

Integrated SERVICES, MTSS, SEL, COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, and???

What is Widely Advocated is Too Limited but Can Be Built on in ways that Fundamentally Transform How Schools Address Barriers to Learning & Teaching

As Secretary Cardona wisely states:

Don't think we're going to solve tomorrow's problems with our school and district design of yesterday.

And as Maslow cautioned: *If we only have a hammer, we tend to treat everything as if it were a nail.*

COVID-19 certainly has increased the focus on factors interfering with reducing the achievement and opportunity gaps. Concerns about mental health and learning loss have received considerable attention. Reports are everywhere underscoring these matters and discussing ways to meet the needs.

Schools are using the relief funds as they react to the increased number of learning, behavior, and emotional problems. And schools are being called on to play a greater and expanded role in addressing barriers to learning. To this end, states and the President and Secretary of Education are promising more money. (News release from yesterday, "HHS Announces Nearly \$35 Million To Strengthen Mental Health Support for Children and Young Adults.")

BUT ... the initiatives and frameworks being touted and the laundry list of ideas for improvement just are too limited. For example, in the case of the federal funding for mental health, the agenda is mainly on mental health SERVICES and improving the mental health service system. That's good for those who are in the mental health business. It's not the best approach for schools since they are in the education business.

(We know that the term "business" will grind on some readers, but the reality is that many stakeholders in both sectors have financial interests that shape policy and practice.)

Schools can't afford to ignore the reality that schools always have to deal with a variety of learning, behavior, and emotional problems, and many students simultaneously are manifesting multiple problems. The complexity requires a much more comprehensive set of interventions.

We know that schools have always pursued a range of student/learning supports. However, these have always been too marginalized and fragmented to do the job.

So in addition to pursuing agenda for responding to increased concern about mental health and learning loss, schools need to start the process of moving toward ***a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports.***

And if schools are to do more than tinker with changes and move toward innovative transformation, policy makers must

- (1) expand school improvement policy and practice from a 2-3 component framework and fully integrate the third component as a primary and essential approach to addressing barriers to learning/teaching
- (2) call for developing the third component into a unified, comprehensive, system of student/learning supports
- (3) support the system change work needed to implement and scale-up the transformation in sustainable ways.

For details, see

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 - > *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
 - > *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*
- all three can be accessed at
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

Also helpful is:

- > *Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/evolvecomm.pdf> .