

## Are MTSS and Community Schools Being Adopted as Buzzwords Rather Than the Basis for Making Substantive System Improvements?

From the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA  
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

Widespread concerns we are hearing from school colleagues mostly have to do with the increase in learning, behavior, and emotional problems. They report that many students are not even coming to school.

As a result, this year has increased appreciation of the long-standing need to transform approaches to addressing students' problems so that schools can address many rather than just a few more of those students in need of attention.

However, it is clear that there is no consensus and not enough discussion about how to move forward.

By now it should be evident that the way to go is *not* just to add a few more personnel to help address learning loss and mental health problems. And just adopting the MTSS framework and the Full Service Community Schools model also isn't enough. Such approaches are relevant and can be built upon. But by themselves these efforts ignore and even impede making essential changes in school improvement policy and guiding transformative systemic improvements in how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students and families.

It also seems that MTSS and Community Schools too often are being adopted as buzzwords rather than being the basis for making substantive system improvements. In any case, it is time to rethink MTSS (<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/newsletter/fall19.pdf>) and evolve Community Schools (<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/evolvecomm.pdf>).

If the next school year is to be more effective in addressing barriers to learning and teaching (and in reducing the opportunity and achievement gaps), schools must unify student/learning supports into a cohesive component and develop the component into a comprehensive and equitable system of supports. It is within such a system that a broad and sustainable focus on a full range of mental health and psychosocial and educational concerns can be fully embedded into school improvement efforts.

While our Center's work has produced many resources related to these matters, here are a few to help increase understanding of the need for transformative systemic changes and how to move forward.

> *Student Supports: What's in place? What's Missing?*

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/summer2023.pdf>

> *Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/briefguide.pdf>

And for a more detailed discussion, we have developed and provide free access to the following three books

> *Improving School Improvement*

> *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*

> *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*

All three can be accessed at [https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving\\_school\\_improvement.html](https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)

Student/learning supports currently are marginalized and fragmented in school improvement policy and practice. Our hope in raising the above concerns and offering guides for transformative system change is to encourage greater attention to ending this undesirable state of affairs. This coming school year districts and schools can move beyond the limitations of reactively responding to barriers to learning and teaching and take proactive action to transform student/learning supports.