

What Might a Fully Functioning Learning Supports Component Look Like at a School?

Hawaii has legislated what it calls a Comprehensive Student Support System (CSSS). CSSS is intended to ensure that every school develops a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated component to address barriers to learning and to promote healthy development. The following outline of what a fully functioning enabling or learning supports component might look like at a school is adapted from a description developed for use by CSSS.

A school with a learning supports component integrates the component as a primary and essential facet of school improvement. Given limited resources, such a component is established by deploying, redeploying, and weaving all existing learning support resources together.

The school has redesigned its infrastructure to establish an administrative leader who guides the component's development and is accountable for daily implementation, monitoring, and problem solving. There is a team (e.g., a Learning Supports Resource Team) focused on ensuring that all relevant resources are connected together to install an integrated continuum of interventions over a period of years. The team maps and analyzes available resources, sets priorities, and organizes work groups to plan program development. As illustrated in Figure 1 the goal is to establish effective *systems* for:

- Promoting healthy development and preventing problems
- Responding to problems as soon after onset as is feasible
- Providing specialized assistance and care

The work involves creating the continuum in keeping with the content or "curriculum" framework the school has adopted for its enabling or learning supports component (e.g., see the six arenas illustrated in Figure 2).

While the focus of the team is on resource use and program development, it also ensures that effective mechanisms are in operation for responding rapidly when specific students are identified as having mild to moderate learning, behavior, and emotional problems. For most students, the problems can be addressed through relatively straightforward situational and program changes and problem-solving strategies.

Based on analyses of their response to such interventions, additional assistance in the classroom is provided to those for whom these first methods are insufficient. Those whose problems persist are referred for additional and sometimes specialized assistance. Before such interventions are set in motion, in-depth analyses are made of the causes of student problems in order to ensure appropriate assistance is planned. All special interventions are carefully monitored and coordinated. Through a sequential strategy that begins with the least intervention needed and that gauges students' responses at every stage, there is a significant reduction in the number requiring intensive help and referral for specialized assistance.

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 perceive school as a welcoming and supportive place. When problems arise, they are responded to positively, quickly, and effectively. Morale is high among faculty and students alike.

The following should be understood as examples of the types of interventions that might be used with any student who experiences barriers to learning. Remember the point is to ensure a full continuum is available at schools so that the least number of intervention strategies are implemented and students' responses to intervention can be used to gauge whether more intensive help and referrals for specialized assistance are required. When such a sequential approach is followed, schools can expect a significant reduction in the flow of referrals for specialized assistance.

EXAMPLE/Focusing on helping the teacher with student re-engagement, rather than overemphasizing discipline and referral for services

The Grade 3 teacher has several students who had not been doing well at school. They often were in trouble on the playground before school and during lunch. Before the learning supports component was established, the teacher constantly had to discipline and send them to the principal's office. They had been referred to the "student success team" but were just put on a long list waiting 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 approach minimizes the need for classroom management, discipline, and outside referral for expensive special services.

The focus on enhancing teacher capacity to re-engage students in daily learning activities is helping the teacher learn more about matching 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 fostering problems and is able to provide a more personalized approach to instruction and extra in-classroom support that will re-engage the students. Over time, all student support staff (all professional staff who are not involved in classroom instruction) are trained to go into the classroom to help the teacher learn and implement new engagement approaches.

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 help engage the students in an activity that interests them (e.g., a sports tournament or an extramural club activity). They monitor involvement to ensure the students are truly engaged, and along with one of the student support staff (e.g., school psychologist, counselor, social worker, nurse), the playground staff use the opportunity to help these and other students learn any interpersonal skills needed to interact well with peers.

Newcomers: One example of support for transitions and home involvement

To increase 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 without correct enrollment records are helped to access what they need. 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 sticks with the newcomer for a few weeks while he or she learns the ropes.

Support staff work with each teacher to identify any student who hasn't made a good transition. Together they determine why and work with the family to turn things 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 pro-social 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 with community services when necessary.

