

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

A New Year's Resolution for All Who Want to Improve How Schools Address Learning, Behavior, and Emotional Problems

2023 can be the year when schools transform student/learning supports.

To this end, we hope you will resolve to advocate with district policy makers that they should adopt/adapt the following policy (which is based on a variety of efforts around the country).

A prototype district policy for improving how schools address learning, behavior, and emotional problems:

Rationale -- The Governing Board and the Superintendent recognize that for some of our students, improvements in instruction and curricula are necessary but not sufficient. We recognize that the economic, neighborhood, family, school, peer, and personal circumstances can create barriers to teaching and learning. We believe that the role of schools and the district is to promote development of the whole child and ensure equity of opportunity. This includes addressing barriers to learning and teaching by creating a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of supports, referred to as a learning supports component, that is fully interwoven with other District wide and site level school improvement efforts.

We recognize that school, home, and community resources combined together and developed into a comprehensive system can support development of the whole child, can address barriers to learning and teaching, and reengage disconnected students. All children, youth, and families members should have equal access to interventions and resources in proportion to their needs. The successful development of such a system is essential to efforts to improve school climate.

With this policy statement, we commit to developing a unified, comprehensive, equitable, and systemic learning supports component for every school. Such a component joins the instructional and management/governance components as the third primary and essential facet of school improvement.

Details -- It is the intent of the Board of Education and the Superintendent that a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System of Learning Supports be fully interwoven with other school and district program efforts to improve instruction and maximize the use of resources at individual schools. All interventions are to be tailored to the diversity of students and families in our schools.

Learning supports are defined as the resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual assistance intended to enable all pupils to have an equal opportunity for success at school. To enable effective use of learning supports, school and community resources are unified in a learning supports component and fully integrated with instructional efforts and interventions and professional development. A learning supports component is deployed in classrooms and schoolwide to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

The Superintendent shall establish an administrative leader and leadership team to prepare a District design and strategic plan for developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable Learning Supports Component that facilitates the establishment of such a support system at each school. The design and plan shall clarify how operational infrastructures can be reworked to fully integrate learning support system administrative leadership and mechanisms at District and school levels and ways for clusters (e.g., feeder patterns) of schools and central office operations to support school site efforts (e.g. helping schools achieve economies of scale and implement practices that effectively improve classroom operations and student learning). The design and plan shall also focus on ways to further promote collaboration with a wide range of community resources at the classroom, school, cluster, and central office levels.

The component design should encompass a continuum of interventions that mesh with community efforts to prevent problems, respond as early as feasible after a problem surfaces, and provide for students with severe and chronic problems. The following six domains of in-classroom and schoolwide learning supports should be considered when establishing the continuum:

- In-classroom supports.** The focus on in-classroom supports stresses embedding student and learning supports into regular classroom strategies to enable learning and teaching. The intent is to prevent and intervene as soon as problems arise and reduce the need for out-of-class referrals. The process involves teachers working collaboratively with each other, with student support staff, volunteers, and others to

 - >ensure instruction is personalized with an emphasis on enhancing intrinsic motivation and social-emotional development for all students, especially those experiencing mild to moderate learning and behavior problems
 - >expand the range of curricular and instructional options and choices and provide small group and independent learning options
 - >reduce negative interactions and over-reliance on social control
 - >reengage those who have become disengaged from instruction
 - >provide learning accommodations and supports as necessary
 - >use response to intervention in applying special assistance
 - >address external barriers to learning with a focus on prevention and early intervention
- Supports for transitions.** The intent is to support transitions that occur daily and over the year (e.g., supporting daily transitions before, during, and after school; welcoming and social support programs for newcomers; school and classroom adjustment programs; assisting students and families as they negotiate the many hurdles related to reentry or initial entry into school; school and grade changes; program transitions; counseling for vocational and college transition accessing special assistance for vulnerable populations, including, but not limited to, those in homeless education, migrant education, and special education).
- Supports to increase home connections and engagement with the school.** The intent is to support the involvement of those who are currently the primary student caretakers at “home” (e.g., parents, grandparents, aunts, older siblings, “nannies,” foster home parents, representatives of homeless youngsters). Interventions stress (a) outreach (e.g., enhancing communication and connection between home and school including a focus on reengaging homes that have disengaged from school involvement), (b) reducing barriers to home involvement (e.g., addressing the learning and support needs of adults in the home including helping those in need of health and social services to connect effectively with such resources, offering family literacy programs and parent education, translation services), (c) helping those in the home enhance supports for their children, and (d) encouraging home support for the school’s mission.
- Crises responding and prevention** (e.g., preparing for emergencies; implementing plans when an event occurs; countering the impact of traumatic events; providing follow-up assistance; implementing prevention strategies; creating a caring and safe schoolwide learning environment that reduces violence, bullying, harassment, abuse, and other threats; establishing collaboration among local schools and the community at-large for crisis planning, prevention, and response)
- Supports to increase community involvement and collaborative engagement with schools** (e.g., outreach to develop greater community connection and support from a wide range of resources – including enhanced use of volunteers and mentors and developing a school-community collaborative infrastructure encompassing health and social service agencies, libraries, recreational facilities, community artists, businesses, postsecondary education institutions).
- Facilitating student and family access to special assistance** (e.g., in the regular program first and then, as needed, through referral for specialized services on and off campus). After all appropriate efforts have been made to address factors interfering with a student learning and performing at school (including application of Response to Intervention), special assistance for pupils and their families is provided or pursued through referrals that effectively connect those in need with direct services to address barriers to the learning of pupils at school. Interventions might include effective case and resource management, connecting with community service providers, special assistance for teachers in addressing the problems of specific individuals, counseling or special education.

NOTE: Implementation aids are available from the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>. For example, see

Student/Learning Supports: A Brief² Guide for Moving in New Directions
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefguide.pdf>