



# Addressing Barriers

# to Learning

New ways to think . . .

Better ways to link



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## Schools as Centers of the Community: Moving Forward in Hard Times

*Where schools truly become centers of the community, great things happen.*

Arne Duncan

President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have stated in various forums their hope that schools increasingly will become centers of the community. This is a welcome message and one that hopefully will be reflected in the use of the stimulus funds for education and the impending reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. From our perspective, a key facet of this is bringing school, home, and community resources together in ways that can create a comprehensive system of student and learning supports.

The paradox, of course, is that despite the stimulus funds, schools across the country are in the throes of making deep budget cuts that work against turning the rhetoric of reform and transformation into reality. And, the poignant irony is that economic downturns increase the need for student and learning supports and, at the same time, lead to disproportionate lay-offs of school personnel who are essential to

- reducing student dropout rates
- reducing teacher dropout rates
- re-engaging students in classroom learning
- narrowing the achievement gap
- eliminating the plateau effect related to student achievement
- reducing the growing list of low performing schools and supporting districts in crisis

### Moving Forward with What Can be Mustered

While cuts are deep, between the stimulus funds and what's left in the budget, school improvement decision makers must come to grips with how best to address barriers to learning and teaching. Whatever the budget, they have to choose whether to continue addressing such barriers reactively or approach the situation as an opportunity to proactively build for the future.

The reactive stance perpetuates what has long been recognized as a waiting for failure policy. That is, nothing potent is done until students manifest severe and pervasive problems, and then they are provided specialized assistance of a highly personalized and costly nature. Because of the costs, relatively few students are helped and these few quickly consume whatever funds are available at the school and at community public agencies.

Rather than reacting in this way, school improvement decision makers can proactively choose to take some *first steps* in developing a comprehensive system of learning supports. Despite sparse resources, they can *begin* to integrate mandates for special and compensatory education (e.g., IDEA and Title I activity,

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including stimulus funds) and initiatives such as Response to Intervention, Early Intervening, Positive Behavior Supports, Coordinated School Health, Safe and Drug Free Schools, student assistance and after school programs, and so forth. And, by establishing effective collaboration with home and community resources, they not only can enhance and accelerate system development, they can become true centers of the community.

*Note that the point is not simply to improve coordination of activity.* The aim is to adopt a comprehensive intervention framework and use it as a basis for designing a system of school-wide and classroom-based student and learning supports. Moreover, the intent is to develop the system by fully integrating it into school improvement policy and practice and braiding school, home, and community resources. Such a system is essential for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and enhancing student (re)engagement at school and in classroom instruction. The goals are to reduce behavior, learning, and emotional problems, promote social/emotional development, effectively re-engage disengaged students, and transform the school into a community treasure. Specific results will be increased attendance, reduced misbehavior, a closing of the achievement gap, a reduction in the number of students inappropriately referred for special education or specialized services, and increased graduation rates.

### **Establishing Priorities**

What is mandated always comes first, but mandates can be pursued simultaneously with taking steps to develop a *system* of learning supports. However, moving forward with sparse resources always calls for establishing priorities. Well-conceived priorities stem from a well-designed gap analysis. With respect to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging students, this means an analysis that uses a comprehensive intervention framework to answer: What is most needed? What must be done? What is likely to produce a significant impact? What is feasible given sparse resources? (See *Moving toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports: Mapping & Analyzing Learning Supports* for a tool to guide such an analysis.

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf> )

Note that our research not only stresses a full continuum, it delineates intervention content in six arenas. These six arenas are briefly highlighted in Exhibit 1 to provide a context for the following discussion.

Most schools have long-standing and overlapping priorities in all six arenas. Given hard times, all such priorities suffer. However, there are some fundamental concerns that all schools must continue to address and these provide opportunities to move forward with development of a comprehensive system of learning supports. We stress three here:

>countering classroom and school adjustment problems

>preventing conflicts that lead to crises and responding after a crisis

>strengthening two way communications among home-school-community and outreaching to recruit volunteers and braid resources

Schools already have something in place related to each of these concerns. For the coming year, the goal can be to enhance staff and system capability to strengthen what is weak.

