

30 years &  
counting



# Addressing Barriers to Learning

*New ways to think . . .*

*Better ways to link*



Vol. 22, #2

## Revitalizing Local Control: Transforming Student/Learning Supports and Enhancing Equity of Opportunity

Given the renewed emphasis on local control, a pressing opportunity and critical imperative is to *transform* how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

To this end, the need is to go well beyond the immediacy of ESSA planning in order to more effectively enhance equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond. School improvement planners must escape old ideas and move in new directions to end the marginalized and fragmented status of student/learning supports.

*Currently, the majority of resources allocated for student/learning supports address discrete, categorical problems, often with specialized services for a relatively small number of students. The result: Existing supports are highly fragmented and incapable of handling the nature and scope of problems experienced at many schools. Calls for improving the situation often stress unrealistic appeals for more student support personnel, rather than illuminating new directions. In the absence of innovative frameworks for substantive, scalable, and sustainable systemic changes, the whole enterprise will remain marginalized in school improvement policy and practice.*

Local control offers many opportunities for states and districts to move in transformative ways to improve student/learning supports. Three foundational concerns related to moving in new directions are highlighted on the following pages:

- (1) *Expanding School Improvement Policy to More Effectively Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching*
- (2) *Rethinking Evaluation and School Accountability to Get Credit for All that is Being Done*
- (3) *Being Rational and Analytical in Bringing Evidence-Based Practices into Schools*

Finally, we share a set of steps for moving forward to transform student/learning supports (based on input from the *National Summit on ESSA and Learning Supports: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching to Enhance Equity of Opportunity* and from sources around the country).

## Expanding School Improvement Policy to More Effectively Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Most policy makers and administrators know that good instruction delivered by highly qualified teachers is insufficient for ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. As a result, schools, districts, regional units, and state departments allocate considerable resources to address barriers to learning and teaching. Unfortunately, the resources are allocated in ways that accomplish too little.

### Needed: New Directions

*Student supports as they currently operate can't meet the needs of the many who are not doing well at school.*

Student/learning supports as they currently operate can't meet the needs of the many students whose problems are affecting their learning and performance at school. And, the straight forward psychometric reality is that in schools where a large proportion of students encounter major barriers to learning, test score averages are unlikely to increase adequately until such barriers are effectively addressed.

In some schools, principals have reported that up to 25% of their school budget is used to address barriers to learning and teaching; furthermore, they are concerned about poor cost-effectiveness. Analyses indicate that the resources are used in fragmented, limited, and sometimes redundant ways. Moreover, counterproductive competition is common among support staff and with community-based professionals who link with schools. And each new initiative potentially compounds these problems.

At the root of all this is the *marginalization* of student/learning supports in school improvement policy and planning. Due to the marginalization, most school improvement plans give short shrift to the type of capacity building (including pre- and in-service staff development) that can yield fundamental rethinking about how schools can better address the many barriers to learning and teaching. Such capacity building is essential to efforts to unify student/learning supports and develop a comprehensive approach to addressing factors interfering with learning.

Limitations of current approaches for providing student/learning supports prevent schools from playing a significant role in stemming the tide with respect to low achievement, delinquent behavior, student and teacher dropouts, and a host of other serious problems. The realities are that the problems are complex and overlap and require a *unified, comprehensive, and equitable approach*.

### ESSA Opens the Door to Transforming Student/Learning Supports

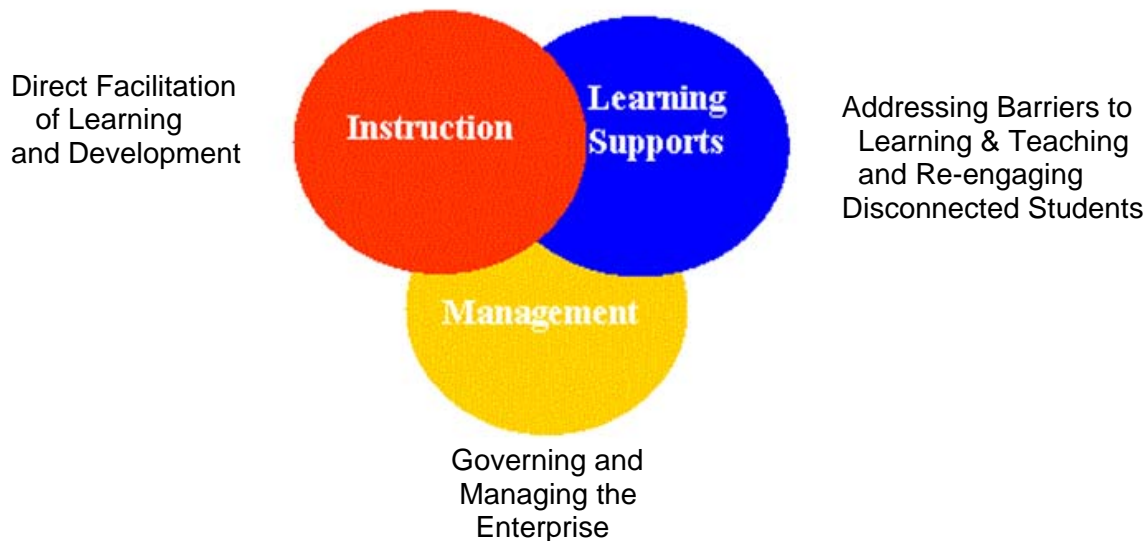
At this critical juncture in the history of public education, an overriding planning concern before states and districts is how to use the immediate press of ESSA planning to enhance the school's role in addressing factors that interfere with learning. We suggest that school policy makers and administrators must move forward by making supports for learning a primary component designed to directly address barriers to learning and teaching *and* re-engage disconnected students. Such a component is essential to enabling *all* students to have an equal opportunity to learn at school.

