadership and Aligned Policy are Needed at Every Level

- Systems of learning supports require quality leaders at all levels who use effective systems of communication and data management, efficient and effective organization of resources, and well articulated planning.
- Cohesive, aligned policies and practices within a district and among its community partners are essential to effect system changes at schools.
- The role of state, regional, and local agencies is to align, assist, and support local level changes.

Beyond the logic, data show both a clear need and a science- base for learning supports. In addition to lagging reading and math scores, the need is reflected in achievement gaps and high drop out rates for subpopulations of students, such as African Americans and Hispanics, students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch, English language learners, and students with disabilities. The increased accountability and related timelines set by the *No Child Left Behind Act* places increasing pressure on schools where the population of students is diverse.

*... the science-base
is expanding
in volume and
positive results.*

The science-base for learning supports is gleaned from a growing volume of research on the value of schools, families, and communities working together to provide supportive programs and services that enable students to learn and teachers to teach. Findings include improved school attendance, fewer behavior problems, improved inter-personal skills, enhanced student engagement and re-engagement in classroom learning, enhanced achievement, and increased bonding at school and at home.

All this leads to the following conclusion:

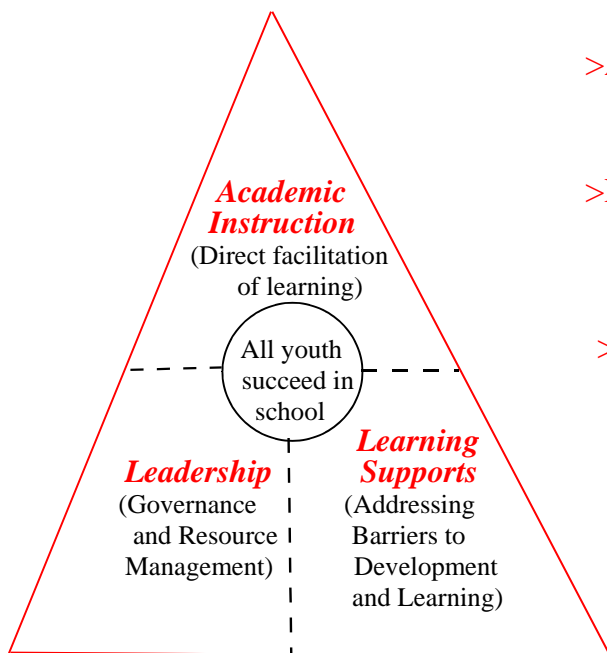
Schools must implement and sustain a fully integrated system of learning supports into school improvement programs and practices. When a comprehensive range of learning supports are provided in a timely and effective manner, fewer students will require more intensive and expensive services. And, the learning, achievement, and performance of all children and youth will improve in ways that enable them to become self sufficient and successful members of a community and workforce.

Meeting the Challenge

The challenge, then, is to create a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system that supports student learning and healthy development and addresses barriers. Developing such a system of learning supports necessitates working in ways that reduce marginalization and fragmentation and minimize counterproductive competition for sparse resources. Toward these ends, we must rethink and redesign our current approach to learning supports with respect to

- C policies
- C intervention frameworks, standards, and accountability indicators
- C infrastructure design at the school level, for a feeder pattern (to achieve economies of scale), and for providing support from the district and community, intermediate regional agencies, and the state's department of education and its agency partners.

Iowa's work draws upon and joins with pioneering initiatives emerging around the country that are rethinking how schools and communities meet the challenge of addressing persistent barriers to student learning. These initiatives reflect a fundamental commitment to a three component framework for school improvement (see the figure). Such a framework encompasses an agenda for developing intervention *systems* to (a) promote healthy development and prevent problems, (b) provide assistance as early as feasible after the onset of problems, and (c) address the needs of students with severe and chronic problems. The three components are:



>**Academic Instruction:** This component represents the people and functions directly related to delivery of academic instruction.

>**Leadership:** This component encompasses those people and functions responsible for the governance and management of the human, material, and financial resources in the education system.

>**Learning Supports:** This component includes the wide array of education personnel who work with families and community partners to ensure that students succeed in school. Their efforts support classroom teachers and instruction by promoting healthy development and working to alleviate barriers that interfere with learning and teaching.