With respect to enhancing *staff capability*, the need is to expand and personalize on-the-job development related to student and learning supports. This includes a focus on learning more about how to work as a team with colleagues and how to integrate others who are willing to help (e.g., students, family members, volunteers, and a wide range of community resources).

To enhance *system capability*, the operational infrastructure must be reworked. This includes ensuring leadership and establishing work groups for planning and implementing priorities.

Our Center offers information and resources to help with all this. In what follows, we underscore a few major points and provide links to resources.

*For schools to become centers of the community, school improvement planning and implementation must fully integrate development of a comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.*

(text cont. on p. 5)

## Exhibit 1

**Major Examples for Each of Six Basic Content Arenas\*****(1) Classroom-Based Learning Supports**

- Opening the classroom door to bring in supports, curricular enrichment, and adjunct programs
- Redesigning classroom approaches to enhance teacher capability to prevent and handle problems and engage and re-engage students to reduce the need for out-of-class referrals
- Enhancing and personalizing professional development

**(2) Support for Transitions**

- Welcoming & social support programs for new students, families, staff, community stakeholders
- Enhancing interventions for facilitating daily transitions, articulation to next grade, summer learning
- Programs to ensure successful school-to-career and higher education transitions

**(3) Home Engagement at School**

- Addressing specific support and learning needs of family
- Improving mechanisms for communication and connecting school and home
- Reaching out to students and families who don't come to school regularly
- Involving homes in student decision making
- Enhancing home support for learning and development
- Recruiting families to strengthen school and community

**(4) Community Outreach to Engage Collaborative Support**

- Planning and implementing outreach to recruit a wide range of community resources
- Systems to recruit, screen, prepare, and maintain community resource involvement
- Building links and collaborations to strengthen students, families, schools and neighborhoods and enhance a sense of community

**(5) Crisis Assistance and Prevention**

- Enhancing school crisis team response planning (including follow up care)
- Mobilizing staff, students, and families to anticipate response plans and recovery efforts
- Ensuring immediate assistance in emergencies so students can resume learning
- Developing prevention programs
- Working with other local schools and the community to integrate response and prevention plans and ensure a safe and caring learning environment

**(6) Student and Family Assistance**

- Providing extra support as soon as a need is recognized and doing so in the least disruptive ways
- Timely and personalized referral of students & families based on response to intervention
- Enhancing access to direct interventions for health, mental health, and economic assistance
- Care monitoring, management, information sharing, and follow-up assessment to coordinate individual interventions and check whether referrals and services are adequate and effective
- Enhancing mechanisms for *resource* coordination and integration
- Enhancing stakeholder awareness of programs and services

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\*In each arena, there is broad involvement of stakeholders in planning the system and building capacity. Emphasis at all times in the classroom and school-wide is on enhancing feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to others at school and reducing threats to such feelings as essential facets of engagement and re-engagement and creating and maintaining a caring and supportive climate.

## Countering School and Classroom Adjustment Problems

Countering adjustment problems begins with ensuring welcoming and social support programs are designed and implemented in ways that facilitate good induction of students and their families into daily living at the school. Then, the need is for interventions that can quickly identify and mobilize assistance when an adjustment problem is identified.

*Strengthening Welcoming and Social Support.* Moving forward in enhancing school and classroom adjustment begins with strengthening welcoming and social support. This begins with ensuring an inviting atmosphere is established school-wide (starting at the front door and in the front office) and in every classroom every day. Welcoming includes connecting students and their families to social support networks, such as peer “buddy” programs for students, families, staff, and volunteers. Going beyond brief orientations and welcoming activity, the goal is to ensure that everyone is connected with ongoing social supports.

Below are Center guides to strengthening welcoming and social support in school improvement planning:

- > *Easing the Impact of Student Mobility: Welcoming and Social Support*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/easimp.htm>
- > *What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/welcomeguide.htm>
- > *Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/welcome/welcome.pdf>
- > *Transition Programs/Grade Articulation/Welcoming* (Quick Find)  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm)

*Addressing Adjustment Problems.* Schools have long been accused of a waiting for failure policy. Teachers readily identify, within weeks, a number of students whose behavior and learning indicate they have not made a good adjustment to a new classroom. What’s often missing are strategies for effectively intervening as soon after identification as is feasible to prevent problems from escalating.