Note the emphasis on *re-engaging* students in classroom learning over time, interventions that only focus on addressing factors interfering with learning are insufficient in sustaining student involvement, good behavior, and effective learning at school. In this connection, our approach to transforming student/learning supports embraces a commitment to an enhanced focus on the role of intrinsic motivation.

### A Three Component Framework for School Improvement Policy and Practice\*

Unfortunately, current school improvement planning is guided primarily by a two component school improvement framework; that is, the focus primarily is on (1) instruction and (2) governance/management. The result: All interventions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students are given secondary consideration at best. This marginalization is an underlying and fundamental cause of the widely observed fragmentation and disorganization of student/learning supports. And it is reflected in the way ESSA and the U.S. Congress ignore the need for transformation and have reduced funding for such essential supports.

Transformation requires adopting a three component framework. The third component establishes efforts to directly address barriers as a primary component (e.g., a learning supports component). This policy shift is essential for elevating the status of the work in school improvement planning.



\*For a brief overview of prototypes to guide operationalization of the third component into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports, see the brief article: *Every Student Succeeds Act: Planning is an Immediate Task, But . . . Addressing Barriers to Learning is the Pressing Imperative* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/Winter17.pdf> .

A fuller presentation is covered in *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* (2017) by Adelman and Taylor and published by Cognella. <https://titles.cognella.com/> (Available in April).

***While school systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students, when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.***

Carnegie Task Force on Education

## Rethinking School Evaluation and Accountability to Get Credit for All that is Being Done

**A**long with expanding the school improvement policy framework, there is a need to rethink and reframe approaches to evaluation and accountability. ESSA does too little in this respect. For example, perhaps it's evident, but in case it's not: *Just adding one or two nonacademic indicators to accountability requirements will do little to move transformation of student/learning supports forward.*

School accountability is a policy tool with extraordinary power to reshape schools – for good and for bad. Systems are driven by accountability measures. This is particularly so under “reform” conditions.

Policy makers demand that schools show that their efforts are effective. But effective in what way? To what degree? At what cost? It is commonplace for there to be dissatisfaction over whatever is mandated. A major concern is that, too often, the data have little relationship to improving schools.

It is evident that accountability and all other evaluation activity can be difficult, troublesome, and controversial. In choosing what to look at, how to gather and interpret the data, and what to report, schools reflect prevailing policy makers' values and priorities. As a result, major disagreements are ongoing about which indicators to collect and how to use the amassed data.

Most of us agree that schools should constantly strive to improve and must be accountable. Every educator is aware of the importance of having data on results. We know that evaluation can be the door to a better future. But it is complicated. And it is more than ironic when prevailing policies and practices close rather than open that door.

Needed at this juncture is policy that reframes evaluation and accountability to ensure that schools get credit for all they are doing and are guided to what they can improve. With specific respect to accountability for addressing barriers to learning and teaching, this requires an expanded accountability framework that encompasses a whole person and whole system focus. This includes:

- (1) cognitive development and engagement (e.g., academics),
- (2) social and personal development and behavioral engagement,
- (3) direct intervention efforts essential for dealing with barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students,
- (4) evaluating system development, performance, and impact within the political-social-economic context (e.g., the neighborhood) in which a school is enmeshed.

