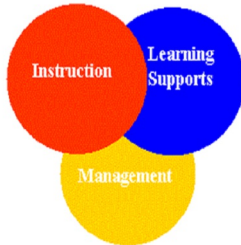


Practice and Policy Brief



Criteria and Rubric for a Best Practice Approach to Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

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To facilitate efforts to address barriers to learning, this resource is freely accessible online.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefguide.pdf>

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*Initially, the Center was named the *Center for Mental Health in Schools*; in 2017, to more fully underscore the breadth of the work, the Center name was expanded.

Toward a Best Practice Approach to Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Every school plays a role in addressing barriers to learning and teaching. So does the surrounding community.

An array of designs and interventions are in use. However, schools everywhere are still striving to create an approach that is able to effectively meet the growing need and the complexity of learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Such an approach requires transforming current fragmented efforts into a robust, transformative system of student and learning supports. This transformation involves ending the marginalization in school improvement policy of student supports. It calls for teachers working collaboratively with student/learning support staff and on schools forging effective partnerships with family and community resources.

As aids in moving forward, our Center has developed a variety of resources.

This document

- highlights key criteria related to developing a system to address barriers to learning and teaching
- provides a rubric for rating the current status of such a system at a school
- includes a list of links to additional resources for transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

Criteria for a Best Practice Approach to Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

The following criteria outline key elements of a system to address barriers to learning and teaching. The aim is to design a system that is:

1. Unified

Interventions are coalesced into a single, cohesive component; they are fundamentally reorganized and woven together, not just coordinated, aligned, or integrated. The process includes:

- Mapping all current student/learning support activities and braiding them together into an integrated component
- Establishing shared priorities, common language, and clear roles
- Streamlining redundant efforts to maximize impact

2. Comprehensive

Interventions are developed progressively over time, addressing factors at the student, classroom, schoolwide, home, and community levels that influence student well being and success. The process includes:

- Framing the system as
 - (a) a continuum – promotion of healthy development, prevention, early-after-onset intervention, and facilitating chronic care
 - (b) a coherent set of student/learning support domains—such as
 - classroom based supports
 - supports for transitions
 - enhancing home engagement
 - enhancing community collaborations
 - crisis response and prevention
 - student and family assistance
- Personalizing interventions as appropriate and providing additional assistance when needed
- Identifying gaps across the continuum and domains

3. Equity Driven and Responsive to Individual Differences

Barriers are addressed in ways that actively counteract inequities and promote inclusive, practices. The process includes:

- Accounting for individual differences (e.g., developmental, motivational, linguistic, cultural, socio-economic) and providing accommodations for vulnerabilities as needed
- Reducing disparities in access to supports and opportunities
- Engaging and reengaging families and students from underserved groups in continuous feedback and improvement processes

4. Evidence Based and Practice Informed

Because research alone is insufficient and resources at schools are sparse, the system draws from both research supported and rationally informed practices. This includes:

- Initially using and redeploying available personnel, time, and resources
- Selecting interventions that best fit a school's highest priority needs
- Using prototypes derived from national experience and research
- Implementing continuous evaluation and improvement cycles to refine and redeploy resources

5. Infrastructure Supported for Implementation and Sustainability

Operational infrastructure must be redesigned to ensure implementation, long term sustainability, and ongoing development of the component. This includes:

- An administrative leader dedicated to the component
- A system development leadership team
- Standing and ad hoc workgroups that carry out specific functions
- A mechanism enabling a family of schools (e.g., a feeder pattern) to work together
- A school-community collaborative set of mechanisms for shared planning and resources

6. Fully Embedded in School Improvement Planning

The component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching must be a high priority item at every planning table. This includes:

- Ensuring it is part of budget development and resource allocation
- Reworking job descriptions to emphasize collaboration and participation in student/learning supports
- Embedding goals and benchmarks for the component into the school improvement plan

7. Continuously Improving Personnel Performance

All personnel must deepen their understanding of the transformed system for improving how the school can reduce learning, behavior, and emotional problems. This includes:

- New job descriptions for student/learning support personnel
- Personalized, job embedded professional development learning opportunities
- Coaching and collegial support focused on implementing the transformed system
- Cross role professional learning that strengthens collaboration

8. Evaluated for Improvement and Directly Relevant Accountability

Evaluation centers on improvement rather than compliance, and accountability focuses on results directly related to addressing barriers. This includes:

- Using formative and summative findings to refine the system
- Monitoring progress toward improved learning, behavior, and well-being outcomes
- Monitoring for negative effects
- Ensuring accountability indicators are broadened to include direct outcomes of student/learning support interventions

Rubric: Status of the System for Addressing Barriers to Learning & Teaching

Rating Scale

- 1 – Not in Place:** No clear practices, structures, or plans exist.
- 2 – Partially in Place:** Some activities or structures exist, but they are fragmented or inconsistently implemented.
- 3 – Mostly in Place:** Most elements are implemented with reasonable consistency; refinement still needed.
- 4 – Fully in Place:** Element is well-established, coherent, sustainable, and continuously improved.

