

Brief Summary*

Fulfilling a Promise, Investing in Iowa's Future: Enhancing Iowa's Systems of Supports for Learning and Development

Iowa has a proud history of leading the nation in education, strong community support for schools, and high expectations of parents for their children's success in school. While Iowans are proud of their schools, no community ought to be satisfied until *all* its young people are healthy and socially competent, successful in school, and have an equitable opportunity to grow into productive and contributing citizens.

The Challenge

School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students. But when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.
Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989):

At no time in our history has the educational imperative for the academic achievement of all students been so crucial. Not every student comes to school motivationally ready and able to learn. Some experience barriers that interfere with their ability to profit from classroom instruction. If every student in every school and community in Iowa is to achieve at high levels, we must rethink how student supports are organized and delivered to address barriers to learning.

Meeting the Challenge

Meeting the challenge requires that schools and school districts, in collaboration with their community partners, develop a comprehensive, cohesive approach to delivery of learning supports as an integral part of their school improvement efforts. To guide the education system's role in providing learning supports, a three component model is used to expand future school improvement. The three components are:

- *Academic Instruction:* This component represents the people and functions directly related to delivery of academic instruction.
- *Leadership:* This component encompasses those people and functions responsible for the governance and management of the human, material, and financial resources in the education system.
- *Learning Supports:* This component includes the wide array of education personnel who work with families and community partners to ensure that students succeed in school. Their efforts support classroom teachers and instruction by promoting healthy development and working to alleviate barriers that interfere with learning and teaching.

Collaboration Among Partners at All Levels

As was learned with IBI and *Success4*, collaboration among school and community organizations is required at all levels in order to create a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system that supports student learning and eliminates barriers that impede it. Such collaboration is essential to reduce current fragmentation, counterproductive competition for sparse resources, and marginalization of efforts to provide learning supports.

*Focus on Outcomes
for Systems,
Children, and Youth*

Systems at all levels have shared responsibility for achieving the desired “Results for Iowa Children and Youth”. The outcomes identified below define the nature and scope of the changes needed if systems of learning supports are to be developed and the results are to be realized:

- quality leadership;
- safe, supportive, healthy, caring and inclusive environments;
- integrated family, school and community efforts;
- a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive school-community continuum of quality programs and services;
- aligned and supportive policies and resources;
- coordinated systems of data management and evaluation;
- inclusive policies, programs, and services responsive to human diversity.

With a fully implemented and sustained system of learning supports, five important intermediate milestones for children and youth will be achieved :

- Mastery of academic and social skill competencies.
- Increased attachment to, and engagement in, school and community.
- Increased personal and interpersonal assets.
- Health promoting, less risky behavior.
- Increased competence to value, work with, and benefit from human diversity.

***The Designed
Prototype***

The prototype for a system of learning supports addresses the following:

- *Long term results and measures* based on available data serve as leading indicators of student success in school.
- *Cohesive intervention frameworks*, grounded in the agreed upon results for all children and youth in Iowa, facilitate organization of school and community resources, programs, and services into a comprehensive continuum that supports student learning and healthy development and addresses barriers.
- *An infrastructure framework* organizes the functions and processes needed to implement a system of learning supports and connect the various system levels (local, regional, and state). The infrastructure focus is on mechanisms that permit schools and communities to make optimal use of their resources, reframe the roles of personnel, and integrate the instruction, management, and learning supports components of the educational system.
- *Supportive policies* at all levels are identified or developed to facilitate the implementation of a system of learning supports in ways that complement and are fully integrated into school-community efforts to improve teaching and learning and manage resources.
- *Capacity building* at all system levels (state, regional, and local) will (a) ensure use of definitions and guidelines that create a common language for improved communication within the educational system and with other child-serving systems and (b) enhance the knowledge, skills, and resources/tools needed to successfully implement a system of learning supports.

