
Here We Go Again: In the Rush to Spend Federal Stimulus Funds Schools are Attending to Immediate Individual Needs Without Addressing the Opportunity to Make Necessary Systemic Improvements

The COVID pandemic has increased school concerns about a growing number of students manifesting learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

This week one large district announced that it would use \$24 million of its federal stimulus funding for a 3 year mental health plan to expand the number of behavioral support teams from 200 schools to closer to 500 and enlist more help from community groups through grants. We wonder what will happen when the funds run out.

In the past, when special funding for such 3 year plans has ended so have the added-on interventions.

For some time, we have seen increasing calls for schools to pursue interventions related to trauma, anxiety, depression, disconnected students and truancy, adverse childhood experiences, social and emotional health, substance abuse, suicide prevention, and other mental health concerns. Clearly, there is a need for schools to play a role in addressing such matters. At the same time, it is essential to avoid ad hoc and piecemeal approaches, cycling from one concern to another, and interventions that pull resources away from other priority concerns and increase inequities of opportunity for other students.

Given the increasing number of learning, behavior, and emotional problems confronting educators, it is essential that schools avoid pressures to *just* expand intervention strategies that only attend to individual needs or that pursue another “hot topic” program.

The federal stimulus funds also provide the opportunity to start a process for transforming student/learning supports in ways that substantially and substantively address a broad range of barriers to learning and teaching.

Here are three free resources we have developed to provide online in depth aids to guide transformation planning:

>Improving School Improvement

>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

And here is a recently released policy analysis prepared for PACE:

Restructuring California Schools to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching in the COVID 19 Context and Beyond

https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/pb_adelman_nov2020.pdf

(Note that this is not just relevant to California)

Please share this information with those who may find it helpful.

And if you have any questions or want to share something you think others might find relevant, send them to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

Finally, for those moving forward to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports, we offer free distance coaching and technical assistance <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/coach.pdf> ,

Best wishes, be well,

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