Circle your rating of each of the eight items

1. Unified System of Student/Learning Supports

Rating	Indicators
1	Student support efforts are fragmented; many interventions operate in isolation.
2	Some coordination exists but supports are still organized as discrete interventions rather than a unified component.
3	Most supports are mapped and partially braided together; common language and shared priorities emerging.
4	All support functions are coalesced into a cohesive component with clear roles, minimal redundancy, and a shared vision and priorities.

2. Comprehensive System (Continuum + Domains)

Rating	Indicators
1	Supports are quite limited and mainly reactive.
2	Some prevention and classroom strategies are present but not systematically organized across the continuum or domains.
3	A developing continuum (promotion of healthy development, prevention, early-after-onset intervention, and facilitating chronic care) and several support domains are in place; some gap analysis conducted.
4	A fully implemented continuum and all major domains (classroom supports, transitions, home engagement, community collaboration, crisis response, student/family assistance) adopted and operating coherently; strategic focus on priorities and filling gaps.

3. Equity-Driven & Responsive to Individual Differences

Rating	Indicators
1	Limited attention to cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic differences; disparities go unaddressed.
2	Some accommodations occur, but family engagement is minimal and inequities persist.
3	Meaningful efforts to reduce disparities; underserved families engaged periodically.
4	Supports intentionally counteract inequities; interventions address a range of individual differences (e.g., developmental, motivational, cultural, socioeconomic); continuous feedback from diverse students and families guides improvements.

4. Evidence-Based & Practice-Informed

Rating	Indicators
1	Interventions are selected ad hoc; little attention to research.
2	Some attention to the literature in selecting interventions.
3	Practices are chosen to fit school priorities; evaluation cycles are emerging.
4	Uses prototypes derived from national experience and research; implements continuous evaluation and improvement cycles to refine and redeploy resources.

5. Infrastructure for Implementation & Sustainability

Rating	Indicators
1	No designated leadership or operational infrastructure for component to address barriers to learning and teaching.
2	Some leadership exists but lack of clear roles or consistency.
3	A leader and leadership team focused on system development, and some workgroups are operating; collaboration with community partners is developing.
4	A fully developed operational infrastructure exists (administrative lead, development team, standing/ad hoc workgroups, feeder-pattern mechanisms, school-community collaboratives).

6. Integration into School Improvement Planning

Rating	Indicators
1	Student/learning support leaders are absent from school improvement planning and budget processes.
2	Student/learning supports are mentioned during planning but are not prioritized.
3	Supports are included in planning and budgets, though not fully prioritized.
4	The component is a high-priority item at every planning table; job descriptions reflect collaboration; explicit goals and benchmarks are in the school improvement plan.

7. Continuous Improvement of Personnel Performance

Rating	Indicators
1	Staff receive little to no personnel development related to a transformed system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.
2	Occasional personnel development occurs related to a transformed system but is not job-embedded or ongoing.
3	Coaching, cross-role learning, and job-embedded professional development occur with some consistency related to a transformed system.
4	All personnel participate in ongoing, personalized, collegial learning focused on enhancing collaboration and implementation and sustainability of the transformed system.

8. Evaluation for Improvement & Directly Relevant Accountability

Rating	Indicators
1	Accountability is compliance-focused; no direct evaluation of student/learning supports interventions.
2	Some evaluation of the direct of student/learning supports interventions, but not systematically used for improvement.
3	Formative and summative findings inform some refinements in transformed system.
4	Evaluation is continuous and improvement-oriented; accountability includes direct indicators of learning, behavior, and well-being outcomes; negative effects are monitored.

Links to Additional Resources for Transforming How Schools Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

>*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefguide.pdf>

>*Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Starting the Process*
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemchangesteps.pdf>

>*An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports:
A Month by Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing Resources*
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/agendapaper.pdf>

>*Building on MTSS to Enhance How Schools Address Barriers to Learning*
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/BuildMTSS.pdf>

Tools to Aid Mapping and Analyses of Intervention Resources

>*An Aid for Initial Listing of Current Resources Used at a School for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/listingresources.pdf>

A tool for clarifying the names, roles, functions, and schedule of student and learning supports staff at a school.

>*Moving toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports:
MAPPING & ANALYZING LEARNING SUPPORTS*

A tool outlining a six step process that can be used by school improvement planners and decision makers to chart all current activities and resource use (e.g., school, district, community) as a basis for evaluating the current state of development, doing a gap analysis, and setting priorities for moving forward.

>*System Change Toolkit* <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

This toolkit offers materials, tools, specific guides, and other resources as aids and to deepen learning about the substance and processes of the work to be done. We have grouped the tools in an order that roughly approximates moving from creating readiness, through initial implementation, to sustaining and scaling-up.