A focus on adjustment problems ties into and expands the current emphasis on *Response to Intervention, Early Intervening, and Positive Behavior Support*. Adjustment problems also underscore the need for team-based strategies to enhance engagement and re-

engagement in classroom learning. Instruction must be supported by interventions focusing on matters such as support for transitions and various forms of special assistance – inside and, as necessary, outside the classroom (again see the Exhibit).

If the *Response to Intervention initiative* is narrowly conceived as a matter of providing more and better instruction, it is unlikely to be effective for a great many students. However, if the strategies are understood as one part of a comprehensive system of classroom and school-wide learning supports, schools not only can address problems effectively early after onset, but can prevent many from occurring.

Below are Center guides to strengthening classroom approaches for addressing adjustment problems in school improvement planning:

- > *Enabling School Adjustment*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/atyourschool/oct02.htm>
- > *Classroom-Focused Enabling* (Quick Find)  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/classenable.htm>
- > *Motivation* (Quick Find)  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>
- > *Response to Intervention*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/responsetointervention.htm>

## Preventing Conflicts That Lead to Crises and Responding After a Crisis

Every school has a plan for responding to emergencies. Few have designed interventions to prevent the type of intergroup and interpersonal conflicts that too often precipitate crises.

*After it Happens.* School crisis response plans often are weak with respect to building capacity of staff (e.g., a crisis team) to respond in general and to provide psychological first aid in particular. When students and their families (and school staff) are exposed to traumatic events, the school must be prepared to play a role in providing psychological first aid. Psychological aid can be as important as medical aid. And while many schools can’t provide follow-up care, they must be sensitive to the problems that linger in the aftermath of crises and respond with accommodations and, as necessary and feasible, with referrals.

*Countering Intergroup and Interpersonal Conflicts.* Some of the crises that arise at schools are predictable. They stem from intergroup and interpersonal conflicts and sometimes from conditions that make students feel alienated. Schools pay a significant price for failure to take steps to address the conditions that lead to preventable crises. At the core of addressing such conditions is creating not only a safe but also a caring and supportive learning environment. This overlaps nicely with strengthening welcoming and social supports school-wide and in the classroom and addressing adjustment problems. Also, a focus on minimizing and preventing interpersonal and intergroup conflicts fits into a school's goals for enhancing personal and social functioning (e.g., interventions for asset building, character education, social and emotional learning, promoting mental health, conflict resolution and mediation).

For Center guides to strengthening crisis response and prevention in school improvement planning, see the Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds:

>*Crisis Response and Prevention*  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2107\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2107_01.htm)

>*Safe Schools*  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2108\\_03.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2108_03.htm)

and the documents entitled

>*Violence Prevention and Safe Schools*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/violence/violence.pdf>

>*Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/naturalopportunities.pdf>

### **Strengthening Two Way Communications among Home-School-Community and Outreaching to Recruit Volunteers and Braid Resources**

Schools cannot do it all. For example, with the economic downturn, more schools are finding it essential to connect with a variety of community resources to assist in addressing basic family survival needs. In some neighborhoods, schools have long-benefitted from community involvement in providing parents with opportunities to enhance literacy, job skills, English-as-a-second language, and more.

Over time, schools must establish working relationships with the home and community stakeholders and strive to braid school, home, and

community resources to better meet the support and learning needs of families. All this begins with strengthening two way communications and with strategic and targeted outreach.

*The more schools are involved in meeting family needs, the more likely families will engage with the school and the more schools become centers of the community.*

*Enhancing Communication.* Schools always find ways to send essential information home. At the same time, a widely acknowledged fact is that schools need better ways to communicate in order to enhance connection and collaboration.

For example, schools need to go beyond general announcements to establish ways to deliver *personalized, helpful, and positive messages* to families and community stakeholders. Having developed opportunities for family and community members to network, learn, join in recreation and enrichment activities, and receive special assistance, schools need direct and personal ways to invite stakeholders to participate. Schools also can play a role in providing useful information about community activities and resources. And, of course, schools must increase the volume of personal, positive messages to families about their youngster. Finally, because communication is a two-way process, school must extend frequent invitations for stakeholders to relay comments and concerns.

All this calls for using a wide variety of delivery systems, such as frequent phone calls, e-mails, and informal notes from administrators, teachers, and other staff; hard copy and electronic newsletters; neighborhood flyers; family phone "trees;" students as postal carriers; websites; and more.

*Strategic and Targeted Outreach.* A priority in developing a comprehensive system of learning supports is to map and outreach to home and community to enhance connections and weave together resources. Even in economically depressed neighborhoods, the range of community resources that can be braided with those of schools is considerable.

Resources encompass not just dollars. Every neighborhood has human and social capital that can help strengthen students, families, schools, and neighborhoods. Examples include local residents; artists and cultural institutions, businesses and professional organizations; public and private

agencies; colleges and universities; service, volunteer, and faith-based organizations; community policy and decision makers.

Among the benefits of mapping resources is identification of where to recruit *volunteers*. Developing a large pool of trained volunteers is a good starting place for enhancing school, home, and community connection and collaboration. Everyone knows that schools have a big job to do and even without the economic downturn, schools have too few resources with which to accomplish the work. From the front office to the classroom to the outside campus, before school, after school, and on weekends – volunteers can assist with a wide range of activities. Schools that have established a mechanism for recruiting, training, and maintaining a large pool of volunteers ease the burden on staff, improve the lot of students and their families, and establish valuable connections with the community.

They've asked me to be part of a school-community collaborative.



Great! Tell them we want more pupil-free days on the school calendar.

### Enhancing Staff and System Capability to Move Forward

While establishing priorities can be relatively easy, effective implementation often is not. In particular, difficulties arise related to (1) redeploying available time and resources for personnel development and (2) reworking the operational infrastructure to establish leadership and work groups. Given economic hardtimes, it is fortunate that increased federal funding is available (see Exhibit 2).

*Personnel development.* Staff development for teachers appropriately is the centerpiece in planning inservice learning at a school. Particular emphasis must be devoted to ensuring teachers learn more and more about preventing and addressing common learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

At the same time, if all students are to have an equal opportunity to succeed at school, much more attention

must be given to building the capacity of student and learning support staff and everyone else who works at a school. For example, support staff must learn how to play a role directly in the classroom to expand the nature and scope of interventions.

*What must stakeholders learn so that they can transform schools into centers of the community?*

Everyone concerned with transforming schools must learn more about their role in addressing barriers to learning and teaching. This includes learning specific practices that enhance intrinsic motivation to learn and perform and how to avoid practices that decrease motivation and/or produce avoidance motivation. It also includes learning practices that can mobilize unmotivated students and particularly those who have become actively disengaged from school and classroom instruction. And, everyone must learn much more about teaming to work together and how to play a role in weaving together student, family, and community resources.

One of the sparse resources at any school is *time* for formal personnel development. Adopting the above priorities means that the time and other resources allocated for this facet of capacity building must be redistributed. The key is to embed the above priorities into staff development planning related to ongoing concerns about addressing learning and behavior problems (e.g., teaching *Response to Intervention* strategies). The Center resources already cited above provide ready access to content for designing such personnel development. And, while processes for on-the-job learning vary widely, there is growing recognition of ways to personalize inservice experiences (e.g., mentoring, coaching, collaborative practices).

*Reworking operational infrastructure.* Given that developing, implementing, and maintaining student and learning supports is essential to schools becoming centers of the community, there must be effective mechanisms for moving forward. Content and resource-oriented operational mechanisms enable development of programs and services by weaving together existing school, home, and community resources and establishing a comprehensive system of student and learning supports over time. Properly designed infrastructure mechanisms enable an increasingly cohesive, cost-efficient, and equitable use of resources.

## Exhibit 2

**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**

*Every dollar we spend must advance reforms and improve learning. We are putting real money on the line to challenge every state to push harder and do more for its children.*

Arne Duncan

***The Dollars.*** Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, the federal government has made \$44 billion available to states and schools to “lay the foundation for a generation of education reform.” The guidelines promote comprehensive education reform (e.g., they require states to show improvements in teacher effectiveness and commitments and achievement in low-performing schools *by providing intensive support and effective interventions in those schools*).

