New Directions for Student Support:

A Comprehensive Learning Supports System

Q & A

The following addresses five frequently asked questions that arise in discussing efforts to ensure schools have a *Comprehensive Learning Supports System* in place.

1) Why is a Comprehensive Learning Supports System an imperative?

2) What needs to be done to make such a component a reality?

3) What does such a component need to look like at a school?

4) What's the research-base for such a component?

5) What will it cost?

> Why is a Comprehensive Learning Supports System an imperative?

> As the Carnegie Task Force on Education has stressed:
> *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.*

- *Leaving No Child Left Behind.* Schools need a better system of learning supports to increase the likelihood that *ALL* students have an equal opportunity to succeed.

- *Enabling Schools to be Effective.* All schools, and especially those high priority schools "in need of improvement," must enhance how they use the considerable resources they expend in addressing barriers to student learning (see Exhibit 1).

Available Data Underscore the Nature and Necessity of Meeting the Challenge.

>National findings related to high school graduation indicate that nearly one-third of all public high school students fail to graduate[1]

>Findings indicate that one-quarter to one-half of all beginning teachers leave teaching within four years and many do so because of the lack of an adequate system of learning supports[2]

>In most states, a significant proportion of schools are designated as "High Priority" (previously Low Performing) Schools

>Evidence is growing that when test score gains are achieved, they mainly occur for young students, are related to noncomplex skills, and tend to plateau after a district shows modest gains over a three year period –
(http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/plateau.pdf)

> **What needs to be done to make such a component a reality?**

- *Establish Policy for a Learning Support Component and Make Schools Accountable for How Resources for Learning Supports are Expended.*

    School improvement efforts must focus on better instruction and also on enhancing how a school addresses barriers to learning. For this to happen, policy should be established that encompasses greater accountability for using existing resources to develop an effective component of learning supports at every school (see Exhibit 2, and also see examples)

- *A Concise and Coherent Approach.*

    To guide development of a comprehensive learning support system, it is essential to provide a concise and coherent framework for learning support activity at a school (see Exhibit 3)

- *Moving Forward.*

    Developing a comprehensive learning support system calls for

    >reframing the support staff roles and functions

    >redeploying some existing resources by reducing fragmentation, redundancy, and the overemphasis on expensive services

    >redesigning infrastructure mechanisms from the school level on up through the state Department of Education

    >addressing capacity building and systemic change considerations

    >accountability reviews

> **What does such a component need to look like at a school?**

    See Exhibit 4 for a brief description.

> **What's the research-base for such a component?**

    An extensive and growing body of literature indicates the value of providing supportive programs and services. Enabling students to learn and teachers to teach improves school attendance, reduces behavior problems, improves interpersonal skills, enhances achievement, and increases bonding at school and at home.[3] A recent statewide example comes from California where data indicate a significant relationship across secondary schools between the state's *Academic Performance Index* (API) scores and three-quarters of the survey indicators on the *Healthy Kids Survey* – (http://www.wested.org/chks/pdf/factsheet.pdf)

> What will it cost?

- *No New Dollars.*

A comprehensive learning support system can be established by reworking how current student support resources are used.[4] The emphasis is on redeploying existing resources by

>reframing the roles and functions of existing student support staff

>reducing fragmentation and redundancy

>reducing the overemphasis on expensive services.[5]

> *What the best and wisest parent wants for (her)/his own child that must the community want for all of its children. Any other idea . . . is narrow and unlovely.*
> John Dewey

Endnotes

1.Who Graduates? Who Doesn't (2004). The Urban Institute, Education Policy Center. Online at – http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410934_WhoGraduates.pdf

2.Benner, A. D. (2000). "The Cost of Teacher Turnover." Austin, Texas: Texas Center for Educational Research. Online at http://www.sbec.state.tx.us/SBECOnline/txbess/turnoverrpt.pdf >>Hanushek, E, Kain, J., & Rivkin, A. (in press). "Why Public Schools Lose Teachers." *Journal of Human Resources*. >>MacDonald, D. (1999) "Teacher Attrition: A Review of Literature." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 15:839-848. >>Tye, B. & O''Brien, L (2002). "Why Are Experienced Teachers Leaving the Profession?" *Phi Delta Kappan 84,* 24-32.

