A Center Report . . .

New Directions for School & Community Initiatives to Address Barriers to Learning: Two Examples of Concept Papers to Inform and Guide Policy Makers

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Introduction: *Why a Concept Paper?*

School policy makers are beginning to understand that a considerable amount of resources are expended on student support services and various education support programs. These resources are allocated because of the widespread awareness that more is needed than the typical teacher can provide if some students are to succeed at school. At the same time, however, there is a growing concern that current efforts are not well-conceived and implemented. As a result, leaders for school improvement and those concerned with school-community collaboration are beginning to look for new directions.

The search for better ways to provide "learning supports" has led many school and community leaders to contact our Center. Over the past few years, we have provided them with information, frameworks, and guidelines outlining major new directions for systemic changes to better address barriers to learning and promote healthy development.

Recently, a new type of request emerged from several sources. The call was for an example of a brief, new directions "white paper" that could be given to school board members, district superintendents, and other policy shapers. Such a concise presentation was needed to highlight (a) the need and vision for developing a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach and (b) the type of major systemic changes that are involved.

This report contains two examples of such a concept paper. One was developed in working with an urban school district director of support services. It was composed as the basis for proposing a major restructuring initiative to the superintendent and the school board. The second example was prepared in work with a superintendent of a suburban school district who wanted a document to focus his initiative to restructure district efforts for addressing barriers to learning and enhance school-community collaboration.

Our experience in drafting these examples has convinced us of the value of a concept paper as a major tool in moving initiatives forward. We are recommending that leaders of any school and community efforts designed to enhance "learning supports" take time to prepare such a brief paper. In this respect, we hope these examples are of use. As with all the Center's work, everyone should feel free to use and/or adapt any aspect that will help efforts to strengthen young people, their families, schools, and neighborhoods.

Talking Points to Clarify the Rationale for Developing a Comprehensive, Multifaceted, and Integrated Approach

Why do we need to strengthen the school and community approach for ensuring that no child is left behind?

The School District and the community are determined to assure that no child is left behind. This means (1) enhancing what schools do to improve instruction ***and*** strengthening how they use the resources they deploy for providing student supports and (2) weaving in community resources to strengthen programs and fill gaps.

- To ensure that no child is left behind, every school and community need to work together to enhance efforts designed to increase the number of students who arrive each day ready and able to learn what the teacher has planned to teach.

- This involves helping significant numbers of students and their families overcome barriers to development and learning (including proactive steps to promote healthy development).

- Most barriers to learning arise from risk factors related to neighborhood, family, and peers. Many of these external barriers (along with those intrinsic to individual students) can and must be addressed by schools and communities so that youngsters have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

- School districts usually have resources – people and programs – in place to help address barriers and enhance student readiness for learning each day. Communities also have relevant resources.

- At school sites, existing school-owned student support resources and community services that are linked to the school often are used in an ad hoc, fragmented, and marginalized way, and as a result, their impact is too limited and is not cost-effective.

- Reframing and restructuring the way in which these resources are used at a school site and then working with the school feeder patterns to create networks for effectively addressing barriers to learning is essential to enhancing impact and cost-effectiveness.

- A draft vision and outline or frameworks for pulling together these resources at schools (and for working with community resources) is outlined in the accompanying brief entitled: *Assuring No Child is Left Behind*, and in the Appendix: *Frameworks for a Component to Address Barriers to Student Learning.*

Executive Summary

Assuring No Child is Left Behind:

Strengthening the Approach of School and Community for Addressing Barriers to Student Learning

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

Carnegie Council on Education Task Force

As schools pursue their mission to educate and as communities pursue the aim of improving the quality of life of their residents, major initiatives have been introduced and progress is being made. At the same time, it is evident that there remains considerable fragmentation and significant gaps in some of our efforts to assure no child is left behind. Fortunately, we have the opportunity and are at a place where we can take the next steps in strengthening our systems for addressing barriers to development and learning and promoting healthy development. Thus, this proposal highlights the type of comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach we need to develop and outlines how we can get there from here.

Note: This document incorporates research from the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. For more resources related to the frameworks outlined, contact Center co-directors Howard Adelman or Linda Taylor c/o Department of Psychology, UCLA, Box 951563, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563 or call 310/825-3634 or use the internet to scan the website: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

Vision for Strengthening the District's Approach for Addressing Barriers to Student Learning*

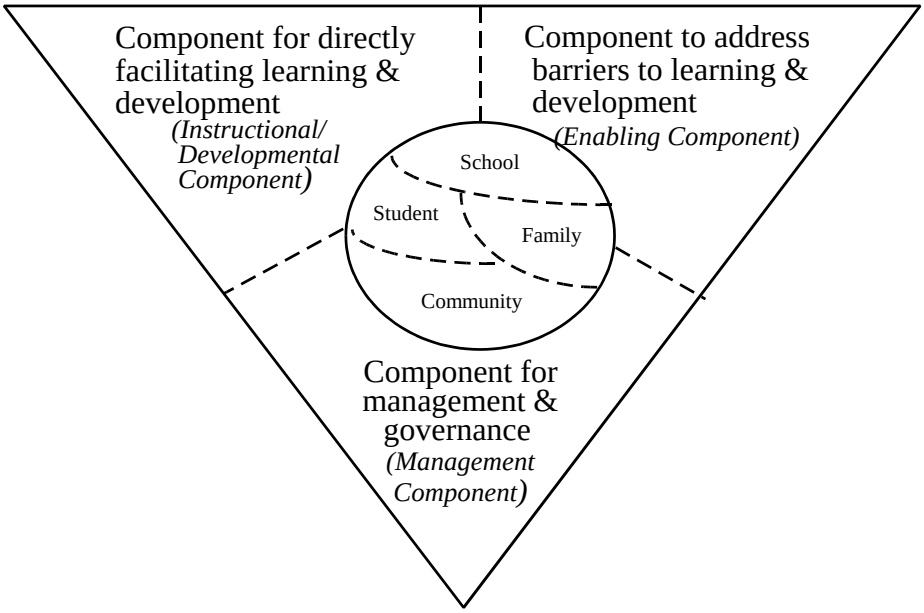
Our District has a long-history of assisting teachers in dealing with problems that interfere with school learning. Prominent examples are seen in the range of counseling, psychological, and social service programs we provide and in initiatives for enhancing students' assets and resiliency. We do a great deal, but the efforts are fragmented and often marginalized. As a result, our efforts are less effective than they can be. Therefore, after careful consideration, we are establishing as a priority the development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach for addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development.

In proceeding, we can draw upon and become part of pioneering initiatives emerging around the country that are rethinking how schools and communities meet the challenge of addressing persistent barriers to student learning and development. This initiative reflects a fundamental commitment to a three component framework for school improvement (see Figure 1).

*The notion of barriers to learning encompasses external and internal factors. Even the best schools find that *too many* youngsters are growing up in situations where significant external barriers regularly interfere with their reaching full potential. Some youngsters also bring with them intrinsic conditions that make learning and performing difficult. As a result, at every grade level there are students who come to school every day not quite ready to perform and learn in the most effective manner.