### About Evaluation

Evaluation involves determining the worth or value of something. It is one of several basic assessment functions used at schools. In that context, evaluation is defined as a systematic process designed to describe and judge the overall impact and value of an intervention for purposes of making decisions and advancing understanding. Properly developed, formative and summative evaluations can aid efforts to (1) assess efficiency, effectiveness, costs, and impact, (2) make good decisions for improving schools, and (3) advance knowledge in ways that improve policy, practice, and personnel preparation.

Given that many more indicators can be proposed than can be feasibly used to gather data, decisions must be made about what will be evaluated. In addition to matters highlighted above, these include decisions about (1) general concerns of interest (e.g., concerns about students, teachers, support staff, administrators; classroom and schoolwide conditions and climate; intervention antecedents/inputs, immediate objectives, intermediate goals, long-range aims), (2) specific facets to be evaluated, (3) level of specificity used in designating indicators, (4) measures and methods for gathering data on designated indicators, and (5) standards to be used in analyzing the data and arriving at judgments. In making such decisions, concerns arise because what can be evaluated currently is far less than what schools assert as their mission. Furthermore, all such decisions are influenced by various sources of bias.

In discussing evaluation, Yankelovich sagely cautioned:

*The first step is to measure whatever can be easily measured. This is okay as far as it goes.*

*The second step is to disregard that which can't be measured .... This is artificial and misleading.*

*The third step is to presume that what can't be measured easily isn't very important. This is blindness.*

*The fourth step is to say what can't be measured really doesn't exist. This is suicide.*

### **Appreciating the Many Functions of Assessment at a School**

Schools need to pursue *assessment* related to various functions. Decisions about indicators begin with clarity about such functions. And, most of the functions call for more than indicators of results.

Besides generating data for system management, assessment plays a key role in:

1. *Identification* – indicators that help find and label matters of specific interest. The focus may be on person variables, environmental factors, or both, and on problems, strengths, or both (e.g., data to help identify effective teachers and effective schools; data to help identify gifted and talented students and those who are not doing well at school – including those needing special education).
2. *Selection* – indicators that help make decisions about general changes in status (e.g., data to inform decisions about moving teachers and principals to different schools, choosing schools for special intervention, placing students in specific programs).
3. *Planning for specific changes* – indicators that help make decisions about immediate and short-term objectives and procedures for accomplishing long-term goals (e.g., data to inform school improvement planning, professional development, specific student interventions – including data from response to intervention efforts and IEP assessments).
4. *Evaluation of School Results* -- indicators that help make decisions about effectiveness based on positive and negative outcomes and related costs (e.g., focus may be on impact on students, particular subgroups, society as a whole). These data play a major role in system improvement and policy decisions (e.g., accountability).

### **Expanding the School Accountability Framework**

*Prevailing accountability pressures marginalize almost every effort not seen as directly and quickly producing higher achievement scores*

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, the only measures that really counted were achievement test scores. Such scores drove school accountability, and what such tests measured became the be-all and end-all of what is attended to by many decision makers. This produced a growing disconnect between the realities of what it takes to improve academic performance and the direction in which many policy makers and school reformers were leading the public.

The disconnect was especially evident in schools serving what often are referred to as “low wealth” families. Such families and those who work in schools serving them have an in-depth understanding of a range of barriers to learning and teaching that must be addressed so students can benefit from the teacher’s efforts to teach. These stakeholders long-stressed that, in many schools, major academic improvements are unlikely until the impact of such barriers are reduced effectively.

At the same time, it is evident to anyone who looks that there is no *direct* accountability for how schools address factors interfering with student success at school. To the contrary, efforts essential for addressing barriers to development and learning often are devalued, further marginalized, and cut when achievement test scores do not reflect an immediate impact.



Thus, rather than building a system that effectively addresses barriers to learning and teaching, prevailing accountability measures mainly pressure schools to pursue “better” instruction. The underlying assumption is that students are both motivated and able each day to benefit from instruction. The reality, of course, is that in too many schools this is not the case for a large group of youngsters.

Students confronted with a host of interfering factors usually are not in a position to benefit even from significant instructional improvements. The result is enduring low test scores and an achievement gap.

As was the case with the No Child Left Behind Act, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides a fragmented vision for a range of student/learning supports intended to promote equity of opportunity. As a result, there remains a fundamental disconnect between ESSA and the realities of what it takes to improve academic performance.

### Ensuring a Focus on Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Logically, well designed, systematic efforts are essential for addressing interfering factors. However, current accountability pressures override the logic and marginalize almost every effort not seen as directly and quickly leading to higher achievement scores. Adding a couple of “nonacademic” accountability indicators clearly is not a solution. Doing so will likely contribute to the trend to drive student/learning supports in ways that deemphasize essential work that is not a specified accountability indicator. For example, efforts to improve attendance often stress rounding up and bringing truants back to school, but do little to help teachers re-engage these students in classroom instruction. This is a recipe for a revolving door.

