

Are you concerned with how well schools are addressing students' learning, behavior, and emotional problems?

As the school year gets underway, superintendents, school boards, principals, school staff, parents, students, and all other stakeholders need to ask:

How good are our schools and district when it comes to addressing students' learning, behavior, and emotional problems?

Can existing resources be reworked to develop an improved system?

To answer these questions, a workgroup needs to be established to *map and analyze existing student and learning support activities* and *develop prioritized recommendations* for systemic changes to improve how their school(s) address barriers to learning and teaching.

Such a group can be initiated at a school and/or district level with relatively few people as long as they are motivated and able to carry out the necessary tasks. The group might include an administrator, a couple of student/learning supports representatives, and as appropriate and feasible, a student.

Mapping, Analyzing, Recommending

a) **Mapping.** The focus is on

- >all current school activities used for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students(including those accessed at the district and those the community brings to the school)
- >clarifying the names, roles, functions, and schedule of student and learning support staff working at and with the school
- >delineating the current leadership and operational infrastructure for student/learning supports

Mapping is best done using a template. In this respect, there is a tendency simply to use a multi-tiered framework (e.g., MTSS). However, given the limitations of such a framework, we suggest a more comprehensive intervention framework, as well as a three component framework for mapping the operational infrastructure. See the following aids.

>>***Mapping Learning Supports***

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf>

>>***An Aid for Initial Listing of Current Resources Used at a School***

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

>>***Leadership Infrastructure: Is What We Have What We Need?***

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20infrastructure.pdf>

Note: The information produced by the mapping is essential for undertaking the next task (i.e., making analyses). And the mapping alone is useful as information that can be shared in various ways with different stakeholder groups. Products can be developed to facilitate planning, to clarify available resources and how to access them, and to publicize school efforts to enable all students to have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and beyond. Some schools simply reproduce their mapping products and post and distribute them to staff and other stakeholders. Others expand the process to ensure there is greater awareness and enhanced appreciation of the work by including major, strategically placed public displays (e.g., in halls and staff rooms) and highlight the work in newsletters provided to a wide range of stakeholders.

b) Analyzing. The focus is on

- >*what's working* – accessing available “data” on effectiveness of current interventions, general system status, and infrastructure for leadership and operations
- >*what's not working* – clarifying which are worth improving and which are wasted resources
- >*gaps* – identifying current gaps with specific reference to pressing needs
- >*fragmentation* – degree to which the approach is coordinated, redundancies
- >*policy support* – is the emphasis on student/learning supports marginalized in school improvement policy? how much is being spent on addressing barriers to learning and teaching?
- >*implications for intervention improvements* – which are and are not worth keeping; which are worth taking steps to improve; which gaps need immediate attention; what is needed to increase cohesion and enhance policy support
- >*needed operational infrastructure changes* – identifying weaknesses in the operational infrastructure for student/learning supports

Done properly, mapping and analyses of resources provide a foundation for making decisions about how to move forward in improving student/learning supports. The objectives are to (a) clarify gaps with respect to assessed needs, (b) identify immediate priorities for improvement and system development, and (c) recommend (re)deployment of resources to best meet priorities and to do so in a cost-effective manner.

Our Center has guidance and resource aids for how to facilitate adoption of recommendations and for moving forward. See, for example:

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

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

We look forward to the coming school year and our interactions with all those who are striving to help schools play an improved role in addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students and families.

Thank you for all you do for young people!

Best wishes and be well,

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