Addressing barriers is not at odds with the "paradigm shift" that emphasizes strengths, resilience, assets, and protective factors. Efforts to enhance positive development and improve instruction clearly can improve readiness to learn. However, it is frequently the case that preventing problems also requires direct action to remove or at least minimize the impact of barriers, such as hostile environments and intrinsic problems. Without effective direct intervention, such barriers can continue to get in the way of development and learning.

Figure 1. A three component framework for school improvement.



In developing a component to address barriers to learning and development, a major emphasis is on improving neighborhood, home, school and classroom environments to prevent problems and enhance youngsters' strengths. At the same time, essential supports and assistance are provided those who need something more to address barriers and engage or re-engage them in schooling and *enable* learning. This has led to calling this facet of school-community improvement an *Enabling Component*.*

For individual youngsters, the intent of an Enabling Component is to prevent and minimize as many problems as feasible and to do so in ways that maximize engagement in productive learning. For the school and community as a whole, the intent is to produce a safe, healthy, nurturing environment/culture characterized by respect for differences, trust, caring, support, and high expectations. *(For more details, see appendix.)*

In accomplishing all this, the focus is on restructuring support programs and melding school, community, and home resources. The process is designed from the school outward. That is, the initial emphasis is on what the classroom and school must do to reach and teach all students effectively. Then, the focus moves to planning how the feeder pattern of schools and the surrounding community can complement each other's efforts and achieve economies of scale. Central district and community agency staff then restructure in ways that best support these efforts.

*Because the first initiatives have been undertaken by the education sector, some places use the term *Learning Support Component*; others use *Learner Support, Supportive Learning Environment*, or *Comprehensive Student Support System*. The usefulness of the concept of an Enabling Component as a broad unifying focal point for policy and practice is evidenced in its adoption by various states and localities around the country. These include the California Department of Education and the Los Angeles Unified School District, whose version is called a Learning Supports component, and the Hawai'i Department of Education, whose version is called a Comprehensive Student Support System. The concept of an Enabling Component also has been incorporated into the New American Schools' Urban Learning Center Model as a break-the-mold school reform initiative. The U. S. Department of Education recognized the Urban Learning Center Model as an important evolving demonstration of comprehensive school reform.

Getting From Here to There

See Exhibit on the following page for an outline of major tasks for moving forward. In brief, the proposed work involves broadening the vision and engagement of key stakeholders. This is followed by establishment of a steering committee to move the initiative forward. This encompasses establishing mechanisms to enhance the policy framework and develop the 5 year strategic plan. Once the plan is appropriately revised based on stakeholder feedback, the steering committee pursues approval and ensures implementation.

The emphasis in planning is first and foremost on working with the school district to clarify how each school can restructure and improve use of existing resources. It should detail the programmatic focus and necessary infrastructure changes at schools, for the feeder pattern, and district- and community wide. It should delineate the processes related to establishing desired systemic-changes and define the role and functions of change agents in implementing these processes. Throughout, the emphasis will be on redeploying existing resources, enhancing connections beyween school and community resources, and capitalizing on the expertise and resources of those who are facilitating similar initiatives around the country (e.g., the Center for Mental Health at UCLA.)

One of the first implementation steps should be the use of a cadre of specially trained change agents working with an administrative leader at each school to establish a resource-oriented team. The team can then map existing school and community programs and services that support students, families, and staff. This will generate a comprehensive form of needs assessment as the resource mapping is paired with surveys of the unmet needs of youngsters, their families, and school and community staff. The task then will be to analyze what is available, effective, and needed as a basis for formulating strategies to use existing resources more effectively.

In a similar fashion, a resource-oriented team for the feeder pattern should be established to analyze the situation with a view to cross-school and community-wide cooperation and integration in order to enhance intervention effectiveness and garner school district- and community-wide economies of scale.

To ensure that the whole process is data-driven, the community should ensure that it has an effective system for generating a yearly community report card. And, the school district should expand its framework for school accountability. That is, in addition to the continued focus on high standards for academic performance, accountability must encompass all facets of a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development. Thus, over time, the district's data gathering increasingly should reflect quality indicators of our high standards for learning related to social and personal functioning and for activity directly designed to address barriers to student learning. The former will emphasize measures of social learning and behavior, character/values, civility, healthy and safe behavior, and other facets of youth development. The latter will include benchmark indicators such as increased attendance, reduced tardies, reduced misbehavior, less bullying and sexual harassment, increased family involvement with child and schooling, fewer referrals for specialized assistance, fewer referrals for special education, and fewer pregnancies, suspension, and dropouts.

Concluding Comments

For some youngsters, regular development and improvement in school performance and academic achievement are hampered because of the absence of comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approaches for addressing barriers to development and learning. At this stage in the ongoing development of our schools and community, it is essential to take the next steps toward ensuring such approaches are in place. By doing so, we move closer to fulfilling the intent of assuring every child reaches full potential and no child is left behind.

Exhibit: What are some of the first steps in getting from here to there?

(1) Broadening the Collaborative's Vision

- Collaborative leadership builds consensus that the aim of those involved is to help weave together community and school resources to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated continuum of interventions so that no child is left behind.

(2) Writing a "Brief" to Clarify the Vision

- Collaborative establishes a writing team to prepare a "white paper," Executive Summary and set of "talking points" clarifying the vision by delineating the rationale and frameworks that will guide development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach (see appended example)

(3) Establishing a Steering Committee to Move the Initiative Forward and Monitor Process

- Collaborative identifies and empowers a representative subgroup who will be responsible and accountable for ensuring that the vision ("big picture") is not lost and the momentum of the initiative is maintained through establishing and monitoring ad hoc work groups that are asked to pursue specific tasks

(4) Starting a Process for Translating the Vision into Policy

- Steering Committee establishes a work group to prepare a campaign geared to key local and state school and agency policy makers that focuses on (a) establishing a policy framework for the development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach and (b) ensuring that such policy has a high enough level of priority to end the current marginalized status such efforts have at schools and in communities

(5) Developing a 5 year Strategic Plan

- Steering Committee establishes a work group to draft a 5 year strategic plan that delineates (a) the development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach and (b) the steps to be taken to accomplish the required systemic changes (The strategic plan will cover such matters as use of formulation of essential agreements about policy, resources, and practices; assignment of committed leadership; change agents to facilitate systemic changes; infrastructure redesign; enhancement of infrastructure mechanisms; resource mapping, analysis, and redeployment; capacity building; standards, evaluation, quality improvement, and accountability; "social marketing.")

- Steering Committee circulates draft of plan (a) to elicit suggested revisions from key stakeholders and (b) as part of a process for building consensus and developing readiness for proceeding with its implementation

- Work group makes relevant revisions based on suggestions

(6) Moving the Strategic Plan to Implementation

- Steering Committee ensures that key stakeholders finalize and approve strategic plan

- Steering Committee submits plan on behalf of key stakeholders to school and agency decision makers to formulate formal agreements (e.g., MOUs, contracts) for start-up, initial implementation, and on-going revisions that can ensure institutionalization and periodic renewal of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach

- Steering Committee establishes work group to develop action plan for start-up and initial implementation (The action plan will identify general functions and key tasks to be accomplished, necessary systemic changes, and how to get from here to there in terms of who carries out specific tasks, how, by when, who monitors, etc.)

APPENDIX

Frameworks for a Component to Address Barriers to Development & Learning

Because of the many factors that can cause problems, schools and communities must be prepared to use a wide range of responses. Moreover, attention should be given not only to responding to problems, but to preventing them. This means that a component to address barriers to development and learning must be comprehensive and multifaceted. To be effective, it must be implemented in an integrated and systematic manner.

A widely advocated framework for understanding the range of interventions needed outlines a continuum consisting of

- systems for promoting healthy development and preventing problems
- systems for intervening early to address problems as soon after onset as is feasible
- systems for assisting those with chronic and severe problems (see Figure 3).

This continuum encompasses approaches for enabling academic, social, emotional, and physical development and addressing learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Most schools and communities have some programs and services that fit along the entire continuum.

A second framework helps to further organize thinking about these programs and services. The framework uses six arenas of activity to categorize and capture the essence of the multifaceted ways schools working with communities need to address barriers to development and learning (see Figure 3).* The six categories encompass efforts to effectively

- enhance regular classroom strategies to improve instruction for students with mild-moderate behavior and learning problems
- assist students and families as they negotiate the many school-related transitions
- increase home involvement with schools
- respond to and where feasible prevent crises
- increase community involvement and support (including enhanced use of volunteers)
- facilitate student and family access to specialized services when necessary.

Each of these is described briefly in the Exhibit following Figure 3.

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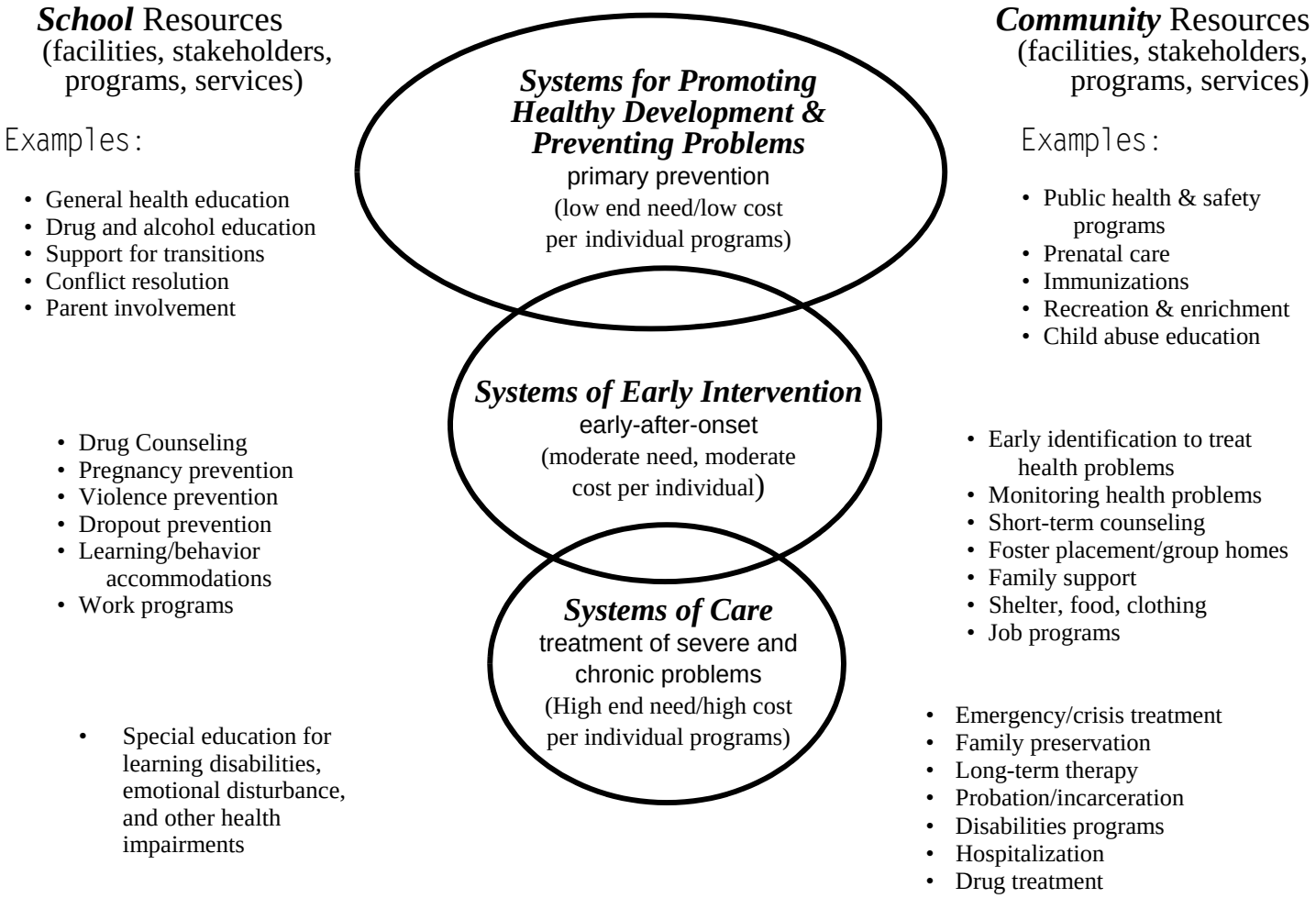
*This framework was developed as part of research on education support programs. The six programmatic arenas are conceived as the curriculum of a component to address barriers to learning.

It also should be noted that there is a growing research base that supports an array of activities for addressing behavior, learning, and emotional problems. This research base is reviewed in several documents prepared by the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. These include: *A Sampling of Outcome Findings from Interventions Relevant to Addressing Barriers to Learning* and *Addressing Barriers to Student Learning & Promoting Healthy Development: A Usable Research-Base.* These documents can be downloaded from the Center's website – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

Figure 2. Interconnected systems for meeting the needs of all students.

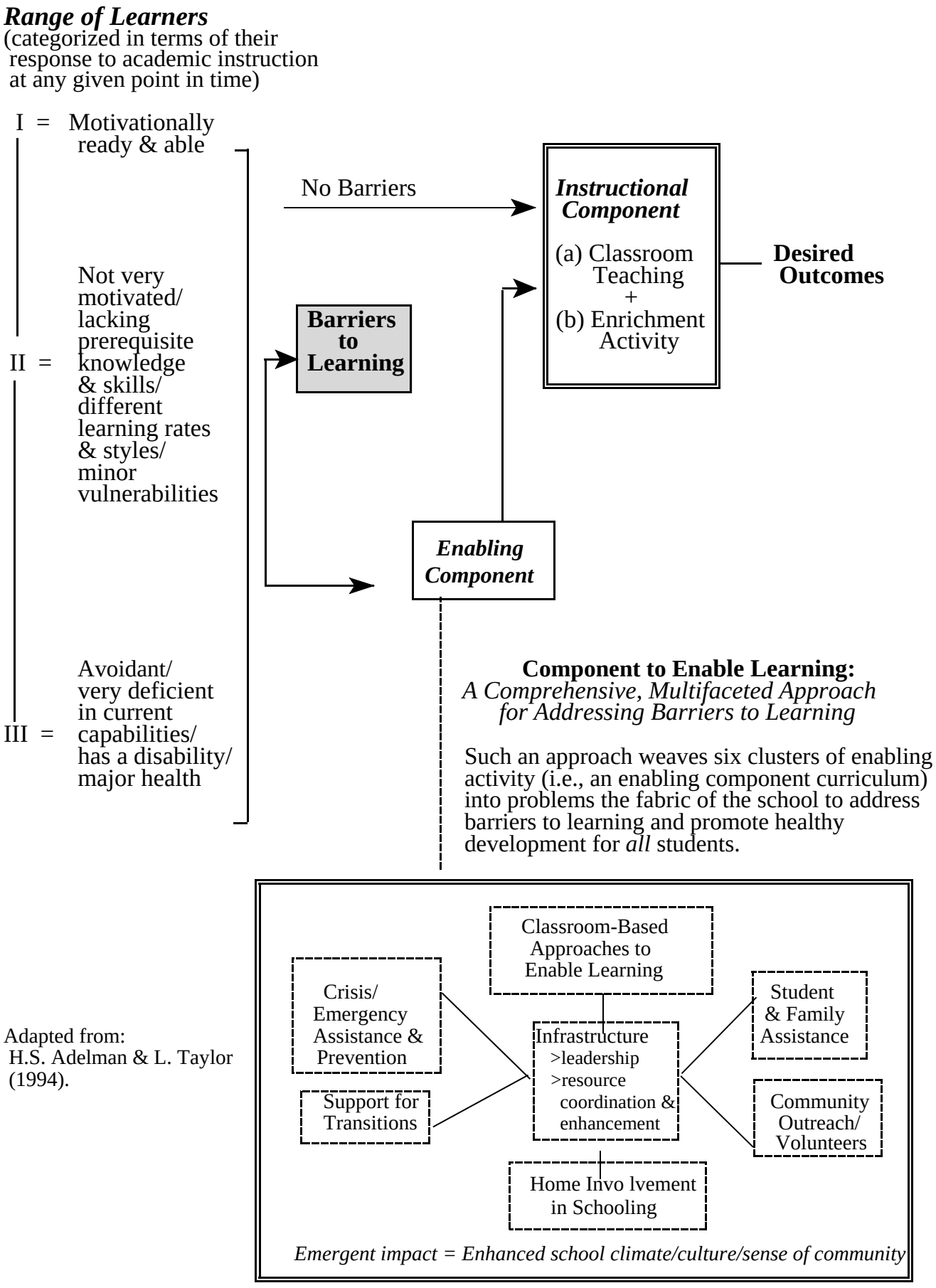


Systemic collaboration* is essential to establish interprogram connections on a daily basis and over time to ensure seamless intervention within each system and among *systems* of *prevention, systems* of *early intervention*, and *systems of care*.

*Such collaboration involves horizontal and vertical restructuring of programs and services
(a) within jurisdictions, school districts, and community agencies (e.g., among departments, divisions, units, schools, clusters of schools)
(b) between jurisdictions, school and community agencies, public and private sectors; among schools; among community agencies

Adapted from various public domain documents authored by H. S. Adelman & L. Taylor and circulated through the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA.

Figure 3. An enabling component to address barriers to learning and enhance healthy development at a school site.



Adapted from:
H.S. Adelman & L. Taylor (1994).

Exhibit

Six Arenas of Programmatic Activity to Address Barriers to Student Learning

1. Classroom focused enabling. Programmatic activity to enhance classroom-based efforts to enable learning is accomplished by increasing teachers' effectiveness in accommodating a wider range of individual differences, fostering a caring context for learning, and preventing and handling a wider range of problems. Such efforts are essential to increasing the effectiveness of classroom instruction, supporting inclusionary policies, and reducing the need for specialized services. Work in this area requires systematic programs to (a) personalize professional development of staff, (b) develop the capabilities of paraeducators, assistants, and volunteers, (c) provide temporary out of class assistance for students, and (d) enhance resources in the classroom.

2. Support for transitions. Students and their families are regularly confronted with a variety of transitions (e.g., changing schools, changing grades, inclusion from special education, before and after school transitions, school-to-work, or postsecondary education). Examples of transition programs include (a) school-wide activities for welcoming new arrivals and ensuring on-going social supports, (b) articulation strategies to support grade transitions and special education transitions, and (c) before and after school and vacation activities to enrich learning and provide recreation in a safe environment.

3. Home involvement in schooling. A range of programs are included here. They include activities to (a) address the learning and support needs of adults in the home, (b) help families learn how to support students with schoolwork, (c) improve communication and connections between home and school, and (d) elicit collaborations and partnerships from those at home to meet school and community needs.

4. Crisis assistance and prevention. Schools must respond to, minimize the impact of, and prevent crises. This requires systematic programs for (a) emergency response at a school and community wide and (b) minimizing risk factors to prevent crises related to violence, suicide, and child abuse. A key mechanism in this area is development of a crisis team educated in emergency response procedures. The team can take the lead in planning ways to prevent crisis by developing programs for conflict mediation and enhancing a caring school culture.

5. Student and family assistance. This one area encompasses most of the services that are the focus of integrated service models. Social, physical, and mental health assistance available in the school and community are integrated to provide personalized services. Systems for triage, case, and resource management increase consistency and effectiveness.

6. Community outreach for involvement and support. Most schools do their job better when they are an integral and positive part of the community. For schools to be integral, steps must be taken to create and maintain collaborative connections. Outreach can be made to (a) public and private agencies, (b) higher education, (c) businesses and professionals, (d) churches, and (e) volunteer service organizations. One facet of all this outreach is establishment of programs designed to recruit, train, and maintain volunteers to assist students in school programs.

Infrastructure for the Component

Addressing barriers to development and learning calls for some changes in *infrastructure* at schools and district- and community-wide. In building the infrastructure, the focus begins with school level mechanisms. Once these are established, mechanisms can be developed that enable the feeder pattern to work together to increase efficiency and effectiveness and achieve economies of scale. System-wide mechanisms are then redesigned based on what must be done at the district and community level to support the work at each school and family of schools.

An effective component to address barriers to development and learning requires mechanisms that provide the means for schools and communtiies to (a) arrive at wise decisions about allocating resources for enabling activity; (b) maximize integrated planning, implementation, maintenance, and evaluation of systematic activity; © outreach to create formal working relationships with each other's resources to bring some to a school and establish special linkages with others; and (d) upgrade and modernize interventions to reflect the best models and use of technology. As the following examples illustrate, implied in all this are new roles and functions for administrators and staff.

Resource-oriented teams. Creation of resource-oriented teams provides essential mechanisms for enhancing attention to developing a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach. Resource-oriented teams encourage programs to function in an increasingly cohesive way. They are vehicles for building working relationships and can play a role in solving turf and operational problems. They encourage weaving together existing school and community resources.

A resource-oriented team both manages and enhances *systems* for coordination, integration, and strengthening of interventions. Such a team must be part of the structure of every school. Then, a representative must be designated to connect with the feeder pattern and with district-wide and community steering groups.

A resource-oriented team differs from a case-oriented team. That is, its focus is not on reviewing specific individuals, but on clarifying resources and their best use. This is a role that existing case-oriented teams can play if they are asked to broaden their scope.