In addition to the stabilization funds, \$11.4 billion is available immediately under the Title I, IDEA, Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living programs. Title I programs serve schools with large concentrations of low-income students. IDEA funds serve students with disabilities. A second round of Title I and IDEA funds will be available later in the year....”

Also note that the "Race to the Top" fund provides \$5 billion in competitive grants to be awarded to “states that are most aggressively pursuing reforms. In order to ensure that Recovery Act funds are driving classroom improvements, states competing for Race to the Top funds will be judged on how well they are using the first round of stabilization and Title I funds to advance education reforms.

Another new stream of dollars that can help schools become centers of the community flows from the *Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act* which creates new service and volunteer opportunities. The bill authorizes nearly \$6 billion over five years — FY 2010 through FY 2014. It is intended to “launch a new era of service that will give Americans of all ages the opportunity to help our nation recover and make progress on education, health care, energy and other key goals by volunteering.”

***Being Ready to Make the Argument.*** For schools to become centers of the community, those who sit at decision making tables must be ready to articulate how a comprehensive system of learning supports fits the ARRA guidelines in general and the focus on Title I and IDEA in particular. For example, the stimulus money provides an opportunity to build an infrastructure for moving forward in weaving together school, home, and community resources, and short term stimulus funding fits well with enhancing the common focus of Title I and IDEA on prevention.

For general strategies about using this challenging time to strengthen learning supports for all students, see:

- >*Call to Action: Student Support Staff Moving in New Directions through School Improvement*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/calltoactionreport.pdf>
- >*Designing Schoolwide Programs in Title I Schools: Using the Non-Regulatory Guidance in Ways that Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching (Center Policy Brief)*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/DOEGuidance.pdf>
- >*Using Federal Education Legislation in Moving Toward a Comprehensive, Multifaceted, and Integrated Approach to Addressing Barriers to Learning*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/federallegislation.pdf>

Reworking the infrastructure *at a school* is a good beginning. Then, adding a mechanism to connect a *family of schools* (e.g., feeder pattern complex) allows for developing economies of scale. Eventually, infrastructure changes are needed at the district level and for school-community collaboratives. Note that the changes at each system level require that staff adopt some new roles and functions and that parents, students, and other community stakeholders enhance their involvement.

Prototype frameworks have been formulated to guide establishment of leadership and groups to develop and maintain a comprehensive system of learning supports (see references at end of this article). In brief, we stress three mechanisms needed at a school to develop, over time, a comprehensive system of learning supports: a designated leader, a resource-oriented team, and work groups for generating practices. A fourth mechanism connects a family of schools.

A few points will help clarify each of these elements:

- (1) *Leadership*. Developing a system of learning supports requires advocates/champions who have leadership roles. Essential is an administrator with responsibility and accountability for ensuring the vision for the school as a center of the community is not lost. Usually, this is an assistant principal or a lead staff person who sits at decision making tables.
- (2) *Learning Supports Resource Team*. The administrator meets with and provides regular input to what we designate as a *Learning Supports Resource Team*. Every school that wants to improve its systems for providing student and learning supports needs such a mechanism to focus specifically on improving *resource* use and enhancement.
 

Most schools have case-oriented teams that focus on individual student/family problems (e.g., a student support team, an IEP team). These teams focus on such functions as referral, triage, and care monitoring or management. In contrast to this case-by-case focus, a school's *Learning Support Resource Team* takes responsibility for enhancing use of all resources available to the school for addressing barriers to student learning and promoting healthy development. This team ensures component cohesion, integrated implementation, and
- ongoing development. This includes analyzing how existing resources are deployed, involving the community with a view to integrating human and financial resources from public and private sectors, and clarifying how they can be used to build a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach. The team meets regularly to guide and monitor daily implementation and development of all programs, services, initiatives, and systems at a school that are concerned with providing learning supports and specialized assistance.
 

