

## Enhancing Professional Development to Better Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

*Teachers must be supported by a broad-range of student /learning supports that directly address factors interfering with good instruction and productive learning*

Adelman & Taylor

**F**or too long, schools have planned professional development mainly in terms of teachers. But the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) recognizes that teachers cannot and should not be expected to address barriers to learning and teaching all by themselves.

Teachers require a range of student/learning supports to help counter the impact of the various external and internal factors that pose pervasive and entrenched challenges to learning and teaching, particularly in chronically low performing schools. Failure to directly address such barriers ensures that (a) too many students will continue to struggle in school and (b) too many teachers will suffer the effects of having to deal with problems that stress them and the system.

The need for student/learning supports has profound implications for personnel development. While ESSA primarily stresses professional development for teachers and “school leaders,” it is noteworthy that training for specialized instructional support personnel and interested community members is mentioned at several points. Mention also is made about giving “teachers of children with disabilities or children with developmental delays, and other teachers and instructional staff, the knowledge and skills to provide instruction and academic support services, to those children, including positive behavioral interventions and supports, multi-tier system of supports, and use of accommodations.”

And with respect to in-service training for school personnel, there is an emphasis on

- (i) the techniques and supports needed to help educators understand when and how to refer students affected by trauma, and children with, or at risk of, mental illness;
- (ii) the use of referral mechanisms that effectively link such children to appropriate treatment and intervention services in the school and in the community, where appropriate;
- (iii) forming partnerships between school-based mental health programs and public or private mental health organizations; and
- (iv) addressing issues related to school conditions for student learning, such as safety, peer interaction, drug and alcohol abuse, and chronic absenteeism.

While funding levels for Title II are uncertain, Part A does call for providing grants to states and districts to improve teacher, principal, and other school leader effectiveness. Given the above, it is not much of a stretch to appreciate that such funds should also be used to improve the effectiveness of specialized instructional support personnel and all school efforts to address barriers to learning.

Funding aside, it is essential, as the 21st century progresses, to rethink professional development. School improvement requires developing all personnel. Doing so effectively involves going beyond the current reliance on special presentations, workshops, conferences, and a limited amount of mentoring and coaching. Narrowly conceived inservice training should be replaced by a broad continuing education agenda. And, as with students, a better fit for learning can be established through a personalized process that includes options for collegial and independent study.

Clearly, personnel development is a critical facet of school improvement, and resources are widely offered. For examples, see the Exhibits on the next page.

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## Examples of Typical Professional Development Resources

Organized groups of those working in K-12 education (associations, guilds, unions) offer a range of resources for continuing education. Other entities do so as well (see the internet). Examples of typical, traditionally-oriented professional development offerings are available at:

- >PBS Teacher Line – <http://www.pbs.org/teacherline/>
- >National Association of School Psychologists – <https://www.nasponline.org/professional-development>
- >American School Counselor Association – <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/professional-development.aspx>
- >School Social Work Association of America – <http://www.sswaa.org/?page=A6>
- >American Association of School Administrators – <http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=1570>
- >National Association of Secondary School Principals – <https://www.nassp.org/professional-learning>
- >National Association of Elementary School Principals – <https://www.naesp.org/>
- >National Education Association – <http://nea.org>

## UCLA Center Resources to Aid Educators in Providing Continuing Education

Our Center provides a regular flow of free resources designed to (a) enhance student/learning supports for all personnel in the classroom and schoolwide and (b) aid system transformation. In addition to the examples below, see the references at the end of this document.