At a school-site, a "Resource Coordinating Team" can be responsible for (a) identifying and analyzing activity and resources with a view to improving efforts to prevent and ameliorate problems; (b) ensuring there are effective systems for prereferral intervention, referral, monitoring of care, and quality improvement; (c) guaranteeing effective procedures for program management and communication among school staff and with the home; and (d) exploring ways to redeploy and enhance resources. This last function includes clarifying which activities are nonproductive and suggesting better uses for the resources, as well as reaching out to connect with additional resources in the school district and community.

Administrative leadership. Administrative leads for an Enabling Component provide essential site and system-wide guidance and assistance at each school and district- and community-wide. Such leadership ensures daily implementation, monitoring, and problem solving. At school sites and at central offices, specific leadership functions include (a) evolving the vision and strategic plans for preventing and ameliorating problems; (b) ensuring coordination and integration of enabling activity; and (c) ensuring integration with the developmental/instructional and management components.

District- and community- wide functions also include enhancing linkages and integrated collaboration among school programs and with those operated by community, city, and county agencies. And, of course, central offices ensure equity, conduct quality improvement reviews, and ascertain how well outcomes are achieved.

Some Characteristics of a Comprehensive, Multifaceted Approach to Addressing Barriers to Development and Learning

As described in the research literature, the concept of an Enabling Component embraces a focus on healthy development, prevention, and addressing barriers. Thus, it is not a case of a negative vs. a positive emphasis (or excusing or blaming anyone). It's not about what's wrong vs. what's right with kids. It is about continuing to face up to the reality of major extrinsic barriers, as well as personal vulnerabilities and real disorders and disabilities – all factors that can interfere with a youngster reaching full potential.

The focus begins in the classroom, with differentiated classroom practices as the base of support for each youngster. This includes:

- Addressing barriers through a broader view of "basics" and through effective accommodation of learner differences

- Enhancing the focus on motivational considerations with a special emphasis on intrinsic motivation as it relates to learner readiness and ongoing involvement and with the intent of fostering intrinsic motivation as a basic outcome

- Adding remediation as necessary, but only as necessary.

  (Remedial procedures are added to instructional programs for certain individuals, but only after appropriate nonremedial procedures for facilitating learning have been tried. Moreover, such procedures are designed to build on strengths and are not allowed to supplant a continuing emphasis on promoting healthy development.)

Beyond the classroom, policy, leadership, and mechanisms ensure school- and community-wide programs address barriers to development, learning, parenting, and teaching. Youngsters and families feel they are truly welcome at school and throughout the community and experience a range of social supports. Some of this activity requires partnering among schools, some requires weaving school and community resources and programs together. An array of programs focuses on prevention and early intervention to ensure that the supports provided and the delivery process correspond to the severity, complexity, and frequency of each youngster's needs. School and community programs enhance a caring atmosphere by promoting cooperative learning, peer tutoring, mentoring, human relations, and conflict resolution. Emerging from all this is an overall school and neighborhood climate that encourages mutual support and caring and creates a sense of community. Such an atmosphere plays a key role in preventing learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems.

To Assure Every Child Reaches Full Potential

A White Paper on:

Strengthening the District's Approach to

Addressing Barriers to Student Learning

Abstract

In pursuing the District's mission, we have made solid gains in strengthening the academic program and have made initial strides in enhancing student support programs and services. At the same time, it has become evident that there is considerable fragmentation and significant gaps in some of our efforts to assure every child reaches full potential. Fortunately, we are at a place where we can take the next steps in strengthening our systems for addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development. This paper highlights the type of comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach we propose to develop and outlines how we will proceed.

Vision for Strengthening the District's Approach for Addressing Barriers to Student Learning

Our District has accomplished a great deal in strengthening all facets of the academic program. And, we will continue to do so. Now it is time to take the next step in addressing the needs of those students who require something more to help them reach their full potential. That is, the time is right for strengthening our approach to addressing barriers to student learning and, in the process, to do more about promoting healthy social and emotional development.*

School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students.

But when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.

Carnegie Council Task Force

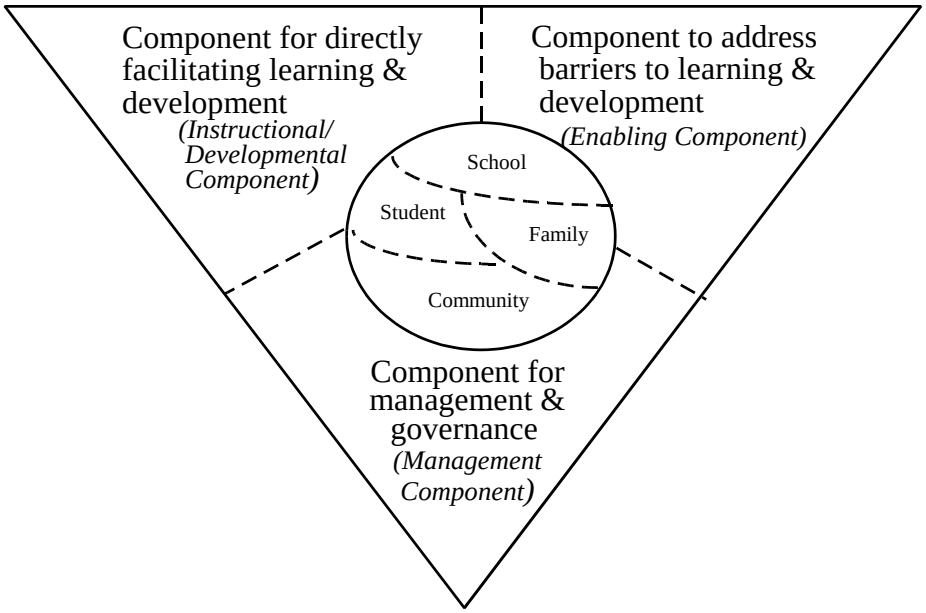
Our District has a long-history of assisting teachers in dealing with problems that interfere with school learning. Prominent examples are seen in the range of counseling, psychological, and social service programs we provide and in initiatives for enhancing students' assets and resiliency. We do a great deal, but the efforts are fragmented and often marginalized. As a result, our efforts are less effective than they can be. Therefore, after careful consideration, we are establishing as a priority the development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach for addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development.

In proceeding, we can draw upon and become part of pioneering initiatives emerging around the country that are rethinking how schools and communities meet the challenge of addressing persistent barriers to student learning and development. This initiative reflects a fundamental commitment to a three component framework for school improvement (see Figure 1).

*The notion of barriers to learning encompasses external and internal factors. Even the best schools find that *too many* youngsters are growing up in situations where significant external barriers regularly interfere with their reaching full potential. Some youngsters also bring with them intrinsic conditions that make learning and performing difficult. As a result, at every grade level there are students who come to school every day not quite ready to perform and learn in the most effective manner.

Addressing barriers is not at odds with the "paradigm shift" that emphasizes strengths, resilience, assets, and protective factors. Efforts to enhance positive development and improve instruction clearly can improve readiness to learn. However, it is frequently the case that preventing problems also requires direct action to remove or at least minimize the impact of barriers, such as hostile environments and intrinsic problems. Without effective direct intervention, such barriers can continue to get in the way of development and learning.

Figure 1. A three component framework for school improvement.