The number of team members varies with school size. Besides the administrator/lead for the component, anyone concerned with developing a system of supports would be welcome. Possible members are the student support staff at the school, a special education teacher, community stakeholders involved regularly with the school, and a student when appropriate and feasible.
- (3) *Workgroups*. Without workgroups, many tasks will not be accomplished. Ad hoc and standing work groups initially are existing "teams" for various initiatives and programs (e.g., a crisis team) and for processing "cases" (e.g., a student assistance team, an IEP team). Where redundancy exists, work groups can be combined. Others are formed as needed by the Learning Supports Resource Team to address specific concerns.
- (4) *Connecting a Family of Schools to Each Other, to the Central Office, and to the Community*. Especially in an era of sparse resources, families of schools need to work together to meet common needs and benefit from economies of scale. We designate such a mechanism as a *Learning Supports Resource Council*. This mechanism connects Learning Supports Resource Teams from across a cluster of schools (e.g., a feeder pattern). A comparable group at the district level provides oversight, leadership, resource development, ongoing support, and economies of scale. These councils are natural mechanisms for establishing and maintaining effective school-community collaboratives.

## Concluding Comments

President Obama and Secretary of Education Duncan have called for fresh thinking and new ideas and a re-emphasis on schools being centers of their community. A critical agenda item is to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Such an agenda requires transformation of prevailing school improvement planning to ensure development, over time, of a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching. And, the resources for turning plans into reality must come from braiding existing resources into new and cost effective ways for schools, home, and community to work together.

Thus, we urge everyone to take special note: moving the agenda forward involves much more than coordinating, co-locating and integrating community services. *The necessary systemic transformation encompasses these matters, but goes much further.* The need is not for additional piecemeal and ad hoc initiatives. Planning and decision making must ensure fundamental changes in how schools and communities work together to establish a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and promote healthy development.

### Schools as Centers of the Community: Some Center Resources

Over the years, the Center has generated various resources to aid those who are working to enhance school, home, and community communication and collaboration. These include sections of our online clearinghouse, policy analysis briefs and articles, guidebooks, and book chapters. Here are a few links:

- > *Collaboration - School, Community, Interagency* (Clearinghouse Quick Find)  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1201\\_01.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1201_01.htm)
- > *Community Outreach for Involvement and Support* (Clearinghouse Quick Find)  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/commoutreach.htm>
- > *School-Community Partnerships: A Guide*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/guides/schoolcomm.pdf>
- > *Community Schools: Working Toward Institutional Transformation*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/csinstitutionaltrans.pdf>
- > *Schools, Families, and Community Working Together: Building an Effective Collaborative* (Guidance Notes)  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/buildingeffectivecollab.pdf>
- > *School-Community Collaboration: A Self-study Survey*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/schoolcommunitysurvey.pdf>
- > *Volunteers to Help Teachers and Schools Address Barriers to Learning*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/volunteer/volunt.pdf>



### Resources for Moving Forward

Helpful guidance and resources for moving forward with development of a comprehensive system of learning supports have been generated from the National Initiative: New Directions for Student Support (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ndannouncement.htm>) and from our public-private collaboration with Scholastic, Inc.'s Rebuilding for Learning Initiative (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/rebuilding.htm>).

See, for example, the free and easily accessible toolkit of resources for *Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

Also see: *Moving Toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports: The Next Evolutionary Stage in School Improvement Policy and Practice* (Policy & Practice Brief) <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/paradigmshift.pdf>

## Center Resources



The list of *Center Resources and Publications* is at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/selection.html>. Below are a few new and updated resources.

### New

- > *Balancing Cut-backs at Schools is Essential to Ensuring Equity of Opportunity* (Policy Notes) <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/cut-backs.pdf>
- > *Ending the marginalization of mental health in schools: A comprehensive approach* (2008). H. Adelman & L. Taylor. In *School-Based Mental Health: A Practitioner's Guide to Comparative practices*. R. Christner & R. Minnuti (Eds). Routledge.
- > *Rebuilding for learning: Addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging students*. (2009). H. Adelman & L. Taylor. New York: Scholastic.
- > *What are Learning Supports?* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/whatlearnsupports.pdf>

### Recently Updated

The Center's *Evaluation Impact Report*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/evaluation/impactevalrept.pdf>

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 graduate and undergraduate students*

Support comes in part from the Office of Adolescent Health, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Admin., U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services.

*Happiness is good health and a bad memory.*

Ingrid Bergman

*I have an existential map; it has "you are here" written all over it.*

Steven Wright



Want resources?  
Need technical assistance?