Those calling for “multimetric” accountability capture the essence of the problem of emphasizing only one or a few nonacademic indicators. However, they have yet to face up to developing an accountability framework that effectively encompasses a systemic focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. If the goal of a school accountability system is to improve schools so that they increasingly enhance equity of opportunity, these factors must be included in a comprehensive and systemic manner.

All this leads to an appreciation of the need for an expanded framework for school accountability – a framework that includes direct measures of achievement *and much more*. We view this as a move toward what has been called *intelligent accountability*. The Exhibit on the following page highlights such an expanded framework.

As illustrated, there is no intent to deflect from the laser-like focus on meeting high academic standards. Debate will continue about how best to measure academic outcomes, but clearly schools must demonstrate they effectively meet goals for *cognitive development* (especially higher order learning).

*It is self-defeating not to hold schools accountable for enhancing personal and social growth*

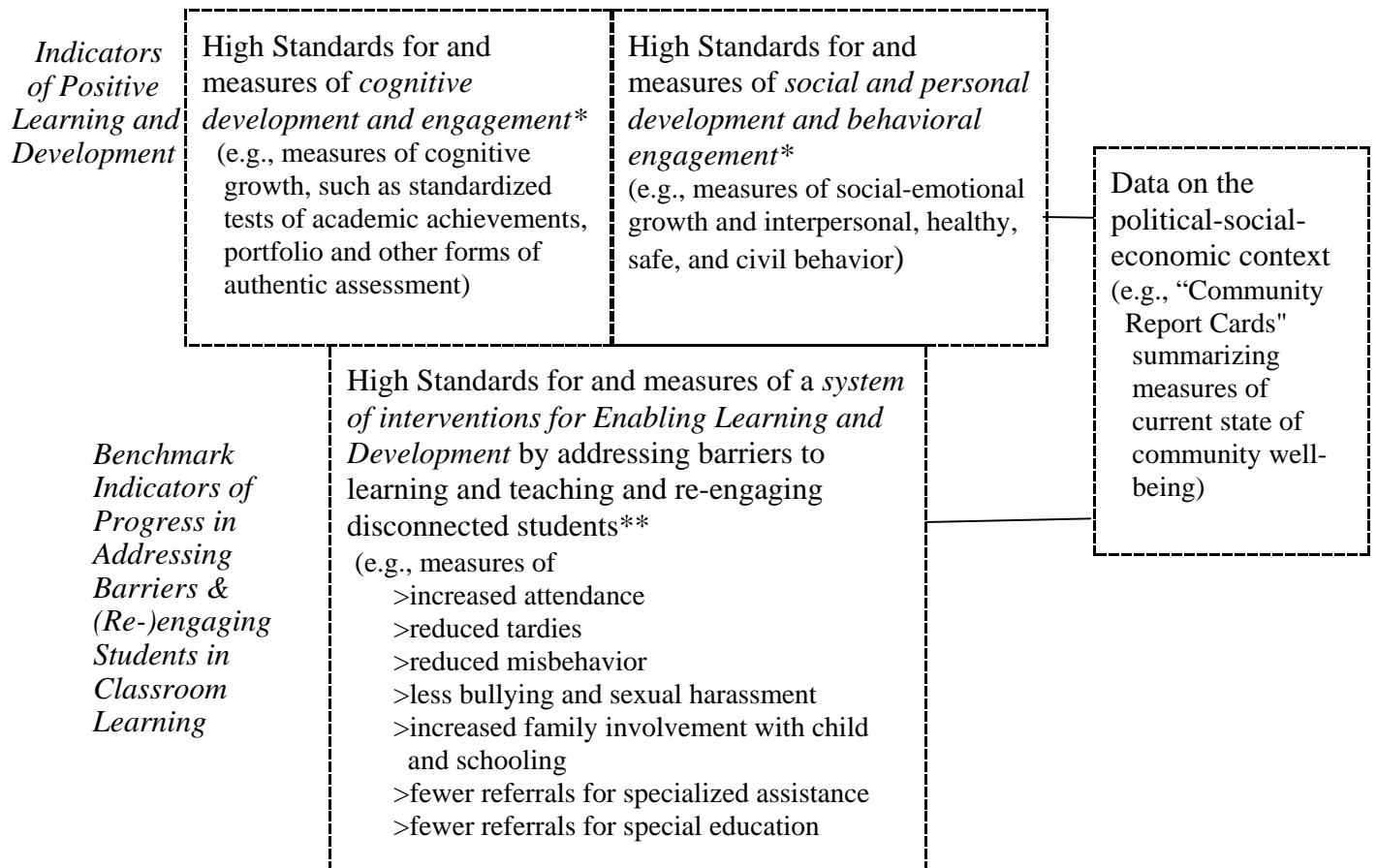
At the same time, policy must acknowledge that schools also are expected to pursue high standards in promoting positive *personal and social functioning*, including enhancing civility, teaching safe and healthy behavior, and some form of “character education.” Every school we visit has specific goals related to this facet of student development and learning. Yet, it is evident that there is no systematic evaluation or reporting of the work. As would be expected, then, schools direct few resources and too little attention to these unmeasured concerns. Yet, society wants schools to attend to these matters, and most professionals understand that personal and social functioning are integrally tied to academic performance. From this perspective, it seems self-defeating not to hold schools accountable for student improvements related to such goals.