The six content areas for the Learning Supports component are:

*A Framework of
Six Content Areas*

- Supplements to Instruction
- Family Supports and Involvement
- Community Partnerships
- Safe, Healthy, and Caring Environments
- Transitions
- Child/Youth Engagement

By defining the content that makes up the Learning Supports component in terms of six areas, a broad unifying framework is created within which a school-community continuum of learning supports programs can be organized.

*A Continuum of
Interventions to
Meet the Needs of All
Children and Youth*

Schools and communities are already implementing some programs and services that address the six content areas. Currently, many of these operate in isolation of one another and do not provide a cohesive, comprehensive approach. By viewing the programs along a continuum of student needs, schools and communities are more likely to provide the right services for the right students at the right time. Such a continuum encompasses efforts to positively affect a full spectrum of learning, physical, social-emotional, and behavioral problems in every school and community in Iowa by

- promoting healthy development and preventing problems;
- intervening as early after the onset of problems as is feasible; and
- providing special assistance for severe and chronic problems.

The continuum provides a guide for mapping resources and identifying gaps and redundancies, thus increasing effectiveness and efficiency of the supports to learning. When complete, the interventions identified will encompass the full continuum of student needs and address developmental levels and the entire age span served in the K-12 educational system.

***Rethinking
Infrastructure to
Integrate
Learning Supports
Fully into School
Improvement***

Given limited resources, a Learning Supports component is established by deploying, redeploying, and weaving all existing learning support resources together. This requires rethinking infrastructure at each level of the system (local, regional, and state) where decisions are made about such matters

Enhancing a system of learning supports requires strong leadership to steer systemic changes and construct the necessary infrastructure. Establishment and maintenance of a potent learning support component requires continuous, proactive, effective teaming, organization, and accountability.

At each level of the system, Learning Supports component leaders and resource management teams carry out specific *core functions* and processes that fall within two major categories – those intended to **build the capacity of systems** to provide learning supports and those related to the actual **development and implementation of a continuum of learning supports**. In general, the functions of a learning supports system are no different than any continuous improvement planning cycle (e.g., the Iowa Comprehensive School Improvement Planning process); however, in implementation, specific functions related to learning supports will emerge that require rethinking infrastructure at all levels.

*About Learning
Support Resource
Management Teams*

Resource-oriented teams are crucial elements of any infrastructure for implementing a cohesive system of learning supports. Some across the country call such mechanisms *Learning Supports Resource Management Teams* or *Councils*. Properly constituted, a learning supports resource team provides on-site leadership for efforts to comprehensively address programs and practices that facilitate learning and ensure the maintenance and improvement of a multifaceted and integrated approach.

Learning supports resource teams can reduce fragmentation and increase cost-effectiveness by determining and supporting ways that programs and practices can function cohesively. For example, a team can coordinate resources, increase communication among school staff, families, and community partners about available services, and monitor programs to be certain they are functioning effectively and efficiently. More generally, this group can provide leadership in planning and the acquisition, organization, and deployment of resources to guide school and community personnel in evolving their vision for the children and youth that they serve.

***Policy Support
and Alignment***

A review of existing state policies across systems indicates that (1) sufficient policy exists for moving forward, (2) application for a waiver from a given written policy may be sought, and (3) over time, the situation can be improved markedly by in-depth policy review, analysis, and realignment.

***Getting from
Here to There --
Capacity Building,
Getting to Scale,
Sustaining, and
Institutionalizing***

The next challenge is the initial implementation and ultimate scale-up of systems of learning supports in schools and communities across the state. The question is, “*How do we get from here to there?*” The Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development will shepherd this effort with the Department of Education taking the lead and other collaborating agencies making essential contributions to the work.

*Steps to
Implementation –
What Needs
to be Done*

To move the prototype described in this document from the drawing board to implementation will require those wishing to replicate it to concentrate on the actions listed below. Each facet and task requires careful planning based on sound intervention fundamentals. This means paying special attention to the problem of the match between changes needed and those who are to change.

