

## **Enabling Component as Related to Mental Health**

The concept of an Enabling Component emerged from work of the School Mental Health Project at UCLA in the late 1980s. Such a component is designed to enhance a school's ability to address factors that interfere with ensuring equal opportunity for all students to succeed at school. The concept establishes an umbrella under which fragmented efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching can be unified and then developed into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system of student and learning supports designed to strengthen all students and their families, school, and surrounding neighborhood.

Besides addressing widespread intervention fragmentation, creation of the concept was a response to the ongoing marginalization in schools of mental health and other student and learning supports. To end the marginalization, policy research stressed the need to (a) embed mental health and other student support interventions into a comprehensive school-community system for addressing barriers to learning and for promoting healthy development and (b) ensure that the system is a primary and essential component of and fully integrated into school improvement policies and practices. To accomplish this, education policy is expanded from the prevailing two- to a three- component framework. That is, because current policy mainly stresses reforms for (1) facilitating learning and development (the Instructional Component) and (2) school governance and management (the Management Component), a third (Enabling) component is added to ensure development of a comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. The three component framework has been adopted by pioneering states and districts across the U.S. and is helping to embed student support staff and special initiatives such as those advocating for Coordinated School Health and for Community Schools into school improvement policy and practice.

With specific respect to school mental health practices, the three component framework also helps differentiate that (1) those mental health practices intended to promote healthy social and emotional development are part of the Instructional Component and (2) those mental health interventions intended to address problems are part of the Enabling Component and should be fully embedded into efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching.

Properly operationalized and implemented, the Enabling Component comprehensively addresses barriers to learning and teaching and re-engages disconnected students in classroom learning by

- reframing current student support initiatives, programs, and services and redeploying the resources to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive component to enable learning,
- developing both in-classroom and school-wide approaches – including interventions to support transitions, increase home and community connections, enhance teachers' ability to respond to common learning and behavior problems, and respond to and prevent crises,
- revamping district, school, and school-community operational infrastructures to weave school and community resources and expertise together strategically with the aim of enhancing and evolving a student and learning supports system (e.g., establishing a dedicated leader for the Enabling Component and a Component Leadership Team at each school),
- pursuing school improvement, school-community collaboration, and systemic change with a high degree of policy commitment for developing and sustaining the component.

The prototype intervention framework for the Enabling Component consists of (1) a continuum of interventions and (2) a delimited set of content arenas. The continuum encompasses *(a) promoting development and preventing problems, (b) early-after onset intervention, and (c) involvement in treatment for severe and chronic problems*. The content at each level of the

continuum is organized around a delimited set of content arenas that emphasize enhancing supports within the classroom and extending beyond to include school and community. In the prototype, the content arenas are delineated into the following six clusters of intervention:

- *Supports to enable classroom learning* (e.g., enhancing in-classroom practices by teachers and others to prevent problems, respond early after a problem appears, and re-engage disconnected students)
- *Supports for home involvement* (e.g., increasing home engagement with schools)
- *Supports for transitions* (e.g., providing support for the many transitions students and families encounter in negotiating school and grade changes)
- *Supports for community involvement* (e.g., expanding community engagement through volunteers, businesses, agencies, faith-based organizations)
- *Supports for crisis response and prevention* (e.g., addressing academic, behavioral, social-emotional problems and crises)
- *Supports for individual students and families* (e.g., providing specialized assistance and facilitating access to effective services as needed)

Schools adopting the Enabling Component concept often designate it as a Learning Supports Component. Learning supports are defined as the resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school. The various elements are designed to help create a school-wide culture of caring and nurturing. Thus, developing student and learning supports into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system not only provides essential interventions in classrooms and school-wide, it has been identified as a key element in facilitating emergence of a positive school climate.

## **Additional Readings**

Adelman, H. S., & Taylor, L. (2006). *The school leader's guide to student learning supports: New directions for addressing barriers to learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Adelman, H. S., & Taylor, L. (2010). *Mental health in schools: Engaging learners, preventing problems, and improving schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press

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Louisiana Department of Education. (2009). *Louisiana's Comprehensive Learning Supports System*. <http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/uploads/15044.pdf>

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(We know you prefer one author, but this work is truly collaborative and should be recognized as such.)

Also see: Extending mental health interventions to families and community; Full service schools; Mental health considerations in the school environment; School climate; School-wide mental health promotion and preventive education programs