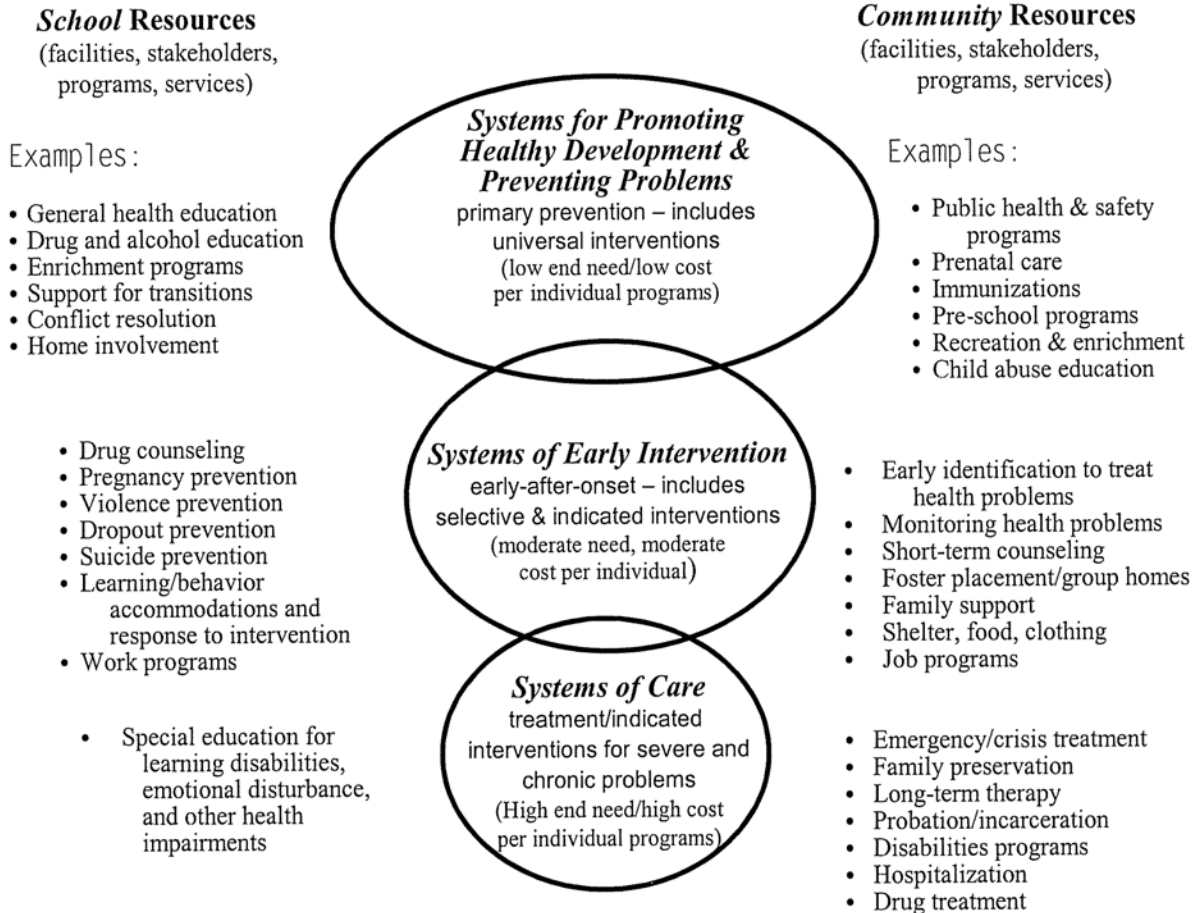
Activity

Looking at the school you know ...

How close are schools to having a comprehensive system of learning supports? To answer this, see the toll for mapping and analyzing learning supports – online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf>

Figure 1. Interconnected Systems for Meeting the Needs of All Children

- > Providing a *Continuum of School-community Programs & Services*
- > Ensuring use of the *Least Intervention Needed*



