

28 years &
counting



Addressing Barriers

to Learning

New ways to think . . .

Better ways to link



Vol. 20, # 1

Announcing

2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

Student and learning supports have long been marginalized in school improvement policy and practice. As a result, such supports are developed in an ad hoc and piecemeal manner. Implementation is fragmented and at times redundant. Those involved often are counterproductively competitive, especially when funding is sparse (and when isn't it?).

All this needs to change. Yet, most of the widely circulated reports about improving schools pay little or no attention to the role of school student and learning support staff.

It is time to make the marginalization a major issue.

To this end, in January our Center will launch the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*.

Solid groundwork has been laid by the initiative for New Directions for Student and Learning Supports, and that work will be morphed into the new initiative. Going forward, the focus will be on transformation and direct action.

To begin with, we will introduce a new work entitled: *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* (see contents on the next page). This resource will be placed for free access on our website as a focal point to stimulate interchange and with a view to mobilizing transformation. (The chapters provide protocol frameworks and many specifics for a systemic learning supports component to replace the existing marginalized and fragmented set of student and learning supports in districts and schools. The work also stresses that transformation can be done by redeploying existing resources and garnering economies of scale.)

We want the interchange to play a major role in elevating school improvement policy discussions about ending the marginalization of student and learning supports. The timing is critical as states pursue higher curriculum standards and as Congress returns to reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

During 2015, we will increase our Center's support for those pioneering state and district initiatives already implementing learning supports as a third component of school improvement policy, as well as coaching and providing technical assistance to those who indicate a desire to move forward. In addition to the new book, our Center is revising and adding to our online, free resources – including professional development activities, powerpoints, implementation resources, and the System Change Toolkit. And, of course, we continue providing free online technical assistance and coaching on request.

Interested? Let us hear your views about direct action to end the marginalization and transform student and 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 or to adelman@psych.ucla.edu

Below is the table of contents for the new book that will be available for free downloading on the Center's website in January.

Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System

***Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
enabling equity of opportunity.***

Part I underscores the imperative for transforming student and learning supports and outlines vital changes in framing policy and intervention. Part II offers details for improving intervention. Part III explores ways to rework operational infrastructures and facilitate systemic change.

Preface

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Part I: Reframing for Transformation

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1. Viewing School Improvement through Additional Lenses
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4. Classroom-based Learning Supports to Enable Learning and Teaching
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10. Major Phases and Key Facets of Transforming Student and Learning Supports
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Appendices

- A. Expanding the Accountability Framework for Schools
- B. Standards for a Learning Supports Component
- C. Self Study Surveys
- D. District Level Operational Infrastructure
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- F. Major Tasks of Mentors and Coaches
- G. Benchmarks for Monitoring and Improving Transformation

As our readers know, our policy and practice analyses highlight that the trend to develop discrete, separate programs to address the many learning, behavior, and emotional problems seen at school adds to the marginalization of student and learning supports. Student and school problems are complex and multifaceted; responses need to be comprehensive, cohesive, and equitable. This requires embedding the many programs, services, and initiatives into a unifying policy and intervention approach. Our analyses have attracted wide-spread interest here and abroad. Recently, we were invited to write an article for the *International Journal of School Health*. The following is a version of that published piece. (Note: References are not cited here; they can be found in the online version at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/intjournal.pdf>.)

Ending the Marginalization of Student and Learning Supports

No one seriously argues against the possibility that behavior, emotional, and physical problems can profoundly affect learning and performance. With this in mind, schools have long offered a range of health, psychological, counseling, and social service programs. The rationale offered has stressed one or both of the following points:

- schools provide good access to students (and their families) who require services;
- schools need to address such concerns to enable effective school performance and student well-being.

Point one typically reflects the perspective and agenda of advocates and agencies whose mission is to improve services. The second point reflects the perspective and agenda of educators.

Barriers to Development, Learning, and Well-Being

Exhibit 1 highlights a range of overlapping factors that can confound efforts to promote positive development, effective learning, and general well-being. Any combination of such factors can put a student at risk, but when there is a higher concentration of risk factors, the number of students manifesting problems increases. And the widespread reality is that many schools cannot achieve their prime mission without playing a significant role in addressing barriers to student and school success. This is especially so in schools serving families living in economically depressed neighborhoods.

Emphasizing barriers to learning and teaching in no way is meant as an excuse for poor school performance. Indeed, acknowledging barriers simply underscores common sense. As schools strive for high performance, success often depends on addressing such interfering factors.

