From the Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports

As you know, Public Education is Under Attack

**Enhancing How Schools Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching is
a Critical Step in Improving Support for Public Education**

In February, the *Education Trust* posted:

> *U.S. Public Education is Under Attack. ... for organizations that advocate for excellence in education, now is the
> time to fight even harder to make sure that students — particularly for those whom public education has failed for
> far too long — receive a high-quality education that prepares them to live a life of their choosing.*
> https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/u-s-public-education-is-under-attack-its-time-to-take-a-stand/

Given the importance of public education in supporting our democracy, the attacks on public education must be
countered not just with words but with potent actions that ensure all students have equity of opportunity to
succeed at school and beyond. And, it would help if the many advocates for specific initiatives temporarily
moved their lobbying efforts to deal with an agenda that addresses a big picture for school improvement policy
and practice. The reality is that they currently are competing for the same sparse resources, and the winners are
pursuing initiatives that cannot have more than a marginal impact in countering the factors threatening public
education.

Our call reflects the concern raised about the need for providing essential supports for *"those whom public
education has failed for far too long."* We are asking education policy makers at every level to end the
long-standing piecemeal, disjointed, and marginalized approach to providing student/learning supports. This
entails ensuring that the role of schools in addressing barriers to learning and teaching is pursued with the same
high level priority as efforts to improve the curriculum and instruction.

Even before the pandemic, the number of students manifesting learning, behavior, and emotional problems was
untenable; now the situation is worse.

How well public schools turn this state of affairs around will play a major role in the battle to save public
education.

We know that public education is underfunded. At the same time, in some schools principals have reported that
up to 25 percent of their budget is consumed in efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching. Because
school budgets are always tight, cost effectiveness is a constant consideration. Analyses indicate limited results
and redundancy in resource use. Rivalry for sparse resources also has produced counterproductive competition
among support staff and with community based professionals who link with schools. And these deficiencies
typically are compounded as schools strive to meet immediate demands for more services. Schools cannot
continue to spend all the time of student and learning support staff responding to the culture of crisis that
dominates efforts to address barriers to teaching and learning and reengage disconnected students and their
families. To do so means maintaining the unsatisfactory status quo and feeding into the criticisms of public
education.

The need at this time is to

- transform the policy framework for school improvement and accountability to include a primary focus on establishing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports that weaves together available school, home, and community resources,

- support the establishment of structured school-community collaboratives designed to facilitate the weaving together of school, home, and community resources (e.g., collaboratives that bring together the resources of complexes of schools, a broad range of family representative, and a wide range of community stakeholders to work on unifying mutually beneficial efforts and blending resources).

And here are some immediate first steps that can be taken to improve student/learning supports at schools and the district level (and even at regional, state, and federal levels).

(1) Establish a Learning Supports Leadership Team (See "What is a learning supports leadership team?" - http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resource%20coord%20team.pdf) The prototype described can be adapted to fit current settings and situations.

(2) Have the team

(a) map existing student/learning support resources   see "Mapping & Analyzing Learning Supports and An Aid for Initial Listing of Current Resources Used at a School for Addressing Barriers Learning and Teaching" - http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf

(b) analyze what's working, what needs strengthening, and critical gaps

(c) develop a set of prioritized recommendations for moving toward a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports

(d) present the recommendations for approval.

(3) As soon as a set of proposed improvements are approved, establish a workgroup to develop a strategic action plan that details the who, what, and when of the steps forward.

(4) Assign the Learning Supports Leadership Team to guide implementation of the strategic plan.

Some General Resources from the Center to Aid in Moving Forward

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

>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
(At the end of 2020, we were invited to prepare this brief by the Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE). The content, of course, is applicable to other states.)

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

A host of other free resources to aid in the transformation process are available on the Center's website http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu   - for example, see the
>*System Change Toolkit* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm