

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Report Focuses on System Transformation as the Next Frontier in Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Los Angeles, CA, July 23 – A new national report from the Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA finds that current efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching, while valuable, remain fragmented. The report concludes that lasting progress will require transforming student and learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system.

The report, *New Directions for Student and Learning Supports: From Fragmented Initiatives to System Transformation*, was authored by researchers Howard S. Adelman, Ph.D., and Linda Taylor, Ph.D. It synthesizes lessons from decades of school improvement efforts, analyzes seven major national initiatives designed to strengthen student and learning supports, and identifies the lessons, challenges, and policy implications emerging from those initiatives.

Schools today are expected to address a growing range of factors affecting student success, including chronic absenteeism, mental health concerns, poverty, housing instability, trauma, school disengagement, and social isolation. While recent initiatives have expanded services and increased awareness, the authors stress that student and learning supports remain fragmented and marginalized in school improvement policy and practice.

"The central challenge ahead is system development, not program development," said Adelman. "Schools are not suffering from a lack of initiatives. They are suffering from a lack of a coherent system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching."

The report reviews seven major and overlapping initiatives shaping efforts to strengthen student and learning supports:

- Whole-child approaches
- Integrated student supports
- Community Schools Movement
- Comprehensive school mental health initiatives
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS)
- Expansion of student support personnel
- Efforts aimed at transforming student and learning support systems

While acknowledging the contributions of these initiatives, the report points out that none provides a sufficiently comprehensive framework for organizing the many programs, personnel, services, funding streams, and community resources districts use to address barriers to learning and teaching.

Fragmentation of student and learning supports remains widespread. As Taylor notes:

"Fragmentation is a symptom. The deeper concern is that addressing barriers to learning and teaching has never been established as a primary component of school improvement. As long as these essential supports remain secondary, fragmentation will continue."

The report calls for expanding the prevailing two-component school improvement framework, focused on (1) Instruction and (2) Management/Governance, to include a third primary component: (3) Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching.

This third component is operationalized as a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports.

Adelman and Taylor stress that initially creating such a system does not primarily require new funding. Rather, it requires reorganizing, braiding, and strategically deploying existing school and community resources through dedicated leadership, infrastructure, and collaboration.

The report also highlights what is described as a unique opportunity for transformation. The growing convergence of whole-child initiatives, MTSS implementation, community schools, school mental health efforts, chronic absenteeism initiatives, and equity-focused reforms means that many of the building blocks for change are already in place. The challenge now is unifying those efforts into a coherent, comprehensive, and sustainable system.

Among its recommendations, the report calls for:

- Elevating student and learning supports as a primary component of school improvement policy
- Organizing fragmented initiatives within a unified intervention framework
- Strengthening leadership and infrastructure dedicated to student and learning supports
- Prioritizing prevention and early intervention
- Expanding school-community collaboration
- Developing accountability measures directly related to student supports as well as academics

The report concludes that improving instruction and transforming student and learning supports are not competing agendas.

"Together they define a full approach to school improvement," the authors write. "The future of student and learning supports depends not on launching one more initiative but on transforming how schools organize efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching that interfere with success for too many students and staff."

About the Authors

Howard S. Adelman and Linda Taylor are co-directors of the UCLA Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports. For more than four decades, they have worked with schools, districts, states, and national organizations to improve how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and enhance equity of opportunity for all students.

Access the Report

New Directions for Student and Learning Supports: From Fragmented Initiatives to System Transformation

Available at <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Newdirs.pdf>

Media Contacts

Howard S. Adelman, Ph.D. adelman@psych.ucla.edu

Linda Taylor, Ph.D. ltaylor@psych.ucla.edu

Website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>