About Fragmentation and Marginalization

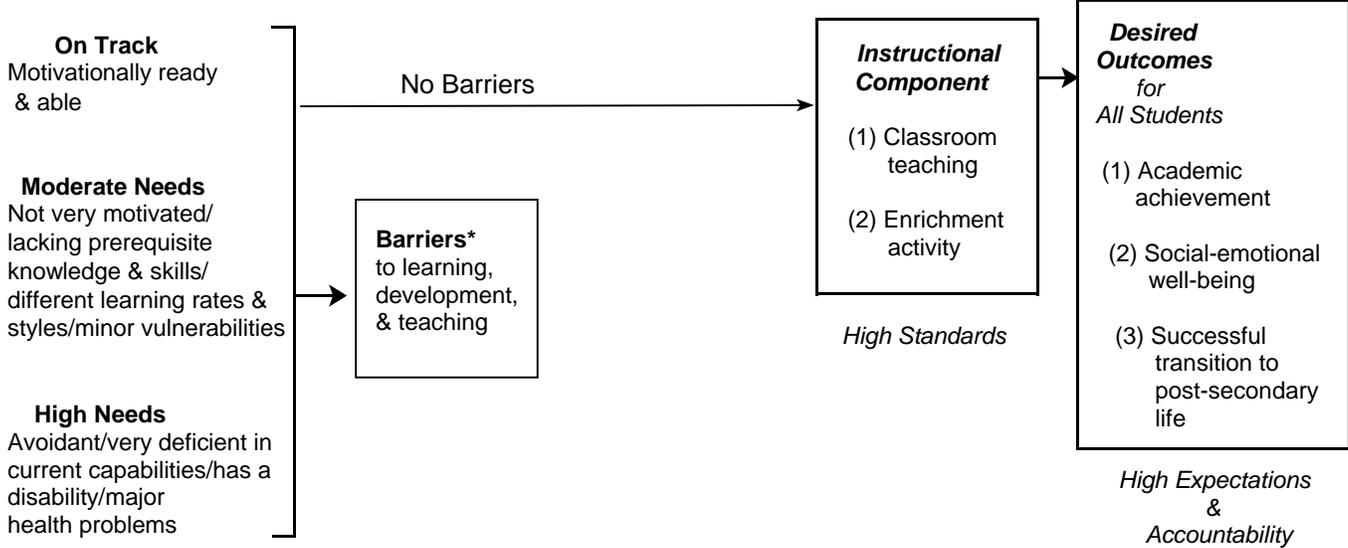
Obviously, the first and foremost mission of schools is to educate the young, and effective instruction is fundamental to that mission. No one wants to send children to a school where teachers lack instructional competence. As a result, school improvement policy primarily emphasizes instruction and usually marginalizes considerations related to dealing with barriers. Student and learning supports are introduced reactively through ad hoc and piecemeal policy and operate in a fragmented manner. This tends to create counterproductive competition for sparse resources as support staff representing different interests push separate, narrow programs and services. And the competition contributes to ongoing marginalization and works against developing a unified, systemic, and equitable approach.

Efforts to improve the situation have overemphasized strategies such as adding additional personnel, bringing in community service providers, and improving coordination, rather than ending the marginalization of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching.

Exhibit 1. Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Range of Learners

(Based on their response to academic instruction at any given time)