### **Regular Emails and Networking**

Weekly – *School Practitioners' Community of Practice* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>

Monthly – Electronic Resource Newsletter (*ENEWS*) – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/enews.htm>

Quarterly – *ejournal* (topical articles) – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/news.htm>

Periodically – New Resources for Continuing Education and School Improvement

Sign-up by emailing [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

### **Free and Readily Accessible Online Resources**

Over 130 *Topical Quick Finds* – a fast way to access a host of online resources from the Center and other sources – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm>

*Practitioner Toolbox* – compilation of various brief aids developed by the Center – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/toolbox.htm>

*System Change Toolkit* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

*Catalogue of Resources* – free access to almost all Center resources (e.g., information and resource aids, school improvement guides, policy analyses, continuing education modules and other personnel development materials – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/resources.htm>

Links to *Resources for Responding to Crises* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/crisisresp.htm>

### **Listings of Learning Opportunities**

*Upcoming initiatives, conferences, workshops, webcasts* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

*Gateway to a World of Resources* – provides quick internet access to other Centers and resources – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/gateway/gateway\\_sites.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/gateway/gateway_sites.htm)

**Hot topics & Issues** – info, resources, and analyses of current topics of interest – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/hottopic.htm>

**Technical Assistance and Distance Coaching** – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/coach.pdf>

While the quality of education personnel begins with matters such as salary, recruitment, and pre-service preparation, once on-the-job the major personnel development concerns involve induction into the work, on-the-job (inservice) learning and supports, and retention of personnel.

## Induction

*Good induction programs “extend beyond the friendly hellos, room key and badge pick-ups and buddy programs. While these are necessary ..., high-quality induction programs ... help [newcomers] survive and thrive in their new environments.*

American Federation of Teachers

Individuals entering a new worksite usually are anxious about how they will be received and how well they will do. Each site has challenges that must be negotiated. A well-conceived and formally implemented induction program that provides job-related and personal transition supports increases the likelihood that newcomers will function effectively at a particular site.

For years, little thought was given to induction beyond cursory introductions and orientation. As a result, many newcomers were frustrated and even traumatized, especially those assigned to schools housing a great many “hard-to-reach and teach” students. Lack of a formal induction program can subvert budding positive beliefs and attitudes.

Increasingly, districts offer some form of teacher induction or mentoring, but often what is provided is highly limited. In a 2010 analysis, Glazerman and colleagues described the usual amount of induction as “informal or low-intensity teacher induction, which may include pairing each new teacher with another full-time teacher without providing training, supplemental materials, or release time for the induction to occur.” What forms and degrees of mentoring, coaching, collaboration, and teaming are offered often is determined idiosyncratically and shaped by available resources.

Minimally, positive induction requires planning and implementation mechanisms for

- welcoming all newcomers
- providing *job-related* (and as feasible *personal*) *support and guidance* from colleagues and administrators to enable new staff to function effectively over the initial months of employment
- initiating *inservice education* (which hopefully is targeted and personalized to meet the individual needs of the newcomer)
- ensuring *ready access to learning/student supports* (personnel, resources, strategies, and practices specifically designed to *enable* all students to have an equal opportunity to succeed at school)

An optimal induction program for education personnel should be designed and implemented as a formal, comprehensive, and multi-year set of activities. The process should absorb the newcomer into a community of learners, guide and integrate them into decision making structures, and avoid undermining the idealism, commitment, and new ideas and practices that are the hallmark of a new generation of educators and are essential to advancing the field. The essence of what Glazerman and colleagues stress for teacher induction can be adapted for all education personnel:

“Comprehensive teacher induction ... provides novice teachers with carefully selected and trained full-time mentors; a curriculum of intensive and structured support that includes orientation, professional development, and weekly meetings with mentors; a focus on instruction, with opportunities to observe experienced teachers; formative assessment tools that permit ongoing evaluation of practice and constructive feedback; and outreach to school-based administrators to enlist their support for the program.”