*It is also self-defeating not to attend to benchmarks related to learning supports*

And, for schools where a large proportion of students are not doing well, it is also self-defeating not to attend to benchmark indicators of progress in addressing barriers to learning and teaching. Schools cannot teach children who are not in class. Therefore, increasing attendance always is an expectation (and an important budget consideration). But there are also other basic indicators of school improvement and precursors of enhanced academic performance (e.g., reductions in tardiness, problem behavior, suspensions, dropouts, inappropriate referrals for special education). Given this, the progress of school staff related to such matters should be measured and treated as a significant aspect of school accountability, with credit given for all progress.

### Exhibit

## Expanding the Framework for School Accountability



\*Results of interventions for directly facilitating development and learning.

\*\*Results of interventions for addressing barriers to learning and development.

## Context Matters

Finally, school outcomes, of course, are influenced by the well-being of the families and the neighborhoods in which they operate. Therefore, performance of any school should be judged within the context of the current status of indicators of community well-being, such as economic, social, and health measures. If those indicators are not improving or are declining, it is patently unfair to ignore these contextual conditions in judging school performance.

### Of Course it's Complex

*How effective is the intervention? Do you have data to support that approach? Where's your proof?*

The questions are so logical and simple to ask, and they can be so devastating in their impact. One problem is that such questions imply that relevant data are easy to gather, and so if data aren't available, the intervention must be ineffective or else those in charge are being irresponsible. Usually ignored by the questioners are the many complexities associated with valid and ethical evaluation.

Indeed, under reform conditions, policy makers often want a quick and easy recipe to use. This leads to measures aimed at holding administrators and staff accountable for specific, short-term results. Little thought is given to the negative effects such a limited focus can have on achieving more complex desired long-term results.

Methodologically, for instance, evaluation and accountability must be carried out with tools that are technically limited (e.g., many lack adequate standardization, have poor reliability, have poor validity). Interpretations of findings are made using different and sometimes biased perspectives. Consequently, what is reported often is controversial.

Moreover, almost everyone has experienced negative consequences from evaluation. Those evaluated often are harmed, and consumers of evaluation reports frequently are misled. Evaluations create tensions and dilemmas and can be misused to create undesirable degrees of uniformity and conformity. Ethically, we should be as concerned with the consequences of evaluation as we are with improving our evaluation capability.

It is important to remember that choices about what data to gather and exclude are guided by policy decisions, and major decisions about education involve considerations that go well beyond the availability of valid data. Profound and conflicting social-political-economic-philosophic agenda are at play; so no one should be surprised that relevant data often are ignored, and some data are manipulated during policy debates and at decision making tables. As Rutkowski cautions, "Through educational indicators a set of 'truths' is arguably produced. However, these 'truths' are very open to interpretation."\* And as Planty and Carlson stress, "Indicators of poor quality certainly distort and misguide decision making and policy."\*\*

Furthermore, two unfounded presumptions are at the core of most current formal and informal evaluations in education. One premise is that an intervention in widespread use has arrived at a relatively evolved stage of development and, therefore, warrants the cost of summative evaluation. The other presumption is that major conceptual and methodological problems associated with evaluating intervention are resolved. The truth is that interventions are frequently introduced prior to adequate development, with a view to evolving them based on lessons learned. This is the case for many science-based practices brought to schools.

It is well to remember that empirical support indicating *efficacy* does not predict *effectiveness* when school personnel implement the practice under common school conditions.) Moreover, many well-institutionalized approaches remain relatively underfunded and underdeveloped. Finally remember that every review of the literature on formal evaluations outlines major unresolved concerns.

Given this state of affairs, the nature and scope of too many accountability demands often are unreasonable and chronically reflect a naive view of the evidence base.

\*Rutkowski, D. (2008). Towards an Understanding of Educational Indicators. *Policy Futures in Education*, 6, 470-481.