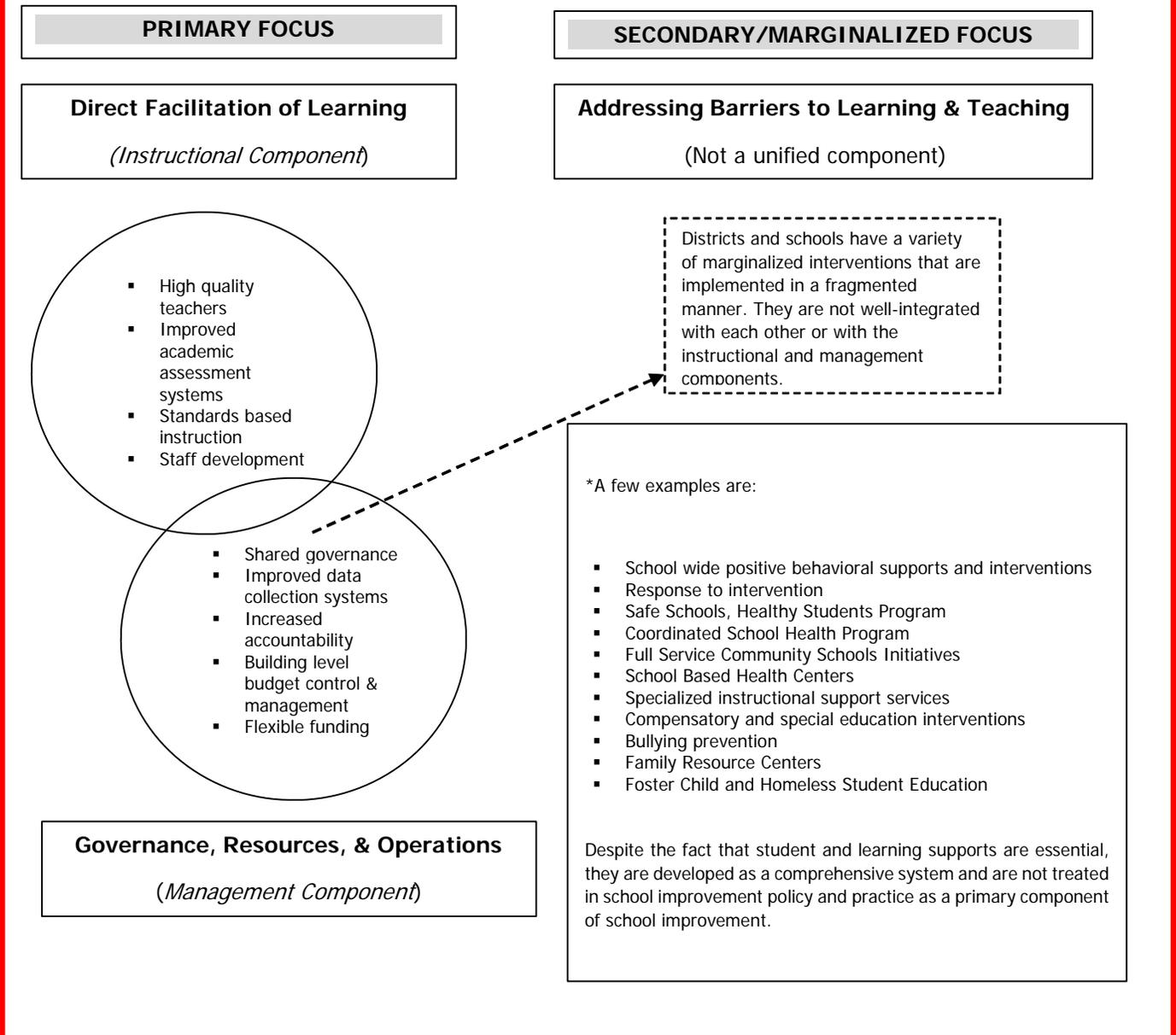


***Examples of Conditions That Can Increase Barriers to Learning**

Environmental Conditions**		Person Conditions**	
<p>Neighborhood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High poverty High rates of crime, drug use, violence, gang activity High unemployment, abandoned/floundering businesses Disorganized community High mobility Lack of positive youth development opportunities 	<p>Family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic conflicts, abuse, distress, grief, loss Unemployment, poverty, and homelessness Immigrant and/or minority status Family physical or mental health illness Poor medical or dental care Inadequate child care Substance abuse 	<p>School and Peers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor quality schools, high teacher turnover High rates of bullying and harassment Minimal offerings and low involvement in extracurricular activities Frequent student-teacher conflicts Poor school climate, negative peer models Many disengaged students and families 	<p>Internal Student Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neurodevelopmental delay Physical illness Mental disorders Disabilities Inadequate nutrition and healthcare Learning, behavior, and emotional problems that arise from negative environmental conditions exacerbate existing internal factors

Our research has clarified that the marginalization stems from the dominance of a two-component framework in school improvement policy making. As graphically illustrated in Exhibit 2, currently the main thrust in improving school performance is on enhancing (1) core instruction and (2) the way schools are governed and manage resources. Student and learning supports (including interventions to improve health) are operated as supplementary add-ons.

Exhibit 2. Current two-component framework shaping school improvement policy.



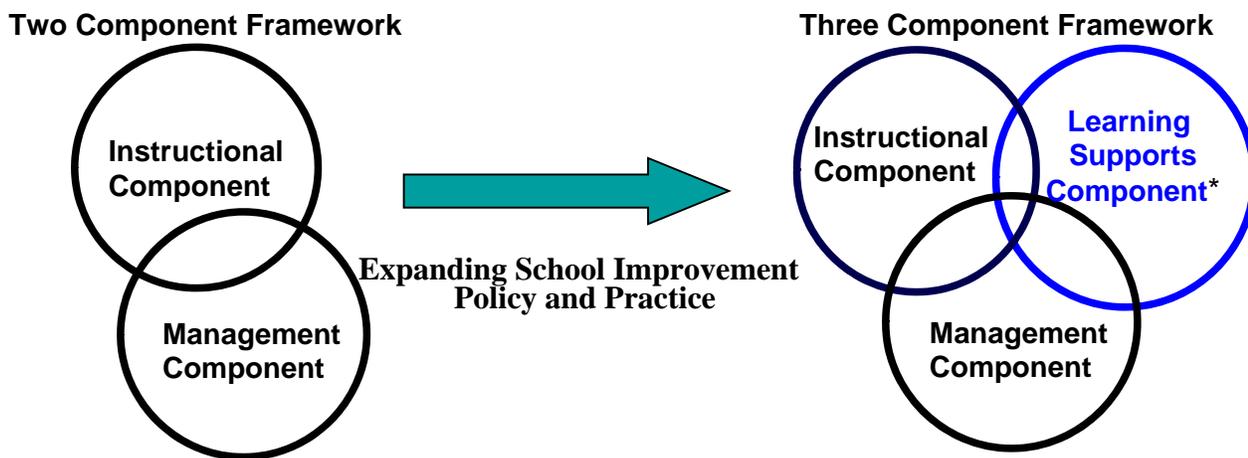
Few student and school problems are discrete; developing separate initiatives for every designated problem not only is infeasible, it contributes to marginalization, fragmentation, and other system problems.

