

Notes About the Learning Supports Facilitator Position

Hiring a Learning Supports Facilitator is a shift away from just adding another service provider. The emphasis is on creating a position to facilitate the establishment of a strong team of colleagues at each school who work together to develop, over time, a comprehensive system of learning supports. (Such a system establishes a unified component at a school designed to meet the needs of *all* students by addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.)

A Center resource that helps clarify this shift is

>*Organization Facilitators: A Key Change Agent for Systemic School and Community Changes*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Report/orgfacrep.pdf>

Introducing the New Position and Those Hired to Fill It

With regard to maximizing the opportunities related to the introduction of the new position, it is important to have district leadership (e.g., the superintendent and the director of student supports) kick off the work at an *introductory session*.

At the introductory session, it is important that district leaders make strong statements about the district's commitment to developing a unified and comprehensive learning support system. Points that need to be emphasized:

- (1) The district is determined to move away from currently marginalized and fragmented approaches to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.
- (2) The district leadership is committed to designing and implementing a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports by fundamentally restructuring its student and learning supports as an essential facet of school improvement efforts.
- (3) This is not just another project or pilot; high level district leadership has been assigned permanently to move the process forward expediently.
- (4) The district has established a new staff position (x number of personnel) to provide the type of resource needed to facilitate organizational changes to enable schools to pull together all resources relevant to student and learning supports.
- (5) The district is committed to institutionalizing the systemic changes as part of its long term school improvement policy.

Note: The center at UCLA is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563
Phone: (310) 825-3634. Email: smhp@ucla.edu.

Feel free to share and reproduce this document; no special permission is needed.
Please cite source as the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA.

- (6) The introductory session is just the first day of building staff understanding and involvement; basic capacity building will continue over the coming months, with an emphasis on why systemic changes are essential in moving away from currently marginalized and fragmented approaches, what the new system will look like, about other places across the country where similar efforts are underway.
- (7) Next steps the district will be taking in moving forward.

Examples of next steps include:

- >discussions with stakeholders (e.g., board members, district central office staff, principals, teachers, student and learning support staff, PTA, unions)
- >capacity building for those assigned to lead the way (e.g., district learning supports leader, new facilitators, principals)
- >actions principals will be taking to get the work started at schools
- >facilitators beginning work at schools.

Our experiences indicate that from the onset and at every step of the way it is essential to continue to underscore these points.

A Note About the Job Description for a Learning Support Facilitator

Careful formulation of job titles and descriptions is critical. A well developed job description provides a basic guide and can be used in clarifying the position for principals, district and school staff, and so forth.

In this respect, the title *Learning Support Facilitator* is better than “coordinator,” “advocate,” or some others we have heard.

The Center’s “Toolkit for Rebuilding Student Supports ...” has examples of job descriptions for the learning supports facilitator role and for an administrator responsible for developing a comprehensive learning supports system. See the prototypes included at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentssupport/toolkit/aidd.pdf>

Also see the job description for a Learning Supports “Coordinator” from the Tucson USD <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/leadershiplsl.pdf>

Some Cautions

Newcomer assimilation. New positions (especially personnel who are new to a district) generate dynamics that must be addressed. Special attention must be paid to integrating *Learning Supports Facilitators* with existing student and learning supports personnel (e.g., school psychologists, social workers, counselors, nurses, title I staff, special ed staff). The need is for administrators as well as the facilitators to learn how to introduce the position in a nonthreatening way and focus on establishing positive working relationships. It is crucial to concentrate on creating allies in the process of explaining what is planned, how it will benefit all staff and students, new roles and functions, the role of facilitators (e.g., which is not that of a supervisor, but of a system change helper), etc.

Oldtimer involvement. We try to be sure that student and learning support personnel are included as early as feasible in discussions about the intended systemic changes. And it is important to identify a friendly colleague at each school who will welcome the new facilitator into the school, provide an orientation for the facilitator (about the school and its personnel, what the school has, what gaps exist), and introduce colleagues in ways designed to begin positive connections.

Team building. We find that the facilitator and school-based student and learning supports staff need time and capacity building to become a well-functioning team. First meetings involve sharing experiences and further clarifying how best to accomplish the goal of developing a comprehensive system of learning supports at the school. Another early task is updating existing mapping of resources and then sharing the products with school staff, teachers, community partners, and other stakeholders. .

Keeping the focus on system development. Because the position of a *Learning Supports Facilitator* is new to staff and principals, it is tempting at schools to try to convert it back into a traditional job. For example, the need for direct service providers is so great that folks simply want to use this new staff member to provide specific services (e.g., work directly with students who have behavior, learning, emotional problems). It is essential, as requests come in for such services, that the facilitator and the development team focus on mobilizing whatever school and district resources are available, and when resources are insufficient, they need to reach out to the community for assistance in filling the gaps.

Another frequent temptation is to co-opt the new *Learning Supports Facilitator* for use as an administrative assistant to the principal. Again, the job description provides a crucial document to counter this. For example, besides stressing the intended nature and scope of the job, it can be used to clarify how the described functions can help organize work groups of interested school staff to carry out many of the tasks with which the principal needs help and, in the process, strengthen shared leadership.

A Few Examples of Resources for Staff Development and Other Capacity Building

The Center provides access to many resources (see the Center’s “Toolkit for Rebuilding Student Supports ...”, the “Practitioners’ Toolbox,” and the Online Clearinghouse Quick Find menu on the Center website (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm>)).

Here are some examples that can help with staff development and other capacity building.

>Team Development

>>*What is a Learning Support Leadership Team?* This is a one page description of a development and resource-oriented team (as contrasted to a case-oriented team) to integrate learning supports resources into a comprehensive component.

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/resource_coord_team.pdf

>>*Key Leadership Mechanisms for Enhancing Student & Learning Supports*

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdffdocs/Report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf

>School, Home, Community Connections

- >>*School-Community Partnerships: A Guide*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/guides/schoolcomm.pdf>
- >>*Parent and Home Involvement in Schools*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/parenthome/parent1.pdf>

>Transition Programs

Transition programs can prevent problems and reduce the need for one-to-one services for students in distress. For instance, see the Center's resources on helping anticipate, prevent, and correct problems many students (and families) experience adapting to a new school or class (e.g., supporting such students with welcoming programs, cross age peer buddies, in class partners, RTI, mentors from the community helping them in class). Here are a few examples of online resources developed by the Center:

- >>*Is the School Year Off to a Good Start?*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/goodstart.pdf>
- >>*Transitions to and from Elementary, Middle, and High School*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transitionstoandfrom.pdf>
- >>*Transitions: Turning Risks into Opportunities for Student Support*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transitions/transitions.pdf>
- >>Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/welcome/welcome.pdf>

>Crisis Intervention Planning and Prevention

Here the focus is on prevention through reducing bullying, promoting a safe/secure environment, and having an implementation plan for when crises occur. For help in planning for crisis preparation, immediate action, and aftermath responses, see *Responding to Crisis at a School* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/crisis/crisis.pdf>). For resources for prevention and other support programs, see the Quick Find menu related to specific concerns (e.g., Bullying -- <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/bully.htm>).