Use our website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>  
 Or contact us at E-mail: [smhp@ucla.edu](mailto:smhp@ucla.edu)  
 Ph: (310) 825-3634 Toll Free Ph: (866) 846-4843  
 Write: Center for Mental Health in Schools, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563

If you're not receiving our monthly electronic newsletter (ENEWS) or our weekly *Practitioners' Exchange*, send your E-mail address to [smhp@ucla.edu](mailto:smhp@ucla.edu)

For the latest on Center resources and activities, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> – click on *What's New*



### National Initiatives

Things are moving rapidly. See our website for the latest updates:

***National Initiative:***  
***New Directions for Student Support***  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ndannouncement.htm>

***Rebuilding for Learning*** (the Center's public-private collaboration with Scholastic, Inc.)  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/rebuilding.htm>

Be sure to let us know of anyone who would like to learn more about benefitting from this work.

### In Progress

#### ***Policy and Practice Analyses***

> We are profiling (via their websites) how state departments of education organize in terms of focus and operational infrastructure with respect to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and whether they are thinking in terms of learning supports.

> We are gathering information from various sources about how small schools (on single and multisite campuses) address barriers to learning and teaching and how they organize their learning supports.

We would appreciate any information you can provide. Please send us any leads and information about either of these matters.

## Ideas into Practice:

### Early Intervening in the Classroom: Beyond Enhancing Instruction



**E**arly intervention is not just about young children. At any age, responding as early after problem onset as feasible is critical. Problems fester if not quickly addressed. Minor adjustment difficulties become major motivation and behavior problems.

The current thrust stemming from IDEA to develop *Response to Intervention* (RtI) and *Early Intervening* strategies provides a foundation upon which schools can build a system that addresses problems in their earliest stages. Before seeking assessment and assistance outside the classroom, RtI calls for making extensive efforts to ensure students are mobilized to learn and that instruction is appropriately designed to accommodate their capabilities. Accomplishing this requires access to, control over, and willingness to use a wide range of learning options and accommodations.

Properly developed, RtI begins with enhanced (e.g., personalized) instruction. Then, if necessary, a broader set of options and accommodations are introduced. If none of this is sufficient, specialized interventions are pursued. Our focus here is on highlighting classroom practices beyond enhanced instruction.

### Adding Learning Options and Broadening Accommodations

Everyone knows classroom programs must offer variety to mesh with student interests. Considerable variety is necessary for those with low motivation for or negative attitudes about school. For such individuals, few currently available options may be appealing. How much greater the range of options must be depends primarily on the strength of their avoidance tendencies.

Determining what will engage them is a major challenge for early intervening in the classroom. For most students, the process begins with dialogue to identify a range of learning options they perceive as of personal value and as attainable with an appropriate amount of effort (including, as necessary, alternatives to established curriculum content and processes). Then, the focus is on facilitating their efforts to make personal and active decisions.

Besides adding options, it is imperative to accommodate a wider range of behavior than usually is tolerated. For example, environments can be changed to better account for youngsters who are very

active and/or distractable. For some students, initially behavioral expectations and standards must be relaxed. This means widening limits for a time so that designated behaviors are not an infringement of the rules.

Accommodative strategies also include reducing levels of abstraction, intensifying the way stimuli are presented and acted upon, and increasing the amount and consistency of guidance and support. In all, accommodations are intended to affect students' motivation by involving them in activities they value and believe are attainable with appropriate effort (see Exhibit on next page).

### Special Assistance in the Classroom/ Prereferral Intervention

Special interventions in the classroom often are described as prereferral interventions. When they are effective, they reduce unnecessary referrals for *specialized services*, such as counseling or special education programs. Without a strong emphasis on providing special assistance in the classroom, referral systems become flooded and help for many students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems grinds to a halt.

In the classroom, special assistance is an extension of general efforts to facilitate learning. It is the struggle to find an appropriate match for learners having problems that mainly differentiates special classroom assistance from regular teaching. Because the science-base is still limited, a great deal of the process remains a matter of trial and appraisal. First and foremost, the focus is on overcoming low or negative motivation. Passive or hostile students are not receptive learners, and they confound efforts to assess and diagnose the nature and scope of their problems.