*a component to
address barriers to
learning and teaching*

In developing a component to address barriers to learning and development, a major emphasis is on improving neighborhood, home, school and classroom environments to prevent problems and enhance youngsters' strengths. At the same time, essential supports and assistance are provided those who need something more to address barriers and engage or re-engage them in schooling and *enable* learning. This has led to calling this an *Enabling or Learning Supports Component*. The usefulness of the concept as a broad unifying focal point for policy and practice is evidenced in its adoption by various states and localities around the country.

Whatever the component is called, the goals are the same:

- providing students with comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated learning supports that are accessible, timely, and strength-based so students can achieve in school, be confident and caring, and become contributing citizens in their communities;
- involve families, fellow students, educators, and community members as integral partners in the provision of a supportive, respectful learning environment; and
- integrate the human and financial resources of public and private agencies to create caring communities at each school.

Iowa's design uses the term *Learning Supports component*. The focus of the component begins in the classroom, with differential classroom practices as the base of support for each student and extends beyond classrooms to include school-wide and community resources. Specifically, each school is to have programs to:

- comprehensive,
multifaceted,
and cohesive*
- enhance the ability of the classroom teacher and other to facilitate learning through prevention and early intervention;
 - increase family supports and involvement;
 - provide support for the many transitions experienced by students and their families;
 - expand community partnerships;
 - ensure safe, healthy, and caring environments;
 - enhance child/youth engagement.

Schools and communities are already implementing some programs and services that address the six content areas. Many of these operate in isolation of one another and do not provide a cohesive, comprehensive approach. By viewing the programs along a continuum of student needs, schools and communities are more likely to provide the right services for the right students at the right time. Such a continuum encompasses efforts to positively affect a full spectrum of learning, physical, social-emotional, and behavioral problems in every school and community in Iowa.

*Rethinking
Infrastructure to
Integrate
Learning Supports
Fully into School
Improvement*

Given limited resources, a Learning Supports component is established by deploying, redeploying, and weaving all existing learning support resources together. This requires rethinking infrastructure at each level of the system (local, regional, and state) where decisions are made about such matters

Enhancing a system of learning supports requires strong leadership to steer systemic changes and construct the necessary infrastructure. Establishment and maintenance of a potent learning support component requires continuous, proactive, effective teaming, organization, and accountability.

At each level of the system, Learning Supports component leaders and resource management teams carry out specific *core functions* and processes that fall within two major categories – those intended to **build the capacity of systems** to provide learning supports and those related to the actual **development and implementation of a continuum of learning supports**. In general, the functions of a learning supports system are no different than any continuous improvement planning cycle (e.g., the Iowa Comprehensive School Improvement Planning process); however, in implementation, specific functions related to learning supports will emerge that require rethinking infrastructure at all levels.

*About Learning
Support Resource
Management Teams*

Resource-oriented teams are crucial elements of any infrastructure for implementing a cohesive system of learning supports. Some across the country call such mechanisms *Learning Supports Resource Management Teams* or *Councils*. Properly constituted, a learning supports resource team provides on-site leadership for efforts to comprehensively address programs and practices that facilitate learning and ensure the maintenance and improvement of a multifaceted and integrated approach.

Learning supports resource teams can reduce fragmentation and increase cost-effectiveness by determining and supporting ways that programs and practices can function cohesively. For example, a team can coordinate resources, increase communication among school staff, families, and community partners about available services, and monitor programs to be certain they are functioning effectively and efficiently. More generally, this group can provide leadership in planning and the acquisition, organization, and deployment of resources to guide school and community personnel in evolving their vision for children and youth.

*Policy Support
and Alignment*

A review of existing state policies across systems indicates that

- (1) sufficient policy exists for moving forward
- (2) application for a waiver from a given written policy may be sought
- (3) over time, the situation can be improved markedly by in-depth policy review, analysis, and realignment.

**Getting from
Here to There:**
*Capacity Building,
Getting to Scale,
Sustaining, and
Institutionalizing*

The next challenge is the initial implementation and ultimate scale-up of systems of learning supports in schools and communities across the state. The question is, “*How do we get from here to there?*” Leadership for the endeavor comes from several sources. The Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development will shepherd the effort with the Department of Education taking the lead and other collaborating agencies making essential contributions to the work. Stakeholders across the state will continue to have direct input through these groups and as part of the Iowa network for the National Initiative: New Directions for Student Support.