In developing a component to address barriers to learning and development, a major emphasis is on improving school and classroom environments to prevent problems and enhance youngsters' strengths. At the same time, essential supports and assistance are provided students who need something more to address barriers and engage or re-engage them in schooling and *enable* learning. This has led to this facet of school improvement being called an *Enabling Component*.*

For individual students, the intent of an Enabling Component is to prevent and minimize as many problems as feasible and to do so in ways that maximize student engagement in learning. For the school as a whole, the intent is to produce a safe, healthy, nurturing environment/culture that reflects the school's mission and is characterized by respect for differences, trust, caring, professionalism, support, and high expectations.

In accomplishing all this, the focus is on restructuring education support programs and melding school, community, and home resources. The process is designed from the school outward. That is, the initial emphasis is on what the classroom and school must do to reach and teach all students effectively. Then, the focus moves to planning how the feeder pattern of schools and the surrounding community can complement each other's efforts and achieve economies of scale. Central staff then restructure in ways that best support these efforts.

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Frameworks for a Component to Address Barriers to Student Learning

Because of the many factors that can cause student problems, schools must be prepared to use a wide range of responses. Moreover, attention should be given not only to responding to problems, but to preventing them. This means that a component to address barriers to learning must be comprehensive and multifaceted. To be effective, it must be implemented in an integrated and systematic manner.

A widely advocated framework for understanding the range of interventions needed outlines a continuum consisting of

- systems for promoting healthy development and preventing problems
- systems for intervening early to address problems as soon after onset as is feasible
- systems for assisting those with chronic and severe problems.

This continuum encompasses approaches for enabling academic, social, emotional, and physical development and addressing learning, behavior, and emotional problems at every school. Most schools in the District have some programs and services that fit along the entire continuum.

A second framework helps to further organize thinking about these programs and services. The framework uses six arenas of activity to categorize and capture the essence of the multifaceted ways schools need to address barriers to learning (see Figure 2).* The six categories encompass efforts to effectively

- enhance regular classroom strategies to improve instruction for students with mild-moderate behavior and learning problems
- assist students and families as they negotiate the many school-related transitions
- increase home involvement with schools
- respond to and where feasible prevent crises
- increase community involvement and support (including enhanced use of volunteers)
- facilitate student and family access to specialized services when necessary.

Each of these is described briefly in the Exhibit appended to this paper.

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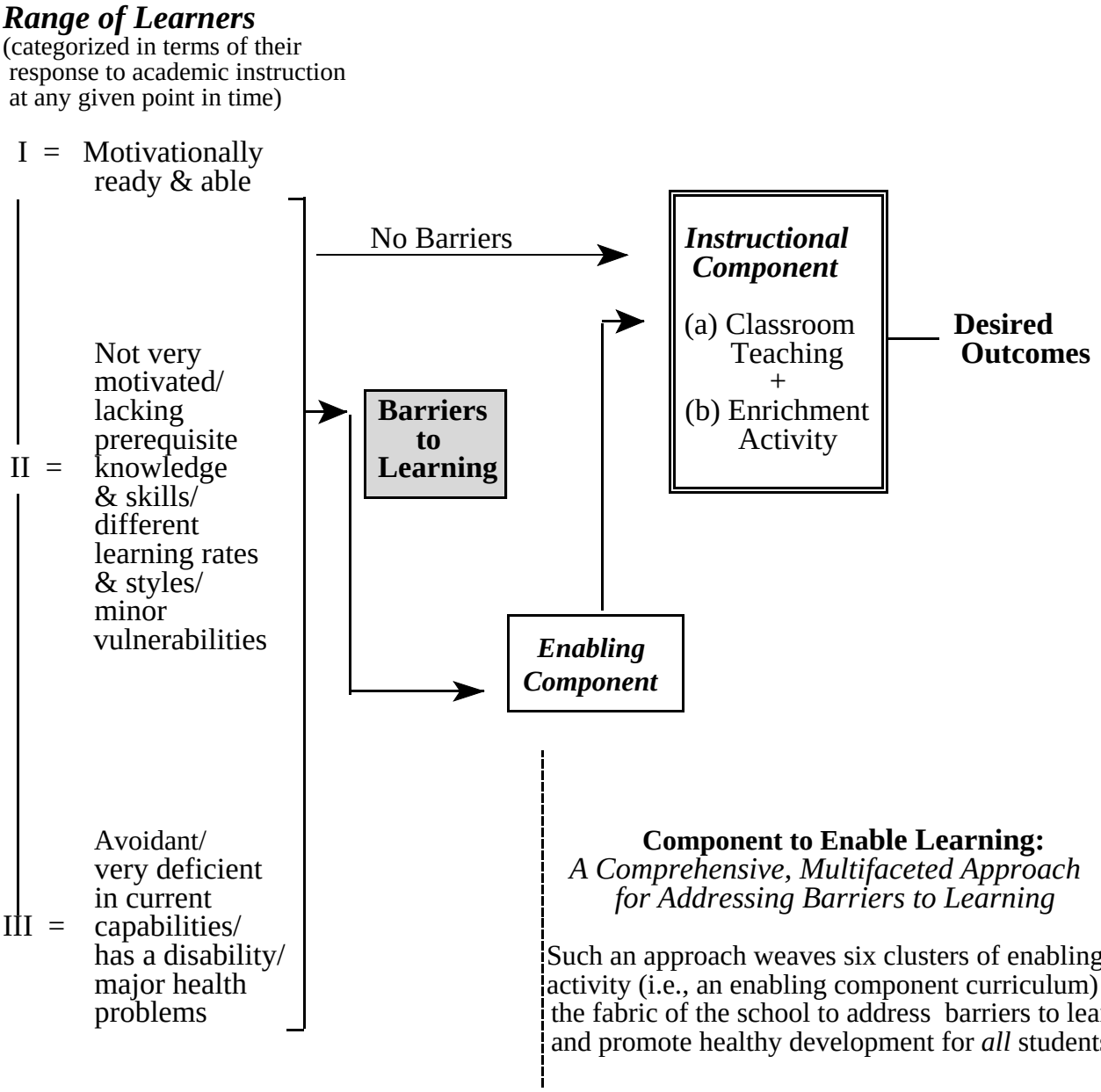
*This framework was developed as part of research on education support programs. The six programmatic arenas are conceived as the curriculum of a component to address barriers to learning.