\*\*Planty, M. & Carlson, D. (2010). *Understanding education indicators: A practical primer for research and policy*. New York: Teachers College Press.



## School Related Assessments: A Few Concluding Comments

*Today's enthusiastic embrace of data has waltzed us directly from a petulant resistance to performance measures to a reflexive and unsophisticated reliance on a few simple metrics.... The result has been a nifty pirouette from one troubling mind-set to another; with nary a mistep, we have pivoted from the "old stupid" to the "new stupid."*

Frederick Hess

Gathering good data to evaluate schools clearly contributes to school improvement. Doing so, however, involves more than amassing limited data on results. Evaluations can as easily reshape schools in negative as in positive directions.

Current practices must be rethought. A particular concern is ensuring that accountability pressures do not inappropriately narrow the mission of public education.

To these ends, policy makers must expand the framework for school accountability beyond indicators of cognitive development to ensure that systems are driven in ways that

- promote an equal opportunity for all students to succeed at school (e.g., include indicators that evaluate direct efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students)
- facilitate students' personal and social development
- evaluate system performance and development in the context of the surrounding community's current status.

Moreover, policy makers need to invest in supporting development of district and school information management systems that enable gathering and reporting data in aggregated and disaggregated ways (with data on individuals appropriately safeguarded).

For more, see

> *Evaluation and Accountability: Getting Credit For All You Do!*

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

> *Standards & Quality Indicators for an Enabling or Learning Supports Component*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/qualityindicators.pdf>

**Folks who work in schools  
deserve more credit.**



**Sure, but they wouldn't need it  
if we paid them better.**

## Being Rational and Analytical in Bringing Evidence-Based Practices into Schools

Good ideas and missionary zeal are sometimes enough  
to change the thinking of individuals; they are rarely, if ever,  
effective in changing complicated organizations ...  
with traditions, dynamics, and goals of their own.

Seymour Sarason

**R**elated to demands for accountability are increasing demands to demonstrate there is a science/research/evidence-base to support practices conducted in schools. Policy makers are prone to ask: *Where's the evidence that this will help the school meet its educational mission?*

The question certainly is logical and simple to ask. Moreover, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) stresses the growing responsibility for states, districts, and schools to incorporate research evidence in their policies and practices for planning, collaborating, decision-making, and continuous improvement.

A critical problem is that the question and the legislative emphasis imply that if data aren't available, an intervention is ineffective. The reality, of course, is that many proposed innovations and comprehensive new directions for school improvement generally haven't been the focus of research, and relevant data often are not yet available on those that have.

This is especially so with respect to research on *transforming* the way schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. There is ample evidence that such a transformation is imperative (e.g., analyses of need assessments and of what's wrong with what's in place). However, the evidence base to guide the design, development, and implementation of essential systemic changes is in its infancy. Thus, at this time, efforts to unify and develop a comprehensive and equitable system of student/learning supports strive to transform what is in place primarily using rationality and innovative prototype development.

For example, the prototype we have developed to counter intervention fragmentation *embeds* all necessary practices into a rationally analyzed set of six content arenas that intersect with a full continuum of interventions. (For details, see the references at the bottom of page 3). The resulting system includes existing practices as well as proposed additions identified to fill critical gaps. Where solid evidence supports any of the embedded practices, so much the better. And if there is significant evidence for replacing an existing intervention, so be it. But the primary concern is what's *needed*.

In sum, a rational approach focuses first and foremost on meeting high priority needs. That is, the first consideration for schools in adding or replacing interventions is:

*Does the proposed practice meet a high priority need? and if so, To what degree?*

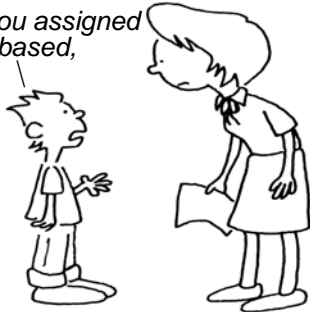
Having identified a needed practice, analyses of an evidence base comes into play. (See Exhibit on the following page.) Of particular concern is:

*What's the nature and scope of and how good is the evidence?*

Also of concern to schools is evidence that the approach can fit into the school culture, is scalable throughout a school district, and is sustainable.

*Can the practice be implemented into the system and sustained in ways that ensure system integrity and equity? (e.g., will it help or hinder the development and substantive sustainability of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports).*

*The homework you assigned  
wasn't evidence-based,  
so I didn't do it.*



Care must be taken not to disregard an essential change just because it has not yet been given an empirical blessing. That would be arbitrary and irrational.