## On-the-job Learning and Supports

*Proper placement and sound supports for [newcomers] need to be in place as they continue to hone their knowledge and skills. If they continue to work without a net, they will likely turn away from the profession or be less effective than we need them to be, regardless of the quality of their preparation.*

Sabrina Laine (in Rochkind, et al, 2008)

*Teachers ... likely to leave the profession reported feeling that the workload was unreasonable or unmanageable, that their efforts were futile, that their needs were not being met.*

Castro, Kelly & Shih (2010)

Overlapping the induction program are mechanisms to provide on-the-job learning. Given that preservice education generally is designed with beginning levels of functioning in mind, systematically designed programs to enhance continuous job-related *knowledge, skills, and attitudes* are essential. With a view to maximizing the value of job-related learning, *targeted and personalized* inservice education are ideals. (There are, of course, a variety of general school and district concerns requiring inservice time. Staff meetings provide one vehicle for addressing such concerns, and, increasingly, technology provides several types of delivery mechanisms.)

Mentoring, coaching, collegial collaboration/teaming, and independent study and self-evaluation can provide an important foundation for personalized and targeted on-the-job learning. Properly planned and implemented, such activity enhances intrinsic motivation for learning and for work by (a) maximizing feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness to significant others and (b) minimizing threats to such feelings.

Currently, the demands for higher standards and achievement have narrowed personnel development primarily to teachers and administrators. Analyses indicate that most of what is being taught reflects the presumption that all but a few students are motivationally ready and able to absorb the content and carry out the processes. (It is recognized that teachers will have to deal with some behavior and learning problems, however, the prevailing mythology is that such problems are readily remedied by good classroom management strategies and differentiated instruction.)

Given all this, too little attention is paid to what to do when students are not motivationally ready and able to respond appropriately to planned instruction. And even less attention is paid to the problem of re-engaging students who have become chronically disengaged from classroom instruction. These lapses may be less critical in schools where few students are doing poorly. However, in settings where large proportions of students are not doing well, and especially where many students are “acting out,” failure to broaden the focus of personnel development is a recipe for student and school failure and student and teacher dropout.

In describing five high schools serving low-income families, Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) note the considerable commitment to continuing learning of teachers.

Overall, the schools allocate 7 to 15 days to shared learning time throughout the year. In addition, they organize substantial time during the week – usually several hours – for teachers to plan and problem solve together. With teachers meeting regularly in grade-level teams, the schools have venues for examining student progress, creating a more coherent curriculum, and enabling teachers to learn from one another. ... Mentoring and coaching systems for new and veteran teachers also augment professional learning. In staff meetings, teachers engage in focused inquiry about problems of practice.

In general, there is a major disconnect between what teachers need in the way of student and learning supports and what schools provide. From this perspective, enhancing personnel development involves an intensive focus on improving how a school addresses barriers to learning

and teaching and re-engages disconnected students. This is a whole school responsibility that goes beyond providing a few scattered programs and services. It requires development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. Properly designed, such a system brings supports into the classroom and surrounds these with a full continuum of schoolwide and community interventions. One prototype for such a system is designated an *enabling or learning supports component*. (For the most recent, detailed presentation, see Adelman & Taylor, 2017.)

This prototype expands the multi-tier system of supports (MTSS) to encompass a school-community continuum organized into a set of six student/learning supports. The process involves first addressing interfering factors and then (re)engaging students in classroom instruction and includes a focus on prevention, early intervening, and use of strategies such as response to intervention.

In the classroom, the emphasis is on enhancing learning supports to enable learning. This involves opening the classroom door to invite in colleagues and volunteers with a view to personalizing instruction and extending accommodations for students with mild-moderate learning and behavior problems and those who have become disengaged from learning at school.

Enhancing classroom approaches is fundamental and essential, but the work can't be limited to the classroom if all students are to have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Thus, the prototype organizes the content into five other arenas encompassing interventions to:

- Support transitions (i.e., assisting students and families negotiate school and grade changes and many other transitions)
- Increase home & school connections & engagement
- Respond to, and where feasible, prevent crises
- Increase community involvement and support (outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
- Facilitate student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed.

It is evident that teachers deserve to have their efforts enabled by a system of student/learning supports. For this system to emerge, however, a high priority on its development needs to be incorporated into policy and planning for personnel development and school improvement.