It also should be noted that there is a growing research base that supports an array of activities for addressing behavior, learning, and emotional problems. This research base is reviewed in several documents prepared by the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. These include: *A Sampling of Outcome Findings from Interventions Relevant to Addressing Barriers to Learning* and *Addressing Barriers to Student Learning & Promoting Healthy Development: A Usable Research-Base.* These documents can be downloaded from the Center's website – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

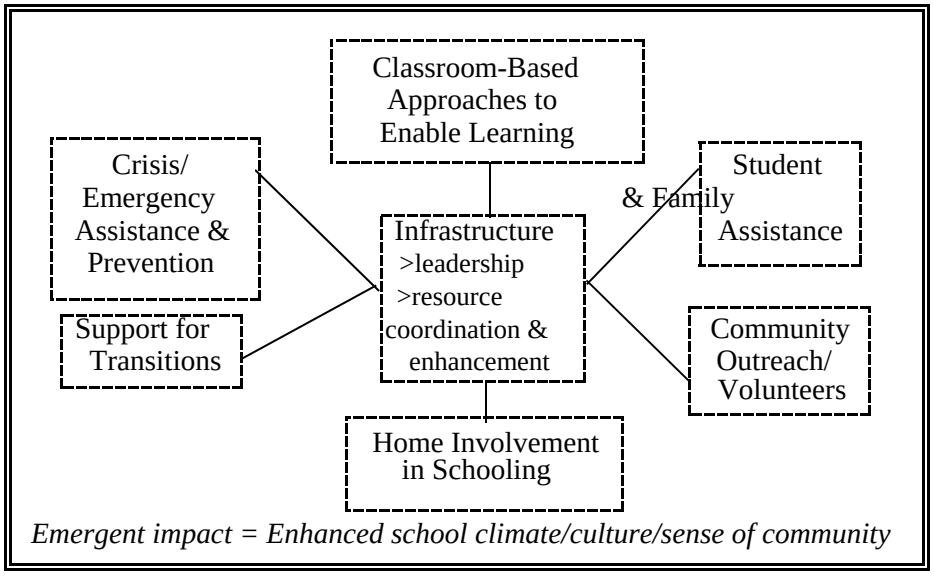
Figure 2. An enabling component to address barriers to learning and enhance healthy development at a school site.



Adapted from:
H.S. Adelman & L. Taylor (1994).

Component to Enable Learning:
A Comprehensive, Multifaceted Approach for Addressing Barriers to Learning

Such an approach weaves six clusters of enabling activity (i.e., an enabling component curriculum) into the fabric of the school to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development for *all* students.



Some Characteristics of a Comprehensive, Multifaceted Approach to Addressing Barriers to Student Learning

As described in the research literature, the concept of an Enabling Component embraces a focus on healthy development, prevention, and addressing barriers. Thus, it is not a case of a negative vs. a positive emphasis (or excusing or blaming anyone). It's not about what's wrong vs. what's right with kids. It is about continuing to face up to the reality of major extrinsic barriers, as well as personal vulnerabilities and real disorders and disabilities – all factors that can interfere with a youngster reaching full potential.

The focus begins in the classroom, with differentiated classroom practices as the base of support for each student. This includes:

- Addressing barriers through a broader view of "basics" and through effective accommodation of learner differences

- Enhancing the focus on motivational considerations with a special emphasis on intrinsic motivation as it relates to learner readiness and ongoing involvement and with the intent of fostering intrinsic motivation as a basic outcome

- Adding remediation as necessary, but only as necessary.
  (Remedial procedures are added to instructional programs for certain individuals, but only after appropriate nonremedial procedures for facilitating learning have been tried. Moreover, such procedures are designed to build on strengths and are not allowed to supplant a continuing emphasis on promoting healthy development.)

Beyond the classroom, policy, leadership, and mechanisms ensure school-wide programs address barriers to learning and teaching. Students and families feel they are truly welcome at school and experience a range of social supports. Some of this activity requires partnering with other schools, some requires weaving school and community resources and programs together. An array of student programs focuses on prevention and early intervention to ensure that the supports provided and the delivery process correspond to the severity, complexity, and frequency of each student's needs. School and community programs enhance a caring atmosphere by promoting cooperative learning, peer tutoring, mentoring, human relations, and conflict resolution. Emerging from all this is an overall school climate that encourages mutual support and caring and creates a sense of community. Such an atmosphere plays a key role in preventing learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems.

Infrastructure for the Component

Addressing barriers to student learning calls for some changes in *infrastructure* at schools and district-wide. In building the infrastructure, the focus begins with school level mechanisms. Once these are established, mechanisms can be developed that enable the feeder pattern to work together to increase efficiency and effectiveness and achieve economies of scale. System-wide mechanisms are then redesigned based on what must be done centrally to support the work at each school and family of schools.

An effective component to address barriers to student learning requires mechanisms that provide the means for schools to (a) arrive at wise decisions about allocating resources for enabling activity; (b) maximize integrated planning, implementation, maintenance, and evaluation of systematic activity; (c) outreach to create formal working relationships with community resources to bring some to a school and establish special linkages with others; and (d) upgrade and modernize interventions to reflect the best models and use of technology. As the following examples illustrate, implied in all this are new roles and functions for administrators and student support staff.

Resource-oriented teams. Creation of resource-oriented teams provides essential mechanisms for enhancing attention to developing a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach. Resource-oriented teams encourage programs to function in an increasingly cohesive way. They are vehicles for building working relationships and can play a role in solving turf and operational problems. They encourage weaving together existing school and community resources.

A resource-oriented team both manages and enhances *systems* for coordination, integration, and strengthening of interventions. Such a team must be part of the structure of every school. Then, a representative must be designated to connect with the feeder pattern and with a District-wide steering group.

A resource-oriented team differs from a student success team. That is, its focus is not on reviewing specific students, but on clarifying resources and their best use. This is a role that existing case-oriented teams can play if they are asked to broaden their scope.

At a school-site, a "Resource Coordinating Team" can be responsible for (a) identifying and analyzing activity and resources with a view to improving efforts to prevent and ameliorate problems; (b) ensuring there are effective systems for prereferral intervention, referral, monitoring of care, and quality improvement; (c) guaranteeing effective procedures for program management and communication among school staff and with the home; and (d) exploring ways to redeploy and enhance resources. This last function includes clarifying which activities are nonproductive and suggesting better uses for the resources, as well as reaching out to connect with additional resources in the school district and community.

Administrative leadership. Administrative leads for an Enabling Component provide essential site and system-wide guidance and assistance at each school and District-wide. Such leadership ensures daily implementation, monitoring, and problem solving. At school sites and at the central office, specific leadership functions include (a) evolving the vision and strategic plans for preventing and ameliorating problems; (b) ensuring coordination and integration of enabling activity; and (c) ensuring integration with instructional and management components.

District-wide functions also include enhancing linkages and integrated collaboration among school programs and with those operated by community, city, and county agencies. And, of course, the central office ensures equity, conducts quality improvement reviews, and ascertains how well outcomes are achieved.

What might a fully functioning component to address barriers look like at a school?

A school with a total commitment to addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development has an administrative leader who guides the component's development and is accountable for daily implementation, monitoring, and problem solving. There is a team focused on ensuring that all relevant resources are woven together to install a comprehensive continuum of interventions over a period of years. The team uses a well-conceived framework to plan and implement a multifaceted and cohesive set of programs (e.g., see Figure 2 and the appended Exhibit).

There also are systematic procedures for responding when students are identified as having problems. In each instance, an analysis is made of the reasons for the problems. For most students, the problems are resolved through minor situational and program changes. Those for whom such strategies are insufficient are provided additional assistance *in the classroom*. For those whose problems require more intensive help, referrals for specialized assistance are made, processed, and interventions are set in motion and carefully monitored and coordinated.

Because there is an emphasis on programs and activities that create a school-wide culture of caring and nurturing, students, families, staff, and the community feel the school is a welcoming and supportive place, accommodating of diversity, and committed to promoting equal opportunities for all students to succeed at school. When problems arise, they are responded to positively, quickly, and effectively. Morale is high.