Expanding to a Three Component Framework for School Improvement

Exhibit 3 graphically illustrates shifting from a two- to a three-component framework. The third component becomes the unifying concept and umbrella under which all resources currently expended for student and learning supports are woven together to develop a unified, comprehensive, and multifaceted system. All efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching are embedded in this component.

As with the other two components, the third component must be treated in policy and practice as *primary and essential* in order to combat current marginalization and fragmentation. Furthermore, to be effective in classrooms and school-wide, it must be fully integrated into school improvement planning and implementation.

Exhibit 3. Expanded Policy Prototype.



*States and districts are trending toward using the umbrella term *Learning Supports*. 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 by directly addressing barriers to learning and teaching. In the classroom and school-wide, such supports encompass efforts to reduce the overemphasis on using extrinsic reinforcers and enhance an emphasis on *intrinsic motivation* to promote engagement and re-engagement.

Learning supports directly address interfering factors *and* do so in a way that (re-)engages students in classroom instruction. Attention to both these matters is essential because, in general, interventions that do not ensure a student's meaningful engagement in classroom learning are insufficient in sustaining student involvement, good behavior, and effective learning at school.

The move to a three-component framework is a fundamental paradigm shift. The intent is to ensure that schools are well-positioned to both enable students to get around barriers to learning *and* motivationally re-engage them in classroom instruction. The emphasis on motivation, especially intrinsic motivation, is essential. It recognizes that, to be effective, efforts to address interfering factors must include a focus on re-engaging students in learning at school. Furthermore, the increasingly overlapping nature of the three-components provides major opportunities for all school staff to play a significant role in enhancing classroom and school-wide programs in ways that promote student, family, and community development, well-being, and engagement with schools.

New Directions for Schools to Address Barriers to Development, Learning, and Well-Being

The complex array of factors interfering with schools achieving their mission calls for embracing an expanded vision for school improvement policy and practice that establishes new directions in providing supports for students and staff. In response to the number of schools and students in trouble, we approach this in terms of *transforming* student and learning supports.

We focus on four interconnected concerns:

- Expanding the policy framework for school improvement to fully integrate, as primary and essential, a student and learning supports component.
- Reframing student and learning support interventions to create a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports in-classrooms and school-wide.
- Reworking the operational infrastructure to ensure effective daily implementation and ongoing development of a unified and comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.
- Enhancing approaches for systemic change in ways that ensure effective implementation, replication to scale, and sustainability.

Given sparse resources, the emphasis is on weaving together and redeploying existing school and community resources and taking advantage of natural opportunities at schools for addressing problems and promoting student, staff, and other stakeholder development.

This is not the place to cover each of the four interrelated concerns. (See the Center's website for resources discussing these matters.) In what follows, we briefly highlight frameworks for expanding school improvement policy and for guiding development of a unified and comprehensive intervention system.

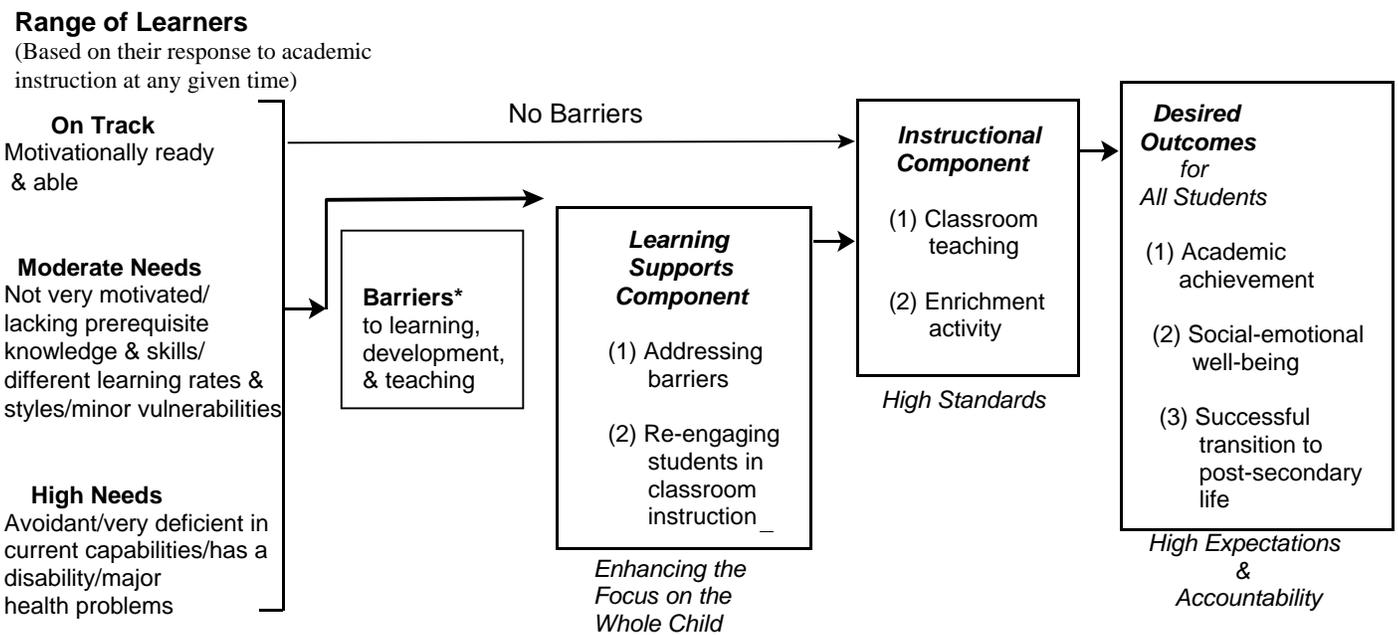
For many years, our Center's policy analyses have stressed that all agenda for physical and mental health in schools and all other narrow student and learning support endeavors need to be brought together under a unifying concept. The three component framework designates that concept as a *Learning Supports Component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching*. The framework provides a concept for embedding and cohesively pursuing a wide range of interventions to enable learning and teaching.