3.See *Addressing Barriers to Student Learning & Promoting Healthy Development: A Usable Research-Base* online at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/BarriersBrief.pdf. Also see Lists of Empirically Supported/ evidence Based Interventions for School-aged Children and Adolescents annotated at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/aboutmh/annotatedlist.pdf

4.The systemic changes needed can be underwritten in many districts through the provisions in the No Child Left Behind Act and in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act that focus on using some of the allocated funds for integration of programs and services (e.g., to support an facilitator/coordinator to enhance their systems for student support in ways that lead to a comprehensive, integrated, and cohesive component at school, cluster, and district levels).

5. As the in-classroom and school-wide approaches emerge, the need for out-of-classroom referrals will decline. This allows for rapid and early response when a student is having problems, and it enables student support staff to work more effectively in linking students up with community services.

Exhibit 1. Considerable resources currently are being expended to address barriers to learning, with too little effectiveness.

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

Motivationally
ready & able

No Barriers

Not very
motivated;
lacking
prerequisite
knowledge
& skills;
different
learning rates
& styles;
minor
vulnerabilities

Barriers
to
Learning

*Instructional
Component*

(a) Classroom
Teaching
+
(b) Enrichment
Activity

ACCOUNTABILITY

Desired
Outcomes

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

HIGH STANDARDS

Too few students engage/re-engage
with classroom instruction.

Avoidant;
very deficient
in current
capabilities;
has a disability;
major health
problems

Currently, no component, no system –
fragmented and marginalized **programs/services**