When any of their children have a problem, a typical family might experience the following:

Clara, a third grader, finds reading difficult. Her teacher asks one of the many community volunteers to work with Clara to improve her skills, motivation, and confidence. Clara and the volunteer, a local college student, go to the library where she is encouraged to choose books on subjects that interest her, and they read together. Clara also writes stories on topics she likes. To further improve her skills, her family is encouraged to have her read the stories to them at home. As Clara's skills improve, she also begins reading to her younger sister, Emma.

Emma needs help in getting ready for kindergarten. She is enrolled in a preschool. Her family, including her grandmother who lives with them, comes to parent meetings to learn ways to enrich Emma's readiness skills.

When the family's oldest child, Tom, got into trouble for fighting at school, his behavior was reviewed at a Student Success Team meeting where school staff, the family, and Tom explored the causes of his behavior problems and planned some solutions. At subsequent meetings, they reviewed the plan's effectiveness. One of the strategies called for Tom becoming a "Peer Buddy" to help provide social support for new students. When the next new family enrolled, Tom spent several days showing the new student around the school, and they both got involved in some extracurricular activities. Tom's behavior problems quickly turned around, and he soon was able to assume a leadership role during various school events.

In the middle of the year, the mother got sick and went to the hospital. Support staff at each of the children's schools were sensitive to the disruption in the home. When Tom and Clara regressed a bit, they arranged for some extra support and explored ways to assist the family's efforts to cope. The work with the family and the two schools that were involved was coordinated through "care monitoring" strategies developed by a multi-site council that focuses regularly on common concerns of all schools in the neighborhood.

Getting From Here to There

This paper begins the process. Next will come establishment of a District steering group to develop a specific action plan.

The emphasis in the action plan will be first and foremost on clarifying how each school can restructure and improve use of existing resources. It will detail the programmatic focus and necessary infrastructure changes at schools, for the feeder pattern, and District-wide. It will delineate the processes related to establishing desired systemic-changes and will define the role and functions of a change agent to implementing these processes.

The steering group will clarify how to underwrite the costs related to the change agent. The intent will be to redeploy District resources to get started and as necessary to seek foundation support to accelerate the work.

One of the first implementation steps will involve the change agent working with an administrative leader at each school to establish a resource-oriented team. The team will then map existing school and community programs and services that support students, families, and staff. This will generate a comprehensive form of needs assessment as the resource mapping is paired with surveys of the unmet needs of students, their families, and school staff. The task will then be one of analyzing what is available, effective, and needed as a basis for formulating strategies to use existing resources more effectively.

In a similar fashion, a resource-oriented team for the feeder pattern will be established to analyze the situation with a view to cross-school and community-wide cooperation and integration in order to enhance intervention effectiveness and garner District-wide economies of scale.

To ensure that the whole process is data-driven, the District will expand its framework for school accountability. That is, in addition to the continued focus on high standards for academic performance, accountability must encompass all facets of a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development. Thus, over time, the District's data gathering will reflect quality indicators of our high standards for learning related to social and personal functioning and for activity directly designed to address barriers to student learning. The former will emphasize measures of social learning and behavior, character/values, civility, healthy and safe behavior, and other facets of youth development. The latter will include benchmark indicators such as increased attendance, reduced tardies, reduced misbehavior, less bullying and sexual harassment, increased family involvement with child and schooling, fewer referrals for specialized assistance, fewer referrals for special education, and fewer pregnancies, suspension, and dropouts.

Concluding Comments

For some students, improvement in school performance and academic achievement is hampered because of the absence of comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive schoolwide approaches to address barriers to learning and teaching. We are pleased to be at a stage in our District's development when we can take essential next steps toward ensuring such approaches are in place. By doing so, we move closer to fulfilling the intent of assuring every child reaches full potential and no child is left behind.

APPENDIX

Exhibit

Six Arenas of Programmatic Activity to Address Barriers to Student Learning

1. Classroom focused enabling. Programmatic activity to enhance classroom-based efforts to enable learning is accomplished by increasing teachers' effectiveness in accommodating a wider range of individual differences, fostering a caring context for learning, and preventing and handling a wider range of problems. Such efforts are essential to increasing the effectiveness of classroom instruction, supporting inclusionary policies, and reducing the need for specialized services. Work in this area requires systematic programs to (a) personalize professional development of staff, (b) develop the capabilities of paraeducators, assistants, and volunteers, (c) provide temporary out of class assistance for students, and (d) enhance resources in the classroom.

2. Support for transitions. Students and their families are regularly confronted with a variety of transitions (e.g., changing schools, changing grades, inclusion from special education, before and after school transitions, school-to-work, or postsecondary education). Examples of transition programs include (a) school-wide activities for welcoming new arrivals and ensuring on-going social supports, (b) articulation strategies to support grade transitions and special education transitions, and (c) before and after school and vacation activities to enrich learning and provide recreation in a safe environment.

3. Home involvement in schooling. A range of programs are included here. They include activities to (a) address the learning and support needs of adults in the home, (b) help families learn how to support students with schoolwork, (c) improve communication and connections between home and school, and (d) elicit collaborations and partnerships from those at home to meet school and community needs.

4. Crisis assistance and prevention. Schools must respond to, minimize the impact of, and prevent crises. This requires systematic programs for (a) emergency response at a school and community wide and (b) minimizing risk factors to prevent crises related to violence, suicide, and child abuse. A key mechanism in this area is development of a crisis team educated in emergency response procedures. The team can take the lead in planning ways to prevent crisis by developing programs for conflict mediation and enhancing a caring school culture.

5. Student and family assistance. This one area encompasses most of the services that are the focus of integrated service models. Social, physical, and mental health assistance available in the school and community are integrated to provide personalized services. Systems for triage, case, and resource management increase consistency and effectiveness.

6. Community outreach for involvement and support. Most schools do their job better when they are an integral and positive part of the community. For schools to be integral, steps must be taken to create and maintain collaborative connections. Outreach can be made to (a) public and private agencies, (b) higher education, (c) businesses and professionals, (d) churches, and (e) volunteer service organizations. One facet of all this outreach is establishment of programs designed to recruit, train, and maintain volunteers to assist students in school programs.

Additional Center Resources

Addressing What's Missing in School Improvement Planning: Expanding Standards and Accountability to Encompass an Enabling or Learning Supports Component
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enabling/standards.pdf

Data Related to the Need for New Directions for School Improvement
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/data.pdf

For Consideration in Reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act . . . Promoting a Systematic Focus on Learning Supports to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/promotingsystem.htm

Frameworks For Systemic Transformation of Student and Learning Supports
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/frameworksforsystemictransformation.pdf

Legislation in Need of Improvement: Reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act to Better Address Barriers to Learning
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/nclbra.pdf

Moving Toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports: The Next Evolutionary Stage in School Improvement Policy and Practice
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/paradigmshift.pdf

Steps and Tools to Guide Planning and Implementation of a Comprehensive System to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/stepsandtoolstoguideplanning.pdf

Talking Points - Five Frequently Asked Questions About: Why Address What's Missing in School Improvement Planning?
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/q&aschoolimprove.pdf

Toward Next Steps in School Improvement: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/towardnextstep.pdf