Ironically, the term "barriers to learning" is commonly used by many stakeholder groups recommending policy changes. Unfortunately, the recommended changes typically fail to include calls for expanding the overall policy framework.

Policy unifying student and learning supports into a third component empowers efforts to counter the continuing marginalization of student and learning supports and provides leverage for full integration into school improvement policy and practice. Moving to a three component policy framework provides a driver for transforming what schools do in dealing with factors interfering with student success. In our work, we refer to the third component as an *Enabling Component* (i.e., a component to enable learning by addressing the barriers). In the U.S.A., several state education agencies and a growing number of districts are pioneering designs that embed and weave together the various supports to better address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. As the third component has been adopted by trailblazing state education agencies and districts in the U.S.A., it often is designated as a *Learning Supports Component*.

As Exhibit 4 illustrates, the third component involves addressing interfering factors and re-engaging disconnected students. As operationalized, the prototype intervention framework combines (a) an integrated and systemic *continuum of school and community interventions* and (b) a multifaceted and cohesive set of *content arenas*. The resulting framework guides development of a unified, comprehensive, and multifaceted system that plays out in classrooms and school-wide to address the many specific problems schools must address on a regular basis.

Exhibit 4. An Enabling or Learning Supports Component to Address Barriers and Re-engage Students in Classroom Instruction*



*A learning supports component is operationalized as a unified, comprehensive, equitable, and systemic approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. In keeping with public education and public health perspectives, interventions are designed to provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports to enable learning and engagement for *all* students and especially those experiencing behavior, learning, emotional, and physical problems. The interventions are meant to play out in the classroom and school-wide at every school and in every community. In promoting engagement and re-engagement, the interventions stress a reduced emphasis on using extrinsic reinforcers and an enhanced focus on intrinsic motivation as a process and outcome consideration.

A Continuum to Equitably Promote Wellness and Address Problems

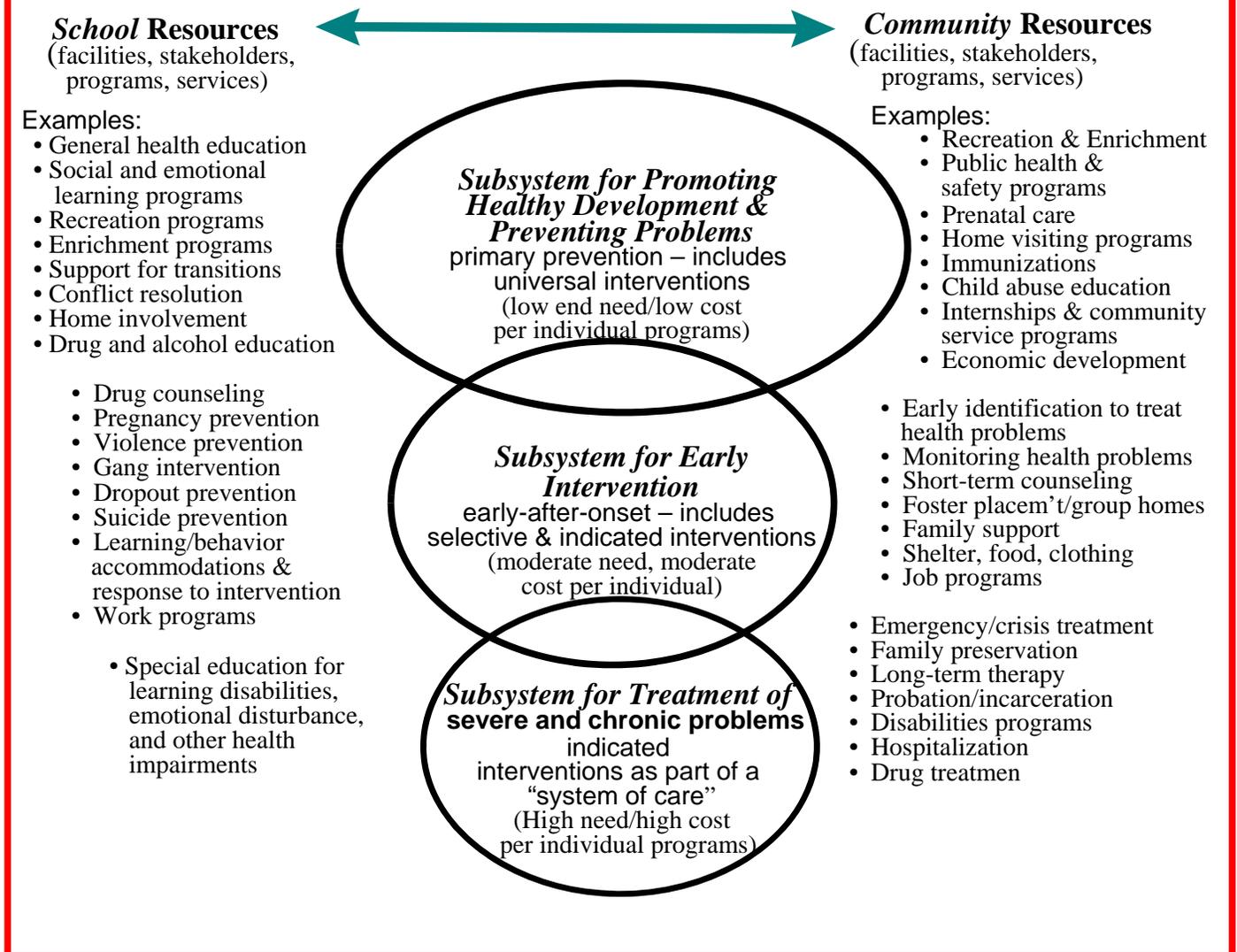
Schools and community interventions fit on a continuum. The continuum encompasses efforts to