*Which of these
addresses barriers to
student learning?*

Psychological Testing

Special Education

Pupil Services

Violence & Crime Prevention

Juvenile Court Services

Community-Based Organizations

Mental Health Services

HIV/AIDS Services

Child Protective Services

Social Services

Pregnancy Prevention

After-School Programs

Physical Education

Health Education

HIV/AIDS Prevention

Clinic

Health Services

Nutrition Education

School Lunch Program

Drug Prevention

Counseling

Drug Services

Smoking Cessation For Staff

Codes of Discipline

SCHOOL

Adapted from: *Health is Academic: A guide to Coordinated School Health Programs* (1998).
Edited by E. Marx & S.F. Wooley with D. Northrop. New York: Teachers College Press.
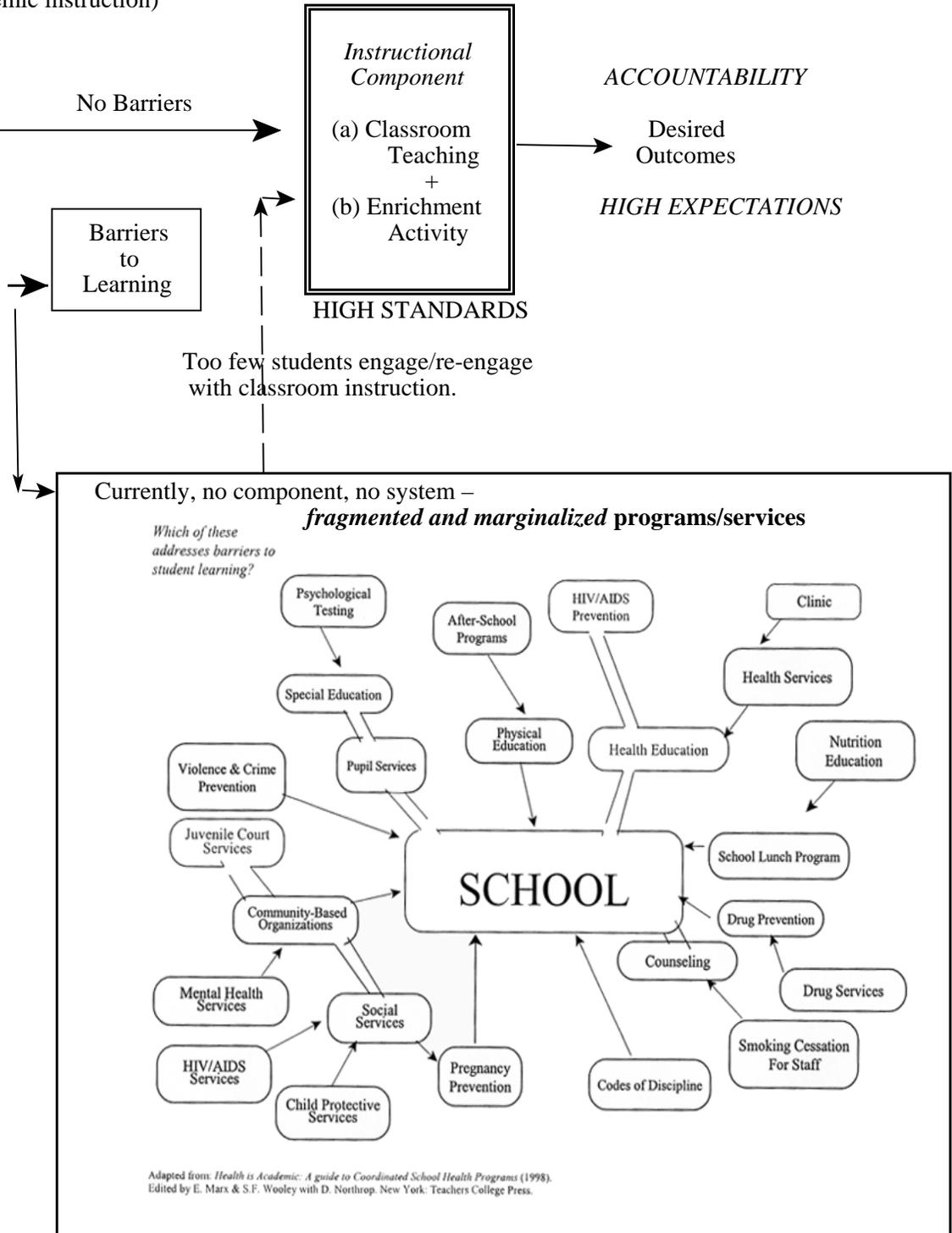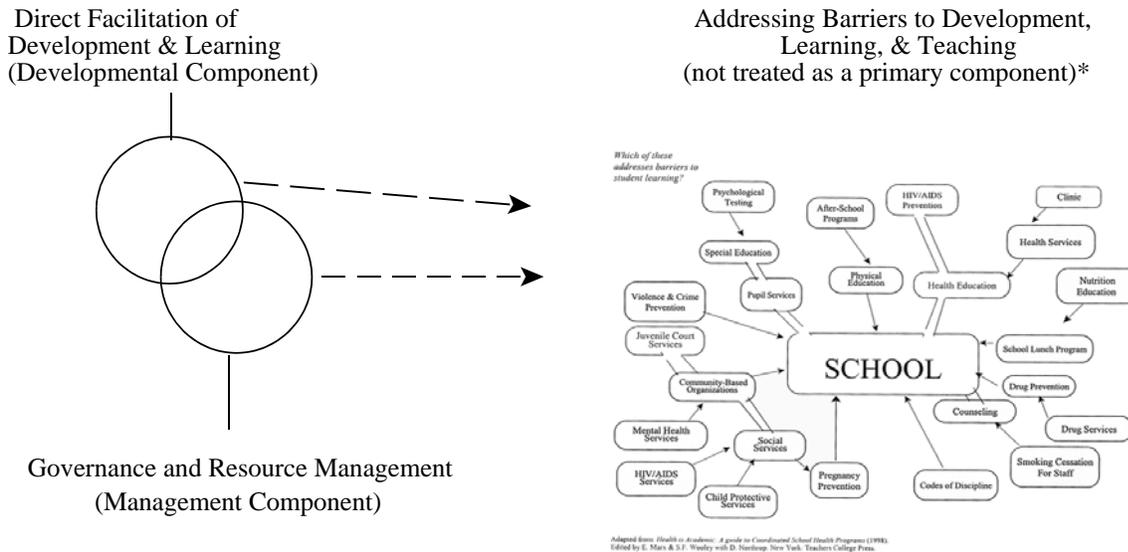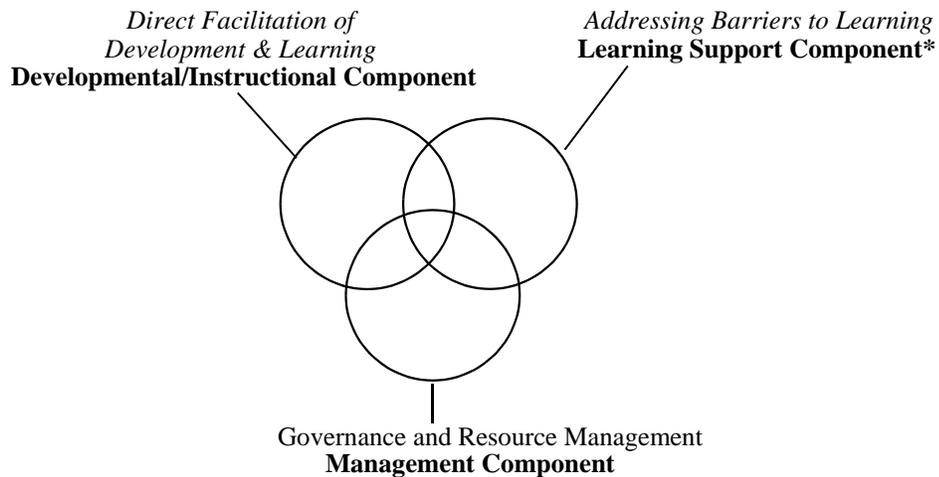
Exhibit 2. Moving from a two- to a three-component approach to school improvement.