Clearly, we must strive to use a scientific base for school improvement; at the same time, we must pursue innovation and new directions with logic, analysis, and wisdom.

**Exhibit****Analyzing the Evidence**

The nature and scope of the evidence offered in support of bringing a needed new practice into a school setting must be carefully analyzed. The question is not just: *How statistically significant are the findings?* A key concern is the degree to which the reported findings go to the core of the addressing a school's many needs. And given the tight budgets at most schools, the data require analyses that clarify *the degree to which the practice can meet a high priority, pressing need*. This involves determining:

*What specifically does the evidence indicate is the practice's impact?*

(e.g., How relevant are the dependent variables? How representative was the sample with respect to the schools where the work is to be implemented? Is there evidence about a potent impact under regular school/classroom conditions? Any long-term findings? Any data on negative outcomes? Any data on scalability and sustainability? Any cost-benefit analyses, and if so, do the benefits outweigh the costs? If it is to replace an existing practice, is there data showing it is better than what is currently in use?)

Another consideration is:

*What's involved in replicating the practice to scale and sustaining it over time?*

(e.g., If it requires significant organizational changes, how costly will it be in terms of making system changes and replicating to scale, organizational disruption, capacity building – including personnel development)

While we all want to base our practices on good evidence, it is often the case that the “best” evidence is not good enough.

And finally there is the problem of the sparsity of evidence for implementation practices. Little research attention has been paid to (1) differentiating *direct* implementation from the process of *facilitating* implementation and doing so on a large scale and (2) differentiating implementation of a *specific practice or program* from efforts to *transform institutions* such as schools. As a result, the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) has concluded: "... very little is known about the processes required to effectively implement evidence-based programs...."\*

\*For more, see *Bringing New Prototypes into Practice: Dissemination, Implementation, and Facilitating Transformation* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/implrep3.pdf>

**Our Concluding Comments; What are Yours?**

It seems evident that public education is at a crossroads. Its future depends on moving in new directions to enhance equity of opportunity. The status quo is not an option. Just tinkering with and tweaking old ideas will only produce more of the same. Much needs to be done to enable the Every Student Succeeds Act to live up to its name. Of critical concern is transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. Such a transformation will pay considerable dividends, including paving the way for new directions when Congress reauthorizes the special education act.

There is an urgency in all this that should transcend business as usual. In coming months, discussion of transforming student/learning supports must be a priority. In particular, the time is overdue for the various associations, guilds, unions, universities, journals, etc. to encourage their constituents to play a greater role in leading the way forward. To do less is to maintain the highly unsatisfactory status quo.

**What's your perspective?** Send your comments to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu). We will synthesize the responses we receive and distribute them widely to further build momentum for transforming student/learning supports.

And feel free to share this with concerned others.

## 2017 – Next Steps for Transforming Student/Learning Supports

Based on input from the National Summit on *ESSA and Learning Supports: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching to Enhance Equity of Opportunity* (held on January 23rd, 2017 at UCLA) and from sources around the country, it is clear that a significant number of folks are ready to begin working toward transforming student/learning supports. In doing so, there are immediate opportunities related to influencing ESSA state planning. Beyond ESSA, opportunities exist with respect to all school improvement planning efforts.

**WITH RESPECT TO ESSA PLANNING** -- the focus needs to be on the section entitled: "Supporting all Students." Possible steps for strengthening this section are:

- 1) Share basic information about desired systemic changes with stakeholders to expand the discussion around ESSA planning. One easy way to do this is to forward them a copy of the pre-summit article: *Every Student Succeeds Act: Planning is an Immediate Task, But . . . Addressing Barriers to Learning is the Pressing Imperative* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/Winter17.pdf>

Alternatively, just let us know who you want to inform, and we'll take care of it. (Send names and emails to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu) .)

- 2) Provide direct stakeholder input about expanding how ESSA focuses on Supporting All Students (e.g., Section 5.A. "Well Rounded Education and Support for Students"). For example, to ensure a deeper and direct focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re engaging disconnected students, suggest adopting a three component framework for school improvement. And, in a state's consolidated ESSA plan, suggest splitting "Section 5.A. Well Rounded Education and Support for Students" in two as follows:

5.A.1 Well Rounded Education

5.A.2 Support for Students

See example in *Improving ESSA Planning for Student and Learning Supports* -

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

- 3) Suggest framing "Support for Students" in terms of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable intervention system. For example, expand the focus on the multitier student support (MTSS) model to move beyond the simple focus on levels to a framework that emphasizes
  - subsystems of school community interventions
  - a systematic organization of intervention content that directly reflects what schools need to do each day to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students (and staff).