- promote positive, healthy development and prevent problems
- intervene to address problems as early after onset as feasible
- provide special assistance for severe and chronic problems.

This range of interventions has the potential to enable academic, social, emotional, and physical development and ameliorate learning, behavior, and physical and mental health concerns. Weaving together a range of resources allows for *meeting the needs of the many and the few and, properly implemented, significantly reduces the number of students diagnosed with disabilities and requiring individual special assistance.*

In education, the continuum often is described simply in terms of tiers or levels of school intervention. In contrast, we emphasize that the continuum is one of two facets of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable intervention system. Specifically, our prototype conceives the continuum levels as *three subsystems* that embrace both school and community resources (see Exhibit 5). The other facet, described in the next section, stresses arenas of *intervention content.*

Exhibit 5. Intervention *Continuum*: Interconnected *Subsystems*



Currently, the considerable policy attention to students manifesting profound problems (e.g., diagnosable disabilities) has helped build the subsystem at the bottom of the continuum which in schools involves special education. At the same time, rather little attention has been paid to building the subsystems to promote healthy development and prevent or at least intervene early after the onset of a problem. Because, students often must be identified for special education in order to receive special assistance, the bottom subsystem is overwhelmed with referrals, and many students are inappropriately diagnosed (e.g., as having learning disabilities or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). The aims of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports are to promote wellness, prevent the majority of problems interfering with learning and teaching, deal with another significant segment as soon after problem onset as is feasible, and end up with relatively few students needing specialized assistance and other intensive and costly interventions.

Framing Intervention *Content* to Address Problems at a School

Most districts and schools currently have no listing of the various efforts they use to address barriers to learning and teaching. When such a list is made, the end product usually is a laundry list of programs, services, and special initiatives. This reflects both the marginalization and fragmentation of the endeavor.

With a view to operationalizing the intervention continuum, we have analyzed how schools currently intervene to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. Then we categorized the efforts into content clusters. We arrived at six fundamental and essential intervention arenas (see Exhibit 6). These generally capture, define, and organize the essence of the multifaceted activity schools need to engage in on a regular basis. This facet of the intervention prototype is sometimes referred to as the content or "curriculum" of the third component of school improvement.

Exhibit 6. Six Arenas for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching.

- *Enhancing strategies in regular classrooms to enable learning* (e.g., working collaboratively with other teachers and student support staff to ensure instruction is personalized with an emphasis on enhancing intrinsic motivation for all students and especially those manifesting mild-moderate learning and behavior problems; re-engaging those who have become disengaged from learning at school; providing learning accommodations and supports as necessary; using response to intervention in applying special assistance; addressing external barriers with a focus on prevention and early intervening)
- *Supporting transitions* (e.g., assisting students and families as they negotiate the many hurdles encountered during school and grade changes, daily transitions, and program transitions; accessing supports)
- *Increasing home and school connections and engagement* (e.g., addressing barriers to home involvement, helping those in the home enhance supports for their children; strengthening home and school communication; increasing home support of the school)
- *Increasing community involvement and collaborative engagement* (e.g., outreach to develop greater community connection and support from a wide range of entities, including enhanced use of volunteers and other community resources; establishing a school-community collaborative)
- *Responding to, and where feasible, preventing school and personal crises* (e.g., preparing for emergencies; implementing plans when an event occurs; countering the impact of traumatic events; implementing prevention strategies; creating a caring and safe learning environment)
- *Facilitating student and family access to special assistance* as needed (including specialized services on- and off-campus)

Over the last decade, versions of the six basic arenas have been incorporated in a variety of venues across the country (see *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Trailblazing Initiatives!* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/summer14.pdf>).

