

Discussion Guide – accompanying the report:

New Directions for Student and Learning Supports: Moving From Fragmented Initiatives to System Transformation <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Newdirs.pdf>

This guide is intended to support conversations among educators, administrators, policymakers, student support staff, higher education faculty, community partners, and family leaders. The goal is to facilitate dialogue and reflection about enhancing local priorities for strengthening student and learning supports.

The report highlights that schools traditionally focus on two primary components of school improvement: Instruction and Management/Governance. It argues that improving student and learning supports requires a third essential component that directly addresses barriers to learning and teaching. Such a component enables development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports.

General Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the report reflect the realities faced by many students?
- What barriers to learning and teaching are most evident in your school, district, community, or state?
- How well are these barriers currently being addressed?
- Which student groups are least well served by existing supports?
- Are student and learning supports viewed as a core mission in our schools?
- How are student and learning supports represented within leadership and governance structures?
- How well are efforts to improve student/learning supports integrated into school improvement decisions and plans?
- What is one idea from the report that most challenges current thinking?
- What are the implications for improvement?

For more indepth discussion as time allows:

(1) What Student/Learning Supports are and aren't Working Well?

(2) How Is the Fragmentation Problem Being Handled?

Generate a list of all current support programs, services, and initiatives operating within your district or school.

Then, discuss:

- Which programs operate independently and compete for resources?
- Which students benefit most from current supports? ?
- Which students may be overlooked or underserved ?
- Where do unnecessary redundancies exist?
- Where are the most significant gaps?
- How easy is it for students and families to access needed supports?
- What are the implications for improvement?

(3) What infrastructure is in place to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports?

Who currently leads current efforts to improve student and learning supports?

What staff are involved in these efforts?

Are these personnel marginalized in school improvement decision making?

Do budgeting and staffing decisions reflect the importance of student and learning supports?

Is there an effective infrastructure for school-community collaboration?

(4) How Much is Devoted to Prevention and Early Intervention to Reduce Problems and the Need for Intensive Interventions?

What early indicators are monitored?

What is impeding greater investment in prevention and early intervention?

Are most resources devoted to reactive, intensive intervention?

What changes would shift the balance toward prevention?

The report argues that the next frontier in school improvement is not creating more programs but transforming how existing resources are organized and developed into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports.

Questions to Discuss About Moving Forward

What would you want a student/learning supports system to look like?

What is one action your organization could take during the next year?

What barriers stand in the way of system transformation?

What opportunities currently exist for advancing change?

Can you facilitate development of a workgroup to advance transformative change?

Who should be involved in such a workgroup?

What first steps should that group take?

As the report emphasizes, the next frontier of school improvement is the transformation of existing resources into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports. Our hope is that this guide helps stakeholders assess current practice and identify concrete next steps toward that goal.

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

Our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

Let Us Know -- about what ideas are being proposed for moving in new directions for transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

And if anyone is thinking about increasing the capacity of a district or school with respect to developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, we can help. Send all info to ltaylor@ucla.edu