(a) Two components and fragmented and marginalized support services.

Direct Facilitation of
Development & Learning
(Developmental Component)

Addressing Barriers to Development,
Learning, & Teaching
(not treated as a primary component)*

Which of these
addresses barriers to
student learning?

Psychological Testing

After-School Programs

HIV/AIDS Prevention

Clinic

Special Education

Physical Education

Health Education

Health Services

Nutrition Education

Violence & Crime Prevention

Pupil Services

Juvenile Court Services

School Lunch Program

Community-Based Organizations

SCHOOL

Drug Prevention

Mental Health Services

Social Services

Counseling

Drug Services

HIV/AIDS Services

Pregnancy Prevention

Codes of Discipline

Smoking Cessation For Staff

Child Protective Services

Adapted from: Health is Academic: A guide to Coordinated School Health Programs (1998).
Edited by E. Marx & S.F. Wooley with D. Northrop. New York: Teachers College Press.

Governance and Resource Management
(Management Component)

*While not treated as a primary and essential component,
every school offers some school-owned student "support"
programs and services – some of which links with community-
owned resources. All the activity, however, remains
marginalized and fragmented in policy and practice.

- -

(b) Turning support services into a Comprehensive Learning Support System.

*Direct Facilitation of
Development & Learning*
Developmental/Instructional Component

Addressing Barriers to Learning
Learning Support Component*

Governance and Resource Management
Management Component

*Learning support is established in policy and practice as
primary and essential and is developed into a
comprehensive system by weaving together school and
community resources.

Exhibit 3. A learning support component to address barriers to learning and enhance healthy development at a school site.

