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

**We hope that those on our listserv will follow-up with messages to AASA about what is discussed in this open letter.**

### **An Open Letter to AASA**

To: Stephanie St. John [sstjohn@aasa.org](mailto:sstjohn@aasa.org)  
Project Coordinator, Leadership Network  
AASA, The School Superintendents Association

Some years ago, our Center at UCLA, with support from Scholastic, worked with AASA to expand school administrators focus on school improvement to include transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students (see  
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/aasa.htm>  
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/exhibitlig.pdf>  
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aasa/aasagainesville.pdf>

When we received the email about AASA's "Transformational Leadership Consortium," we wondered at this critical time for public education if there would be any focus on how essential it is to transform student and learning supports.

For the most part, education leaders are fretting about the increasing numbers of learning, behavior, and emotional problems manifested each day at school. They continue, however, marginalize discussion of ways to make fundamental changes in the way student and learning supports are conceived and structured.

Currently, across a district, while some schools offer a range of student and learning supports, others mainly provide only what is mandated. In large districts, psychologists, counselors, social workers, and other specialists often are organized into separate units. Such units overlap regular, special, and compensatory education. In general, districts plan and implement student and learning supports in a fragmented and piecemeal manner – generating a variety of specialized programs and services that deal with the same common barriers to learning and teaching. Federal and state funding streams have exacerbated this state of affairs.

Improvements that call mainly for more resources generally are unrealistic. School budgets always are tight; cost-effectiveness is a constant concern. In some schools, principals report that up to 25% of their budget already is consumed by efforts to address barriers to learning. Analyses of current approaches indicate extremely limited results, redundancy in resource use, and counterproductive competition among support staff and with community-based professionals who link with schools.

Over many years, increasing concern about fragmented approaches has produced calls for "integrated services" and recently for "integrated support systems." However, by focusing primarily on fragmentation, policy makers and school improvement advocates fail to deal with a core underlying problem. What drives the fragmentation is the *marginalization* in school improvement policy of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching *in a direct, unified, comprehensive, and equitable way*.

We, of course, continue to work on these matters. Perhaps those involved in the consortium would find some of the work worth noting. See for example:

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

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

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

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

Please let us know where AASA stands related to the pressing need to *transform* student and learning supports and whether the matter will given significant attention at the consortium.

Best wishes and be well,

Howard & Linda

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