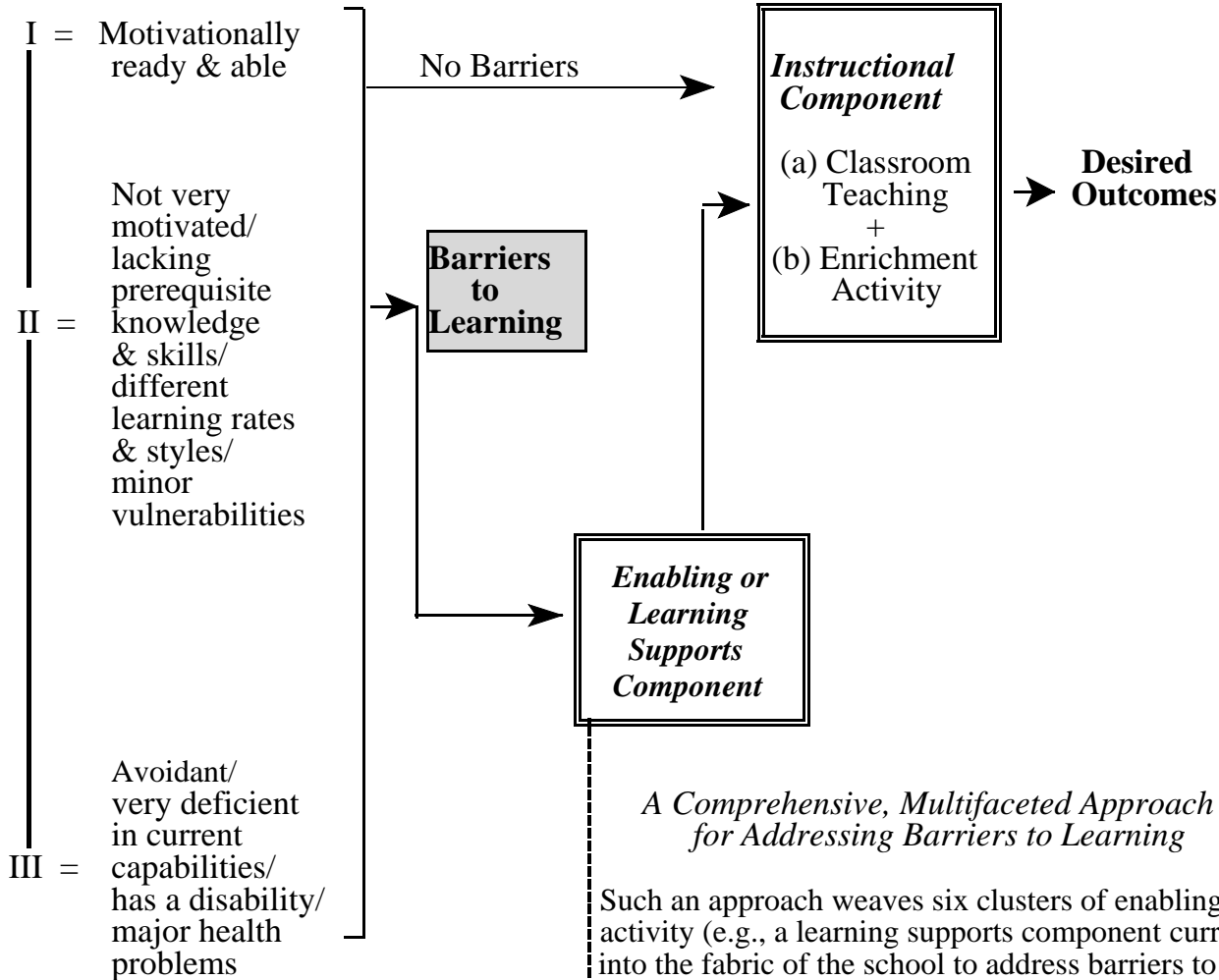
Systemic collaboration* is essential to establish interprogram connections on a daily basis and over time to ensure seamless intervention within each system and among *systems of prevention, systems of early intervention, and systems of care.*

*Such collaboration involves horizontal and vertical restructuring of programs and services
 (a) within jurisdictions, school districts, and community agencies (e.g., among departments, divisions, units, schools, clusters of schools)
 (b) between jurisdictions, school and community agencies, public and private sectors; among schools; among community agencies

Figure 2. An Enabling Component to Address Barriers to Learning & Enhance Healthy Development at a School Site

Range of Learners

(categorized in terms of their response to academic instruction at any given point in time)



A Comprehensive, Multifaceted Approach for Addressing Barriers to Learning

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

