

## National Initiative: New Directions for Student Support\*

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### What will it cost? – *No New Dollars!*

[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/what will it cost.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/what%20will%20it%20cost.pdf)

The processes of rethinking student supports and moving to develop a comprehensive system of learning supports at schools can be started without any new allocation of funds. The emphasis in moving in new directions for student support is on redeploying existing resources by

- >reframing the roles and functions of existing student support staff
- >reducing fragmentation and redundancy
- >reducing the overemphasis on expensive services. (As an improved systems of learning supports emerges in classrooms and school-wide, the need for out-of-classroom referrals will decline.)

That is, a comprehensive learning support system can be established over time by reworking how existing student support resources are used. True accountability and analyses related to currently deployed resources will clarify that a significant proportion of the budget in many schools already is expended for learning supports.

There are no satisfactory data clarifying the entire gamut of resources actually expended addressing barriers to learning and teaching in schools. In depth cost and accountability studies are needed. Analyses that focus only on pupil service personnel salaries probably are misleading and a major underestimation of how much schools spend addressing learning, behavior, and emotional problems (see Exhibit). This is particularly so for schools receiving special funding. Studies are needed to clarify the entire gamut of resources school sites devote to student problems. Budgets must be broken apart in ways that allow tallying all resources allocated from general funds, support provided for compensatory and special education, and underwriting related to programs for dropout prevention and recovery, safe and drug free schools, pregnancy prevention, teen parents, family literacy, homeless students, and more. *In some schools, it has been suggested that as much as 30 percent of the budget is expended on problem prevention and correction.*

There are, of course, costs related to changing from what is to what needs to be. In this respect, it should be noted that the systemic changes involved in moving in new directions can be underwritten in many districts through provisions in the No Child Left Behind Act and in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Both acts allow the use of some allocated federal funds for integration of programs and services (e.g., to support a facilitator/coordinator to enhance systems for student support in ways that lead to a comprehensive, integrated, and cohesive component at school, cluster, and district levels).

So, arguments against moving in new directions for student supports should not begin and end with “we can’t afford to change.” The point, of course, is that “we can’t afford not to change if we really mean to leave no child behind.” Accountability involves more than holding students to higher standards; it includes ensuring that allocated resources are used in ways that enable students to have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Schools already spend a considerable amount of money on learning supports, and school decision makers need to take greater responsibility for how those resources are used. Every school improvement plan needs a substantial section that addresses barriers to learning and teaching through a process that replaces the current ad hoc, piecemeal approach and redeploys the resources to begin the process of developing a comprehensive system of learning supports.

*Exhibit*

***What Is Spent in Schools?***

- Looking at total education budgets, one group of investigators report that nationally 6.7 percent of school spending (about 16 billion dollars) is used for student support services, such as counseling, psychological services, speech therapy, health services, and diagnostic and related special services for students with disabilities (Monk, Pijanowski, & Hussain, 1997). The amount specifically devoted to learning, behavior, and emotional problems is unclear.

BUT, note that these figures do not include costs related to time spent on such matters by other school staff, such as teachers and administrators. Also not included are expenditures related to initiatives such as safe and drug free schools programs and arrangements such as alternative and continuation schools and funding for school-based health, family, and parent centers, and much more.

- Federal government figures indicate that total spending to educate all students with disabilities found eligible for special education programs was \$78.3 billion during the 1999-2000 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). About \$50 billion was spent on special education services; another \$27.3 billion was expended on regular education services for students with disabilities eligible for special education; and an additional \$1 billion was spent on other special needs programs (e.g., Title I, English language learners, or gifted and talented education.) The average expenditure for students with disabilities is \$12,639, while the expenditure to educate a regular education student with no special needs is \$6,556. Estimates in many school districts indicate that about 20% of the budget is consumed by special education. How much is used directly for efforts to address learning, behavior, and emotional problems is unknown, but remember that over 50 percent of those in special education are diagnosed as learning disabled and over 8 percent are labeled emotionally/behaviorally disturbed.

Monk, D.H., Pijanowski, J.C., & Hussain, S. (1997). How and where the education dollar is spent. *The Future of Children*, 7, 51-62.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs, *25th Annual (2003) Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, vol. 1, Washington, D.C., 2005.



\* This initiative has morphed into the National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html> .

The work is facilitated by the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA.

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For an overview of resources available from the Center, browse the website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>