*Steps to
Implementation:
What Needs
to be Done*

To move the prototype described in this document from the drawing board to implementation will require concentrated action. As delineated in the Iowa design document and highlighted below, each facet and task requires careful planning based on sound intervention fundamentals. This means paying special attention to the problem of the match between changes needed and those who are to change.

Planning

- 1) articulating a *clear, shared vision* for their system of learning supports;
- 2) establishing/adopting *long term results and measures*;
- 3) negotiating formal and informal *partnership agreements*;
- 4) *mapping and analyzing* existing resources for availability, content, and effectiveness;
- 5) reframing student supports into an *infrastructure* for learning supports by
 - dedicating administrative time to learning supports
 - redefining leadership roles and functions to facilitate, guide, and support systemic changes for *ongoing* development of learning supports systems at every level (state, regional, and local),
 - realigning support staff/pupil services personnel roles and functions, and
 - creating or enhancing teams to plan, implement, and evaluate use of resources for a Learning Supports component.

Implementing

- 1) phasing in the six content areas (intervention framework);
- 2) reviewing and revising *policies* to ensure that they are supportive and facilitative of all aspects of a learning supports system;
- 3) integrating resources into a *cohesive and integrated continuum* of school and community interventions;
- 4) providing *ongoing professional development* to equip learning supports personnel with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement a Learning Supports component

Overlapping Phases of Implementation

- 1) *creating readiness* – by enhancing a climate/culture for change,
- 2) *initial implementation* – whereby change is carried out in stages using a well-designed guidance and support infrastructure,
- 3) *sustaining and institutionalization* – accomplished by ensuring there is an infrastructure to maintain and enhance productive changes, and
- 4) *ongoing evolution* – through use of mechanisms to improve quality and provide continuing support.

The above actions should lead to a) more effective deployment of existing resources to reduce fragmentation of services, b) a more cohesive, comprehensive and effective array of interventions to promote healthy development and alleviate barriers to learning, and c) an approach to delivering learning supports to increase student achievement and success in school that are an integral part of the overall improvement efforts of schools and communities.

*Capacity Building
to Implement, Sustain,
and Institutionalize
Learning Supports*

Efforts to create systems of learning supports require much more than implementing demonstrations at a few sites. Improved approaches are only as good as the ability of schools and communities to develop, sustain, and institutionalize them in all their schools. This process often is called diffusion, replication, roll-out, or scale-up. Such a process requires support of policy and pursuit of strategies for creating motivational readiness among a critical mass of stakeholders, especially those most directly responsible for implementation, and for accommodating changes in roles and functions.

*Change Functions
Require Change
Mechanisms*

One way for state and regional agencies to assist local schools in implementing a process to turn existing student support programs and practices into a system of learning supports is to form a *change mechanism*, i.e., a designated team of change agents. Such staff can provide a temporary, but necessary, organizational base and skilled personnel for disseminating a prototype, negotiating decisions about replication, and dispensing the expertise to facilitate implementation of a prototype and eventual scale-up.

In Iowa, in many instances, school improvement action committees (SIACs) perform change agent functions for various aspects of school reform. Guiding the process of creating efficient and effective systems of learning supports, in all likelihood, will require re-thinking and expanding the scope of work they are currently doing and the way that the team interacts with community as part of the decision-making process. Some SIACs already may be performing these functions with respect to Learning Supports. On the other hand, assuming additional responsibilities to oversee another aspect of the school reform change process may be too much for some teams, requiring them to look to others to carry out these functions. A valuable source for such assistance in guiding the change process can lie with community coalitions or existing community planning groups. At the state level, the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development has undertaken this responsibility.

Concluding Comments

As steps now are taken to implement Iowa's design for a system of learning supports in school districts and communities across the state, the challenges are clear, but the intended results are unarguable. Schools, in collaboration with their communities, must wrap supports around students and their teachers. Iowans are up to the challenge; they know that an investment in Iowa's children and youth is an investment in Iowa's future.

Learn More About the *New Directions for Student Support Initiative*

For detailed information on the initiative, click on "New Directions: Student Support" on the homepage of the Center for Mental Health in Schools' website – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>. It provides a list of the co-sponsors, a concept paper, reports and recommendations from the summits, progress updates, guidelines for a student support component at a school, resource aids for new directions, descriptions of trailblazing efforts, and much more.

Interested in being involved in the New Directions for Student Support Initiative?
See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ndannouncement.htm> or email smhp@ucla.edu
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