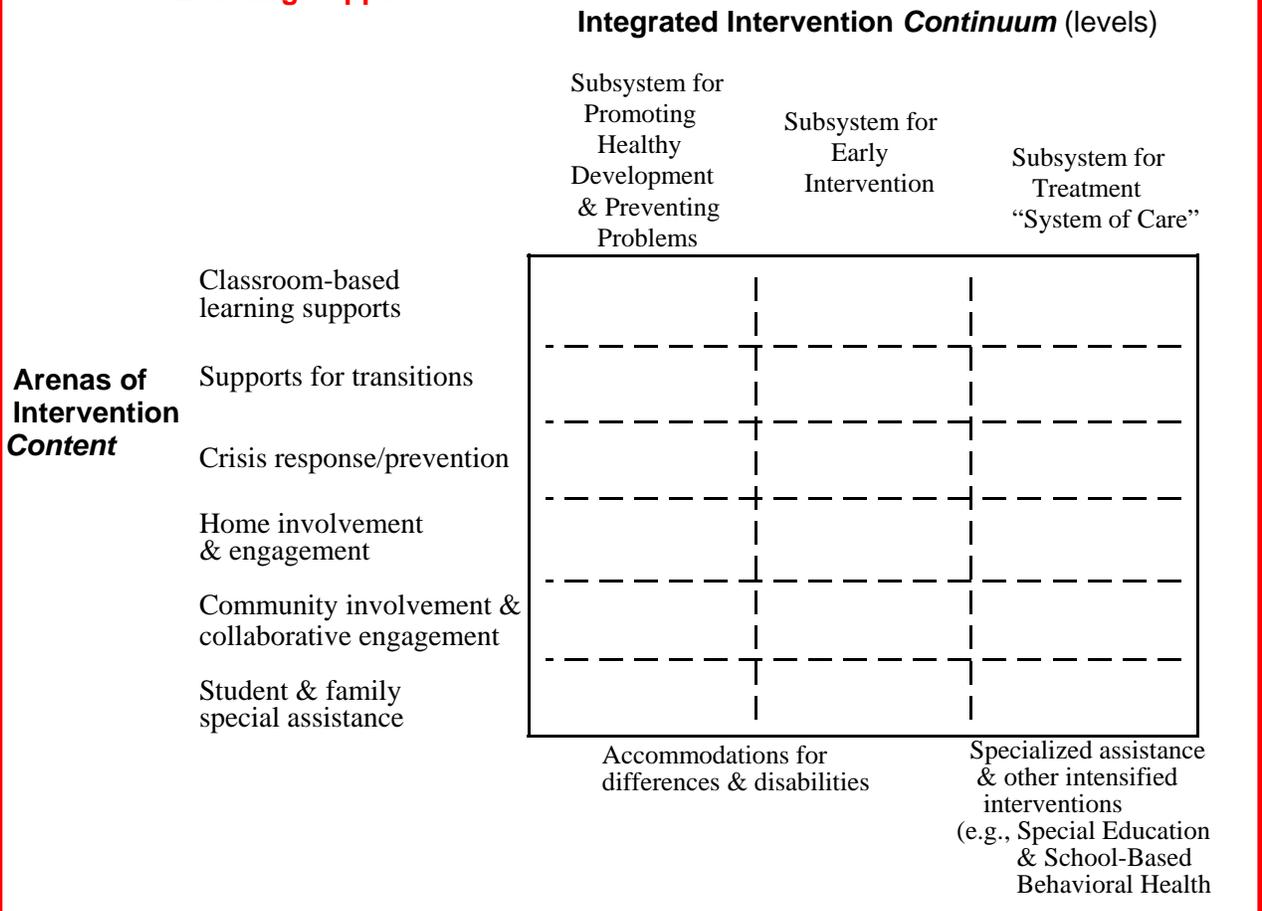
Continuum + Content = A Unified and Comprehensive Intervention Framework

Combining the continuum with the six arenas provides a unified, "big picture" intervention framework for student and learning supports (see Exhibit 7). The resulting matrix stimulates rethinking and restructuring of daily work to enable learning at a school.

In sum, the framework constitutes an intervention prototype for a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports. Such a framework can guide and coalesce school improvement planning for developing an equitable system. The matrix provides a tool for mapping what is in place and analyzing resources, identifying gaps and redundancies, making decisions about priorities in filling gaps, enhancing coordination and integration of resources. Moreover, given the likelihood that many problems are not discrete, the framework counters tendencies to develop separate initiatives for every designated problem. Overtime, this type of mapping and analyses can be done at the school level, for a family of schools (e.g., a feeder pattern), at the district level, community-wide, and at regional, state, and national levels.