### A Note on Retention

Excerpt from: **Teacher Mentor Program Increases Retention in Tucson Unified** (8/15/17)

<http://azednews.com/expect-arizona-excellence-tour-teacher-mentor-program-increases-retention-tucson-unified/>

What started as a pilot program a decade ago with five team members has grown to a team of 18 professional teacher mentors who are dedicated to helping new teachers adjust to their roles and responsibilities. ... Every first and second-year teacher in the district, including long-term subs, is partnered with a mentor who works directly with them to identify the educator's needs, provide a sounding board for challenges, and help with planning. The mentor dedicates 90 minutes every week to each teacher and even coordinates with the school principals to understand the school's goals and unique programs.

An effective teacher is one of the most important factors in a child's success, and the team at Tucson Unified understood that schools all over Arizona are losing too many teachers after only a year or two in the profession, which isn't long enough to become the best at what they do. Departures of younger teachers, coupled with a large number of educators who are nearing retirement, will compound the current shortage. Professional development and individual support will go a long way to keeping people in the classroom. And the effort is already making a difference. During the 2016-17 school year, nearly 300 teachers took part, and two out of three said that having a mentor influenced their decision to remain in the district. What's more, four out of five said that it was effective or very effective in supporting their growth as an educator.

Retention efforts also would benefit from well-defined opportunities for career advancement and from programs that facilitate access to such opportunities. As Holley (2008) notes with respect to teachers: “Because teaching has few possibilities for career advancement, highly motivated teachers seeking more responsibility and a better salary may move into administration or leave the profession altogether. Schools do need high-quality personnel in administration, but having good teachers routinely leaving the classroom in search of a greater challenge creates classroom vacancies that may be filled with lower-caliber personnel.”

Career ladders in education provide opportunities for advancement and enhanced status. Such ladders differentiate stages in personnel development (e.g., novice to master) and a broadening of responsibilities (e.g., coaching, mentoring, supervising those in training). And, moving up such ladders, of course, must be accompanied by increases in salaries.

### Concluding Comments

Providing all students an equal opportunity to succeed requires *more than* higher standards, greater accountability, better teaching, increased discipline, and reduced school violence. It also requires a comprehensive approach to countering factors that interfere with learning and teaching. Thus, personnel development for education must encompass an intensive focus on enhancing the effectiveness of *all* personnel with respect to improving how schools counter interfering factors.

For some time, it has been evident that any transformation of education involves rethinking personnel preparation (National Governor’s Association, 2000). Policy makers need to encourage such rethinking. Institutions of higher education, SEAs, and LEAs need to lead the way in enhancing preservice preparation and delineating connections with induction, inservice, and continuing personnel education for the different groups working in education.

At a time when public education is at a critical crossroads, the field must align demands for high expectations and high standards at schools with a commitment to enhancing the development of all who work in education. And, the need is to do so not only in terms of directly facilitating instruction, but also with respect to learning supports that enable students to benefit from good instruction and enhance equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond.

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### **A Few Additional Center Resources for Personnel Development Related to Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching**

- >*RTI and classroom and schoolwide learning supports: A guide for teachers and learning supports staff*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtiguide.pdf>
- >*Personalizing Personnel Development at Schools: A Focus on Student Engagement and Re-engagement*  
<http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagement.pdf>
- >*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*. Access from the Center's homepage at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>
- >*Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families –*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/welcome/welcome.pdf>
- >*Addressing School Adjustment Problems –* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/adjustmentproblems.pdf>
- >*Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School –*  
<http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagingandre-engagingstudents.pdf>
- >*Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning –*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/naturalopportunities.pdf>
- >*Turning Big Classes into Smaller Units –* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/smallclasses.pdf>
- >*Volunteers as an Invaluable Resource –* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/voluntresource.pdf>
- >*Working with Disengaged Students –* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/disengagedstudents.pdf>
- >*School Engagement, Disengagement, Learning Supports, & School Climate –*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schooleng.pdf>
- >*What Might a Fully Functioning Enabling or Learning Supports Component Look Like at a School?–*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/whatmightfully.pdf>