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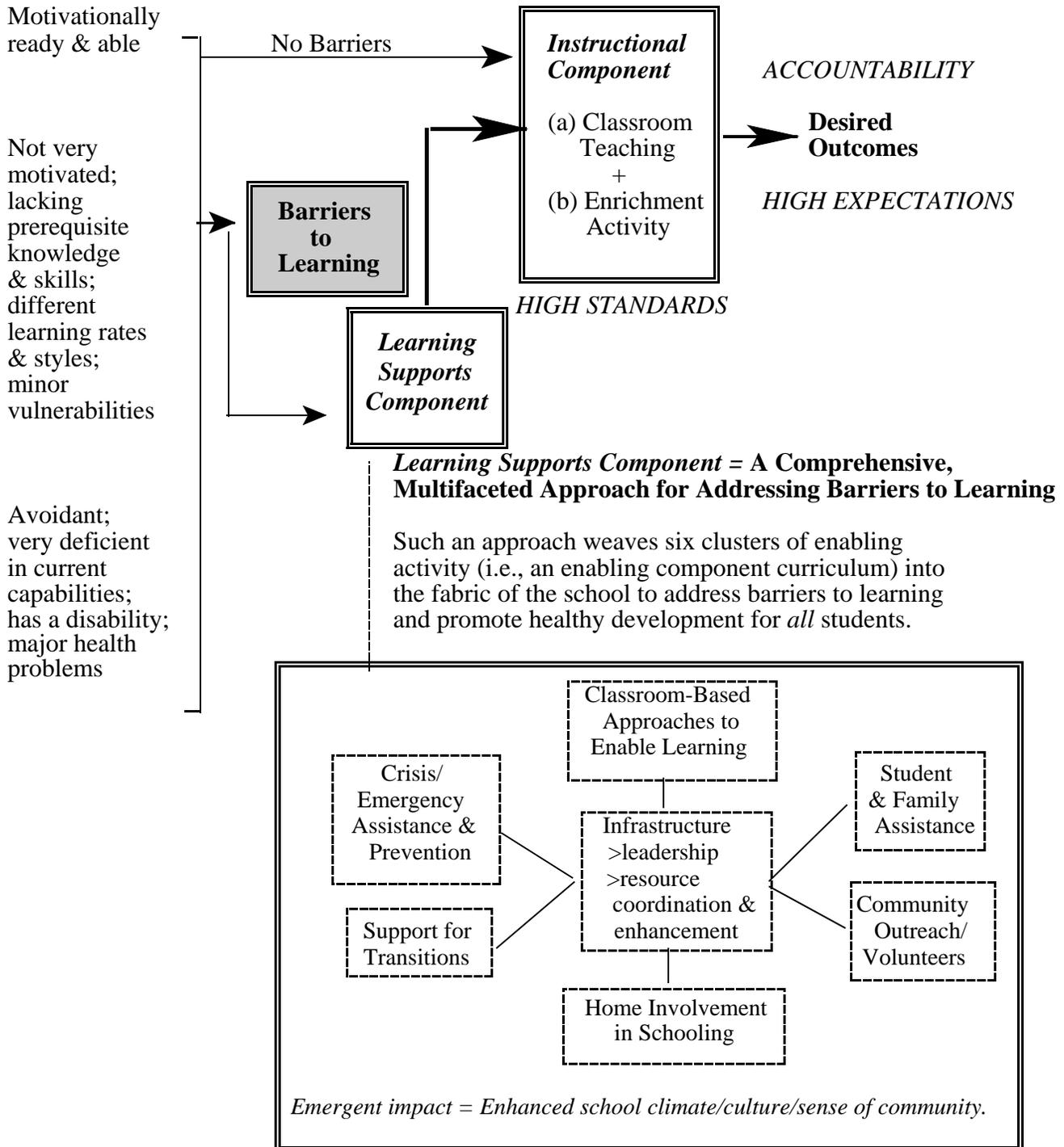 response to academic instruction)

Motivationally
ready & able

No Barriers

Instructional Component

(a) Classroom Teaching
+
(b) Enrichment Activity

ACCOUNTABILITY

Desired Outcomes

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Not very
motivated;
lacking
prerequisite
knowledge
& skills;
different
learning rates
& styles;
minor
vulnerabilities

Barriers to Learning

HIGH STANDARDS

Learning Supports Component

Avoidant;
very deficient
in current
capabilities;
has a disability;
major health
problems

Learning Supports Component = **A Comprehensive, Multifaceted Approach for Addressing Barriers to Learning**

Such an approach weaves six clusters of enabling activity (i.e., an enabling component curriculum) into the fabric of the school to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development for *all* students.

Classroom-Based Approaches to Enable Learning

Crisis/ Emergency Assistance & Prevention

Student & Family Assistance

Infrastructure
>leadership
>resource coordination & enhancement

Support for Transitions

Community Outreach/ Volunteers

Home Involvement in Schooling

Emergent impact = Enhanced school climate/culture/sense of community.

Exhibit 4

What does such a component need to look like at a school?

A Comprehensive Learning Support System is conceived as a primary and essential facet of school improvement. The aim is to ensure that every school develops a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive component to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development. Given limited resources, such a component is established by deploying, redeploying, and weaving all existing learning support resources together.