Development of a unified, comprehensive, systemic approach is intended to increase impact, reduce the number of individuals who require specialized supports, and enhance cost-effectiveness. This encompasses a focus on promoting the well-being of teachers and other school staff so that they can do more to promote the well-being of students. The aims are to prevent and minimize the impact of as many problems as feasible and do so in ways that equitably maximize school engagement, productive learning, and positive development.

Exhibit 7. Intervention Prototype Framework for a Unified & Comprehensive System of Learning Supports



Conclusions

Analyses of school improvement policy and plans underscores how far away most schools are from playing an effective role in addressing barriers to learning and teaching and enabling equity of opportunity. With specific respect to current approaches to student and learning supports in schools, the tendency is for piecemeal and fragmented implementation and ongoing marginalization.

Improving the situation involves doing much more than expanding the number and range of programs and services. Needed is a fundamental transformation of student and learning supports so that all the fragmented pieces are unified as a primary and essential component that is fully integrated into school improvement policy and practice for every school.

The bottom line is that it is time for those who push for expanding the focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching to adopt a unifying approach. Too much of current advocacy agenda items (and especially the clinical health agenda) are too narrow to fit into the broad mission of schools in our society and are inadequate for enabling equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school. We can continue to build a few islands of excellence (demonstrations, pilots) and “Cadillac models,” but with the number of schools involved (e.g., over 90,000 schools in the U.S.A.), the scale of need demands moving quickly in fundamentally new directions.

All this has revolutionary implications for the professional preparation of educators. Those expected to improve schools must be prepared to play significant roles in system development and transformation, participating fully and effectively on school and district governance, planning, and evaluation bodies. To do less is to make values such as *We want whole child development! We want all children to succeed! We want to leave no child behind!* simply rhetorical statements.

We just missed the school bus.

***Don't worry. I heard the principal say
no child will be left behind!***



Center Update



Latest Center Resources

New Article:

Adelman, H.S. & Taylor, L. (2014). Embedding School Health into School Improvement Policy. *International Journal of School Health, 1* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/intjournal.pdf>

Information Resource:

> *Prevention & Schools* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/prevention.pdf>

Policy Alerts:

- > *Standards Debates Continue to Ignore Student and Learning Supports* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/standards.pdf>
- > *Improving Schools? Not Another Special Initiative!* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/notanotherinit.pdf>

Also – go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> and click on *What's New*.

Accessing Online Resources for Improving School-Community Collaboration

Those who want to establish productive collaborations will find a range of helpful resources listed on the center's Quick Find on *School and Community Collaboration* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1201_01.htm

Center developed documents that can be freely accessed from this Quick Find include:

- > *School-Community Partnerships: A Guide*
- > *Fostering School, Family, and Community Involvement.*
- > *Sustaining School-Community Partnerships to Enhance Outcomes for Children and Youth: A Guidebook and Tool Kit*
- > *Moving Beyond the Concept of Integrated Student Supports*
- > *Understanding Community Schools as Collaboratives for System Building to Address Barriers and Promote Well-Being*

**LET US KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING TO MOVE LEARNING SUPPORTS FORWARD
AS A UNIFIED AND NONMARGINALIZED SYSTEM**

Send an email to ltaylor@ucla.edu

Want more resources? Need technical assistance?

Use our website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>
or contact us – E-mail: Ltaylor@ucla.edu or Ph: (310) 825-3634

Not receiving our monthly electronic newsletter (*ENEWS*)?
Or our weekly *Practitioners' Community of Practice Interchange*?
Then, send your request to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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

End the Marginalization! It's Time for Direct Action!

2 015 is the time for everyone concerned about ending the marginalization of student and learning supports to pursue the following courses of action:

- Work for collaboration among groups recommending changes in education policy so that there is a unified message about
 - >ending the marginalization of student and learning supports
 - >developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports.
- Participate at decision making and planning tables focused on school improvement so you can clarify the need to expand from a two to a three-component policy framework.
- Send the message to those shaping school improvement policy (e.g., principals, superintendents, mayors, governors, organizational, business and philanthropic leaders).
- Communicate with Congress about the need to end the marginalization of student and learning supports and expand from a two to a three-component policy framework for school improvement as a major facet in reauthorizing the ESEA.
- Focus the attention of governors, mayors, superintendents, principals, and other leaders on the need to help schools unify and develop a comprehensive system of student and learning supports.
- Let us know who to send information to.

At a minimum, let us know your thoughts about direct action to elevate student and learning supports in policy as a nonmarginalized and unified system. That will help us in mobilizing others.

Send your ideas and any information about what you see happening to Ltaylor@ucla.edu or to adelman@psych.ucla.edu

Here's a few resources to share with colleagues:

- >*Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Trailblazing Initiatives!*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/summer14.pdf>
- >*Introducing the Idea of Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports to a New Superintendent or to One Who May Be Ready to Move Forward*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/introtosups.pdf>
- >*Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, & Equitable System of Learning Supports: First Steps for Superintendents Who Want to Get Started*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/superstart.pdf>
- >*Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School: Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf>

And when the 2015 initiative is launched in January, go to the new section for the initiative on our website and download and share the new book: *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*.