

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

How federal agencies contribute to fragmenting the role schools play in addressing the problems of children and youth

Many federal agencies provide grants and other resources for schools. For some time, policy makers have recognized that these agencies, *at the very least*, need to coordinate their efforts to avoid the prevailing fragmentation of efforts. (The larger need, of course, is for collaboration to fully coalesce intervention resources and to focus on transforming systems where agency missions and visions overlap.)

A current example of federal efforts with relevance for schools is seen in SAMHSA's *Interim Strategic Plan* https://www.samhsa.gov/about-us/interim-strategic-plan?utm_source=SAMHSA&utm_campaign=c3cc3915c9-SAMHSA_Announcement_2022_11_10_1601831&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_ee1c4b138c-c3cc3915c9-167791969

The plan delineates five priority areas: (a) Preventing Overdose, (b) Enhancing Access to Suicide Prevention and Crisis Care, (c) Promoting Resilience and Emotional Health for Children, (d) Youth and Families, (e) Integrating Behavioral and Physical Health Care, Strengthening the Behavioral Health Workforce.

With respect to children and youth, schools have a major role to play in all this.

Unfortunately, SAMHSA still doesn't indicate a strategic way it will work more effectively with the Department of Education and other federal agencies to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable plan that moves policy and practice ahead in how schools address such matters.

The tendency at SAMHSA (in the past and apparently in the future) is for each priority to be addressed as a discrete rather than as a set of overlapping concerns. This approach perpetuates intervention fragmentation at schools and undermines efforts to end the marginalization in school improvement policy of how schools work to prevent and ameliorate student problems.

For many years, our Center has received a steady stream of frustrated comments about the situation at schools related to all this. And the situation has been exacerbated as a result of COVID-19. (Considerable concern has been expressed about the capability of schools to deal with the increasing number of students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems.)

The challenge at this time is to escape old ways of thinking about these matters. New directions are essential.

At the very least, federal agencies need to include in their strategic planning

- (1) how schools can integrate funding from separate agencies and
- (2) ways to support sustainable development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for preventing and ameliorating student problems.

For related resources, see:

>About Integrating Funding – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fundinginteg.pdf>

>Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefguide.pdf>

>Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change

>http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

Please share with interested colleagues. And if you want us to send information to anyone, just let us know.

At a minimum, let us know your thoughts about direct action to elevate student and learning supports in policy as a nonmarginalized and unified system. That will help us in mobilizing others.

Send your ideas for action and any information about what you see happening to Ltaylor@ucla.edu or to adelman@psych.ucla.edu

Best wishes and be well,

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