Planning

- 1) articulating a *clear, shared vision* for their system of learning supports;
- 2) establishing/adopting *long term results and measures*;
- 3) negotiating formal and informal *partnership agreements*;
- 4) *mapping and analyzing* existing resources for availability, content, and effectiveness;

5) reframing student supports into an *infrastructure* for learning supports by

- dedicating administrative time to learning supports,
- redefining leadership roles and functions to facilitate, guide, and support the systemic changes for *ongoing* development of learning supports systems at every level (state, regional, and local),
- realigning support staff/pupil services personnel roles and functions, and
- creating or enhancing teams to plan, implement, and evaluate how learning supports resources are used for a Learning Supports component.

Implementing

- 1) phasing in the six *programmatic content areas* (intervention framework);
- 2) reviewing and revising *policies* to ensure that they are supportive and facilitative of all aspects of a learning supports system;
- 3) integrating resources into a *cohesive and integrated continuum* of school and community interventions;
- 4) providing *ongoing professional development* to equip learning supports personnel with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement a Learning Supports component

Overlapping Phases of Implementation

- 1) *creating readiness* – by enhancing a climate/culture for change,
- 2) *initial implementation* – whereby change is carried out in stages using a well-designed guidance and support infrastructure,
- 3) *sustaining and institutionalization* – accomplished by ensuring there is an infrastructure to maintain and enhance productive changes, and
- 4) *ongoing evolution* – through use of mechanisms to improve quality and provide continuing support.

The above actions should lead to a) more effective deployment of existing resources to reduce fragmentation of services, b) a more cohesive, comprehensive and effective array of interventions to promote healthy development and alleviate barriers to learning, and c) an approach to delivering learning supports to increase student achievement and success in school that are an integral part of the overall improvement efforts of schools and communities.

Capacity Building to Implement, Sustain, and Institutionalize Learning Supports

Prototypes often are developed and initially implemented as pilot demonstrations at one or more sites. Efforts to create systems of learning supports, however, will require much more than implementing demonstrations at a few sites. Improved approaches will only be as good as the ability of schools and communities to develop, sustain, and institutionalize them in all their schools. This process often is called diffusion, replication, roll-out, or scale-up. Such a process requires support of policy and pursuit of strategies for creating motivational readiness among a critical mass of stakeholders, especially those most directly responsible for implementation, and for accommodating changes in roles and functions.

*Change Functions
Require Change
Mechanisms*

One way for state and regional agencies to assist local schools implement a process for turning existing student support programs and practices into a system of learning supports is to form a change *mechanism*, i.e., a designated team of change agents. Such staff can provide a temporary, but necessary, organizational base and skilled personnel for disseminating a prototype, negotiating decisions about replication, and dispensing the expertise to facilitate implementation of a prototype and eventual scale-up.

In Iowa, in many instances, school improvement action committees (SIACs) perform change agent functions for various aspects of school reform. Guiding the process of creating efficient and effective systems of learning supports, in all likelihood, will require re-thinking and expanding the scope of work they are currently doing and the way that the team interacts with community as part of the decision-making process. Some SIACs already may be performing these functions with respect to Learning Supports. On the other hand, assuming additional responsibilities to oversee another aspect of the school reform change process may be too much for some teams, requiring them to look to others to carry out these functions. A valuable source for such assistance in guiding the change process can lie with community coalitions or existing community planning groups. At the state level, the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development has undertaken this responsibility.

Concluding Comments

As steps now are taken to move the prototype from design to action in school districts and communities across Iowa, the challenges are clear, but the intended results are unarguable. Schools, in collaboration with their communities, must wrap supports around students and their teachers. Iowans are up to the challenge; they know that an investment in Iowa's children and youth is an investment in Iowa's future.

*NOTE: This summary was prepared by the Center for Mental Health at UCLA as a resource aid. Iowa is in the process of developing an Executive Summary and other brief documents highlighting the design and implementaion plans.