

Cut-Backs Make it Essential to Unify and Rework Student and Learning Supports at Schools and Among Families of Schools

In *practice*, there are three primary and overlapping components for improving schools in ways that enhance equal opportunity for student success at school:

- *the instructional component* -- includes all direct efforts to facilitate learning and development
- *the enabling or learning supports component* – embraces direct efforts to address factors interfering with learning and teaching
- *the management component* – encompasses managerial and governance functions.

In *policy*, however, the enabling/learning supports component is not given the same priority and attention as the other two. Efforts to address interfering factors are enacted in a piecemeal and ad hoc fashion and implemented in fragmented ways. And, as budgets tighten, the trend always is for such supports to be among the first cut. Given the current slow economic recovery, the consensus is that cut-backs will worsen in the next few years. This makes it essential for policy makers to understand new and cost-effective ways to address factors that interfere with learning and teaching.

New approaches are needed because prevailing ideas for using whatever resources are left are inadequate for addressing the many problems undermining student outcomes. In the absence of new directions, (1) those student support staff who are not laid off will be asked to help far more students than is feasible, and (2) despite limited and dwindling agency resources, there will be increased emphasis on schools simply linking with community agencies (e.g., full-service community schools, wrap-around services).

What's Needed? It is time to go beyond thinking in terms of providing traditional services, linking with and collocating agency resources, and enhancing coordination. These all have a place, but they do not address how to unify and reconceive ways to better meet the needs of the many rather than just providing traditional services to a relatively few students.

It is time to fundamentally rethink student and learning supports. The intent is to develop a comprehensive and cohesive system. Such a system encompasses a full continuum of interventions and covers a well-defined and delimited set of classroom and schoolwide supports (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/towardnextstep.pdf>).

Developing the system entails

- (1) unifying all direct efforts to address factors interfering with learning and teaching at a school
- (2) connecting families of schools (such as feeder patterns) with each other and with a wider range of community resources
- (3) weaving together school, home, and community resources in ways that enhance effectiveness and achieve economies of scale.

Starting points include ensuring that the work is fully integrated into school improvement policy and practice, reworking operational infrastructure, setting priorities for system development, and (re)deploying whatever resources are available to pursue priorities (see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf>).

Pioneering Initiatives are Underway! In motion across the country are trail blazing initiatives by several state education agencies and school districts (e.g., in Louisiana, Iowa, Georgia, Florida, Arizona – see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>).

For example:

- Over the past two years, Louisiana’s Department of Education has developed its design for a *Comprehensive Learning Supports System* and has begun district-level work. The design has been shared widely throughout the state; positions for Regional Learning Supports Facilitators have been created; and implementation is underway with first adopters (<http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/15044.pdf>).
- A nationwide initiative by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in collaboration with our center at UCLA and Scholastic aims at expanding leaders' knowledge, capacity, and implementation of a comprehensive system of learning supports (<http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=7264>).
- In the Tucson Unified School District, the process of unifying student and learning supports into a comprehensive system has begun with the employment of a cadre of Learning Supports Coordinators to help with the transformation at each school (http://www.tusd.k12.az.us/contents/depart/learningsupport_es/index.asp <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/tusdbrochure.pdf>).

These pioneers are moving forward to better balance cut-backs across all three components and to use remaining resources in ways that begin system building for the future.

***Unifying student and learning supports is long overdue;
cut-backs make it essential to do it now!.***

For more on this, see the various related policy and practice analyses and resources on the Center’s website <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> and feel free at any time to email Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu or the center email smhp@ucla.edu

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