This also is illustrated in *Improving ESSA Planning for Student and Learning Supports* -

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

- 4) Suggest expanding the discussion of Title II to include a focus on enhancing transformative school leadership that can drive innovation related to student/learning supports. For example, stress
  - transforming student/learning supports in all teacher, principal, and other leader personnel development planning
  - developing student and learning support staff as leaders for transforming student/learning supports.

With Title II in mind, see:

>*What Do "Teachers, Administrators, and Other School Leaders" Need to Learn about Transforming Student and Learning Supports?*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/teachers2.pdf>

Note: States can work to improve school leadership by: (a) devoting a significant portion of its state activities funds; and (b) considering its flexibility to reserve an additional three percent of Title II, Part A district subgrants for state activities to improve school leadership.

**WITH RESPECT TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING IN GENERAL**, the Center has a variety of resources online. Start by reviewing the System Change Toolkit - <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>  
See for example the step-by-step guides – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

*Or just contact us for free consultation and TA (see information below).*

**About Free Distance Technical Assistance and Coaching from the Center**

We want to help! Transforming student/learning supports is challenging (especially with everything else that has to be done on most days). To aid the efforts of those moving forward to develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports, the Center offers free mentoring, coaching, and technical assistance primarily by email and phone. Those making such systemic changes have found it particularly helpful when we work with them in preparing a design document and strategic plan for the work in ways that integrate the transformation into district and school strategic plans and implementation. Interested? CONTACT: [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

**Note:** Various vendors are offering coaching. While these can be helpful (if they can be afforded), working directly with the Center, at least at the start, can ensure that the frameworks and essential system elements are understood and systemic changes are designed in ways that ensure substantive transformation, scalability, and sustainability.

*Let us hear your views about direct action to end the marginalization and transform student/learning supports. Also, let us know if you are ready to move forward to develop a Learning Supports Component to better address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.*

Send to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu) or to [adelman@psych.ucla.edu](mailto:adelman@psych.ucla.edu)

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There is a tendency in efforts to improve schools to call for simple solutions to complex matters and focus on seeking low-hanging fruit. It will take more than an elevator speech and another round of tinkering to save public education. We think Mencken was right when he said: *For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.*

Transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students is not a simple process. As the preceding articles underscore, there are complex challenges ahead. But they are doable with perseverance and good will. And they must be done if we are to enhance equity of opportunity and not simply assert an empty promise to have every child succeed.

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***Perfection is not attainable,  
but if we chase perfection  
we can catch excellence.***

Vince Lombardi





## Center Resources Update

(For regular updates about new Center resources, go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> and click on *What's New*.)

### New

- > *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* (2017). Book published by Cognella. <https://titles.cognella.com/>
- > *Every Student Succeeds Act and Learning Supports* (Hot Topic) — <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>
- > *Empathy, Compassion, and Addressing Student Misbehavior* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/empath.pdf>
- > *About Resilience and Schools* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resili.pdf>
- > *Report from the National Summit on ESSA and Learning Supports: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching to Enhance Equity of Opportunity* (held on January 23rd, 2017 at UCLA). <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/summitreport.pdf>

### Some Recently Featured Center Resources on Evaluation

#### >Tools for assessing a school's support for students

>> *Addressing Barriers to Learning: A Set of Surveys to Map What a School Has and What It Needs* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/surveys/set1.pdf>

Surveys for 6 arenas of concerns and related system needs that underscore the content of a unified, comprehensive, equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. The areas are (1) classroom-focused enabling, (2) crisis assistance and prevention, (3) support for transitions, (4) home involvement and commitment, (5) student and family assistance, and (6) community outreach for involvement and support.

>> *RTI and Classroom & Schoolwide Learning Supports: A Guide for Teachers and Learning Supports Staff* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtiguide.pdf>

> **Tools for assessing students** – For resources on student assessment (from our Center and from others), see the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on

>> *Assessment/Screening* – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1405\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1405_01.htm)

Among the Center developed documents listed there is:

>> *Screening/Assessing Students: Indicators and Tools* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/assessment/assessment.pdf>

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#### **Want resources? Need technical assistance? Coaching?**

Use our website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

or contact us – E-mail: [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu) or Ph: (310) 825-3634

Not receiving our monthly electronic newsletter (ENEWS)?

Or our weekly *Community of Practice Interchange*?

Send requests to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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***If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door.***  
Milton Berle

The Center for Mental Health in Schools operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project in the Dept. of Psychology, UCLA.

Center Staff:

*Howard Adelman, Co-Director*

*Linda Taylor, Co-Director*

*Perry Nelson, Coordinator*

*... and a host of students*