
Why Aren't the Leading Advocates for School Improvement Talking About Transforming Student and Learning Supports?

Besides analyzing state and district school improvement plans, our center reviews the calls for system changes from various university centers, foundations, institutes, and other high visibility advocates. With respect to student and learning supports, the trend we see is for approaches that tinker with current efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. (See, for example, the changes supported by foundations such as *Gates, Carnegie, Ford, and Chan Zuckerberg*.) Such tinkering continues and sometimes exacerbates the ongoing marginalization and fragmentation of essential supports.

While everyone is concerned about improving how schools prevent and correct learning, behavior, and emotional problems, advocated changes generally tend to be limited to more of the same. Examples are calls for implementing more universal prevention strategies, screening for problems, hiring a few more support staff (e.g., counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, school resource officers), promoting the establishment of more school-based health centers, integrating and coordinating services, and developing community schools.

All this is well-intentioned and helpful to some students in need. However, it is not enough to effectively promote whole child development, improve school climate, and enhance equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school.

If you have access to any of the leading advocates for school improvement, please contact them and ask that they broaden their thinking to embrace fundamental system change related to student/learning supports. In particular, they need to call for policies that

(1) coalesce all that schools do to (a) address barriers to learning and teaching and (b) re-engage disconnected students into a unified component

(2) ensure that the unified component is a primary and essential facet of all school improvement efforts (i.e., treated on a par with the instructional and management components)

and
(3) rework operational infrastructures at state and local education agencies and at schools so that the unified component is developed into a comprehensive and equitable system of learning supports.

For more details on improving the system of supports, refer them to:

>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*

>*Improving School Improvement*

Both accessible at: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html .

For a brief discussion about rethinking MTSS, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/fall19.pdf>

Anyone ready to take local action for systemic change will find some first steps at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsnew/call.htm> .