Reducing unnecessary referrals requires enhancing the capacity of classroom staff to assess problems and implement special assistance. To this end, personnel development must prepare *student support staff to work with teachers in their classrooms* with a view to helping expand the RtI process and build capacity for providing special assistance in the classroom. All who are available to work with the youngster in the classroom (e.g., teachers, aides, volunteers, resource teachers, student support staff) can play a role in implementing a comprehensive approach to RtI. Students' responses to the interventions can provide an appreciation of strengths as well as weaknesses (including missing prerequisites and interfering behaviors and attitudes, limitations, likes, dislikes).

## Exhibit

### Early Intervening and Response to Intervention: A Sequential and Hierarchical Approach

A sequential and hierarchical framework guides early intervening in the classroom. The first step enhances personalized instruction to ensure the program is highly responsive to learner differences in *both* motivation and development. The curriculum promotes not only academic, but also social, and emotional learning and fosters intrinsic motivation for learning and teaching. The process establishes a safe, caring, stimulating, supportive, and nurturing context for learning.

To accomplish all this, teachers must:

- Open the classroom door to bring in more help (e.g., volunteers, resource teachers, and student support staff to team up with the teacher in the classroom)
- Transform big classes into smaller units to facilitate personalized instruction
- Provide an array of options and meaningful participation in decision making
- Do regular reevaluations of progress and reformulate plans as needed

For a significant number of students, changing environments and improving programs are sufficient to prevent and correct problems at school. Others require some *special assistance*. A sequential and hierarchical classroom approach to special assistance involves first re-teaching with additional accommodations to better address individual needs and differences. If that doesn't work, the focus shifts to identifying and teaching missing prerequisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Finally, the emphasis is on addressing *major external and internal barriers* interfering with student learning and performance.

Examples of additional classroom accommodations:

- ✓ Make changes that minimize confusion and distractions
- ✓ Use oral, written, pictorial, color-coded, and multisensory guides as prompts and organizational aids
- ✓ Check with students frequently throughout an activity to provide concrete support and guidance
- ✓ Support student efforts to self-monitor and self-evaluate and provide nurturing feedback keyed to student progress and next steps

For students who seem easily distracted and/or have difficulty finishing tasks as scheduled:

- ✓ Identify environmental factors that distract students and make appropriate environmental changes
- ✓ Modify the length and time demands of assignments and tests and allow for frequent "breaks"
- ✓ Modify the nature of the process and products (e.g., allow use of technological tools and allow for oral, audio-visual, arts and crafts, graphic, and computer generated products)
- ✓ have the student work with a group that is highly task-focused
- ✓ Designate a volunteer to help whenever a student becomes distracted and/or starts to misbehave

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



For resources, see the Center's online clearinghouse and use the Quick Find search topics <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/websrch.htm>

If you can't find something you need, contact us directly:  
email — [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)  
Toll free phone – (866) 846-4843

## Interested in More Information/Networking/Sharing?

(1) **Documents:** While all of our materials are online and can be downloaded at no cost, if it would be helpful, hard copies of the following are available. Indicate below any that you want sent.

- Engaging the Strengths of Families, Youth, and Communities in Rebuilding Learning Supports*
- New Directions for Student Support: Assuring No Child Is Left Behind*
- Evidence-based Practices in Schools: Concerns about Fit and Implementation*
- Restructuring Boards of Education to Enhance Schools Effectiveness in Addressing Barriers to Learning*
- Personnel Development for Education: Does the Process Enhance How Schools Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching*
- Bullying and Addressing Barriers to Learning*
- Diversity and Professional Competence in Schools*
- School Improvement: Where's Student Support?*
- Working in Schools: Q and A*

(2) **Information and Sharing:** Check below if you want (and don't already receive) either or both:

- the monthly electronic news resource (ENEWS) – see archived issues at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/enews.htm>
- the weekly Practitioner listserv – see last week's at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mhpractitioner/practitioner.pdf>

## How Are Schools Using Opportunities to Move Forward?

We want to compile and share information on how schools use federal dollars to develop comprehensive systems of student and learning supports and how this work is moving schools forward in becoming centers of their community. Please share what is happening in your locality (the good, the bad, and whatever). If there is someone we should contact for details, provide the contact information.

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

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*Thanks for completing this form. Return by FAX to (310) 206-8716.*



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