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From the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA

### ***Why Are So Few Educators Focused on Transforming Student Supports?***

This question points to deep systemic problems in education.

Schools face relentless pressure to raise academic achievement, yet a critical reality is widely given short shrift - *barriers to learning and teaching undermine classroom instruction*. As every school experiences, students usually cannot learn effectively when such barriers go unaddressed.

### ***Given this wide ranging reality: Why Isn't Transforming Student Supports a Priority?***

Several factors explain why most educators haven't made this a major focus:

***Instruction vs. Support Divide:*** Educational culture—and policy—treats “instruction” and “support” as separate components, funding and regulating them differently and, in effect, *marginalizing* student/learning supports in school improvement efforts.

***Accountability Pressures:*** Standardized test scores dominate accountability systems, pushing schools to prioritize instructional improvement over essential student supports.

***Supports as Add-Ons:*** Student supports are often viewed as peripheral rather than integral to teaching and learning. They're siloed into departments or handled by specialists.

***Fragmented Thinking and Actions:*** Many educators see supports as isolated programs (e.g., PBIS, MTSS tiers) rather than as part of a unified, comprehensive system.

***Resource Concerns:*** Time, staffing, and funding constraints make systemic change feel overwhelming.

***Ironically, transforming student/learning supports isn't about spending more***—it's about using existing resources more effectively to help students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Current approaches are marginalized, fragmented, and often compete for limited time and resources. Without systemic change, vulnerable students will continue to fall through the cracks. Equity depends on access to a unified and comprehensive system of student/learning supports.

### **Moving Forward**

Let's agree that traditional supports help, but they're fragmented, reactive, and reach too few students. What's missing is a systemic approach that integrates student/learning supports into the school's core mission which is to effectively teach all students.

Educators can start to address what's missing by:

- *Adopting Whole-School, Whole-Student Lenses*: Reframe student/learning supports as an essential component for effectively instructing all students.
- *Mapping Existing Resources*: Identify all current interventions and personnel (many schools have more than they realize).
- *Creating a Learning Supports Leadership Team*: Include school and community collaborators to develop a plan for (a) unifying supports and (b) building a comprehensive and equitable system.
- *Starting Small, Thinking Big*: Begin with priority needs, then expand systematically to address other barriers to learning and teaching in collaboration with families and communities.

Transforming student/learning supports is about leveraging what we already have to move forward potently toward ensuring every student can engage, progress, and thrive.

### **Resource Aids for Moving Forward**

#### ***Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions***

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefguide.pdf>

#### ***An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports: A Month by Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing Resources***

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/agendapaper.pdf>