A school with a learning support component redesigns its infrastructure to establish an administrative leader to guide the component's development and be accountable for daily implementation, monitoring, and problem solving. Another facet of the infrastructure is a resource-oriented team that helps establish and evolve the component over a period of years. The administrator and the team use the CPLSS framework in planning and implementing programs in all six content areas (see Exhibit 3), with the aim of establishing an effective continuum of systems to

- promote healthy development and prevent problems
- respond to problems as soon after onset as is feasible
- provide intensive care.

There also are mechanisms for responding when students are identified as having problems. In each instance, an analysis is made of the reasons for the problems. For most students, the problems are resolved through minor situational and program changes. Those for whom such strategies are insufficient are provided additional assistance first in the classroom. For those whose problems require more intensive help, referrals for specialized assistance are made, processed, and interventions are set in motion and carefully monitored and coordinated.

Because there is an emphasis on programs and activities that create a school-wide culture of caring and nurturing, students, families, staff, and the community feel the school is a welcoming and supportive place, accommodating of diversity, and committed to promoting equal opportunities for all students to succeed at school. When problems arise, they are responded to positively, quickly, and effectively. Morale is high.

A Typical Example of Focusing on Helping the Teacher with Student Re-engagement, Rather than Overemphasing Discipline and Referral for Services

Matt, a third grader, has not been doing well at school. He often is in trouble on the school playground before school and during lunch. Before the component was established, his teacher constantly had to discipline him and send him to the principal's office. He had been referred to the Student Success Team but he was among a long list of students who were in line to be reviewed. Now, the focus is on how to enhance what goes on in the classroom and on school-wide changes that minimize negative encounters; this minimizes the need for classroom management, discipline, and referral out for expensive special services.

The focus on enhancing teacher capacity to reengage students in daily learning activities is helping Matt's teacher learn more about matching his individual interests

and skills and how to design the instructional day to provide additional supports from peers and community volunteers. Rather than seeing the solution in terms of discipline, she learns how to understand what is motivating Matt's problem and is able to provide more a personalized approach to instruction and extra in-classroom support that will reengage Matt in learning. Over time, all student support staff (all professional staff who are not involved in classroom instruction) will be trained to go into the classroom to help the teacher learn and implement new approaches designed not just for Matt, but for all students who are not well-engaged in classroom learning.

At the same time, the focus on enhancing support for transition times (such as before school and lunch) increases the recreational and enrichment opportunities available for all students so that they have positive options for interaction. Staff involved in playground supervision are specifically asked to work with Matt to help him engage in an activity that interests him (e.g., a sport's tournament, an extramural club activity). They will monitor his involvement to ensure he is truly engaged, and they, along with one of the student support staff (e.g., school psychologist, counselor, social worker, nurse) will use the opportunity to help him and other students learn any interpersonal skills needed to interact well with peers.

Newcomers: One Example of Support for Transitions and Home Invovlement

To enhance family involvement in schooling, special attention is placed on enhancing welcoming and social support strategies for new students and families. Student support staff work with office staff to develop welcoming programs and establish social support networks (e.g., peer buddy systems for students; parent-parent connections). As a result, newcomers (and all others) are greeted promptly and with an inviting attitude when they come into the school. Those who do not have the correct enrollment records are helped to access what is needed. Parents are connected with another parent who helps them learn about school and neighborhood resources. Upon entering the new classroom, teachers connect the newcomer with a trained peer buddy who will stick with the newcomer for a few weeks while they learn the ropes. Support staff will work with each teacher to identify any student who has not made a good transition, and they will determine why and work together and with the family to turn the situation around.

Crisis prevention:

To reduce the number of crises, student support staff analyze what is preventable (usually related to human relations problems) and then design a range of school-wide prevention approaches. Among these are strategies for involving all school personnel (credentialed and classified) in activities that promote positive interactions and natural opportunities for learning prosocial behavior and mutual respect.

Fewer Referrals, Better Response:

As the in-classroom and school-wide approaches emerge, the need for out-of-classroom referrals declines. This allows for rapid and early response when a student is having problems, and it enables student support staff to work more effectively in linking students up with community services when necessary.