

About the Daily Supports Teachers Need

In the October 1, 2022 of *Educational Leadership*, teacher and director of professional learning Elizabeth Dampf writes: “It’s About Skillsets and Support, Not Sainthood” <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/its-about-skillsets-and-support-not-sainthood>

Her message is:

“Sainthood is not required for capable instruction. Let’s shift the focus instead onto the skills that our students deserve in their teachers. This would break the cycle of guilt felt by overwhelmed teachers—veteran and novice alike—who find themselves disliking their jobs but unable to admit it. It may draw attention to the need for additional social support where teachers simply cannot shoulder any more responsibilities. Most important, it can engender a cultural respect for the profession of teaching. This cultural respect is key, for it may incentivize smart, driven people to enter the profession.”

She concludes her article by stating:

“The way we, as a society, talk about teaching is powerful. It can paint a picture in the minds of our community, our students, and even those in the profession. To fix the many issues of morale, attrition, and supply pipelines the industry faces, we must reckon with our own mythology and construct a more sustainable language.”

We commend her for her efforts to improve the way teachers are viewed.

And we want to take her concern about SUPPORT a few steps further.

One of the debilitating ways society talks about teaching is that it creates a myth and expectation that teachers can do it all alone. And when Elizabeth Dampf mentions ‘support,’ the main emphasize is on SOCIAL SUPPORT. That’s important -- but let’s not ignore the need for daily supports that address factors interfering with learning and teaching.

What teachers tell us is that they are encountering an increasing number of students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems, and they need better supports to address the factors interfering with their efforts to teach these youngsters.

It is patently unfair and unreasonable to believe that addressing the wide range of students having problems can be done by teachers alone. School districts hire a range of student/learning support professionals (counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, etc.), and more than ever, these stakeholders have a critical role to play. The policy focus on multi-tiered student supports (e.g., MTSS), community schools, and school-based health centers also highlights the need.

The unfortunate reality is that the way schools have implemented student/learning supports has done too little to address barriers to learning and teaching. So it is not surprising that discussions of improving the situation for teachers tends to further marginalize the role of student/learning support professionals.

For teachers to be well supported as they encounter learning, behavior, and emotional problems, schools must fundamentally transform the role they play in addressing factors interfering with learning and teaching.

Based on our research over many years, we have shared prototypes for transforming current student/learning supports into a more unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students and families. For example, see

>*Rethinking Student and Learning Supports* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fall22.pdf>

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

We doubt that anyone seriously argues against the importance of enhancing teacher capabilities (e.g., skillsets). However, discussion of improving the situation for teachers must not proceed in ways that ignore all the other professional educators who are essential to a school's success. Ignoring these resources is particularly unfortunate for teachers since it perpetuates the myth held by the general public that teachers working alone can end learning and behavior problems, close the achievement and equity gaps, increase graduate rates, and ensure students are career and college ready.

Please share with interested colleagues.