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# Addressing Barriers to Learning

New ways to think . . .

Better ways to link



Vol. 19, # 3

## Special Edition

## Transforming Student and Learning Supports: *Trailblazing Initiatives!*

Over the last two decades, work on transforming student and learning supports has blossomed across the country. Changes encompass (a) a fundamental shift in school improvement policy, (b) development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of intervention, (c) reworking of operational infrastructure, and (d) strategic implementation that accounts for replication-to-scale and sustainability (e.g., see *Education Leaders' Guide to Transforming Student & Learning Supports*—<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transguide.pdf>).

As with any fundamental systemic changes, implementation has varied, but each effort has moved transformation forward. This document highlights the momentum and lessons learned.

### Some Background

Our involvement with what follows extends back decades. The ideas took root at a UCLA lab school for students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems. From there, the work moved into the “real” world, with pieces first tested in the Los Angeles Unified School District and then in states across the country. Over the years, many states and districts have explored facets of the developed prototypes.

The first legislative recognition came in Hawai'i in 1999 where the design was designated as a *Comprehensive System of Student Supports* (CSSS). In 2004, the Iowa Department of Education designed a statewide framework for what they designated as a *Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*.

To build momentum, our Center at UCLA established a national initiative for *New Directions for Student and Learning Supports* and entered into a collaboration with Scholastic. In 2009, these efforts contributed to the Louisiana Department of Education designing a *Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*. The collaboration with Scholastic also led to work with the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and produced a district-wide initiative in Gainesville, Georgia.

In recent years, additional states have taken steps to rethink student and learning supports. And in 2012, Alabama became the first to initiate a multi-year phase-in process intended to facilitate transformation of its student and learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system in all districts.

**Alabama and Learning Supports:  
A state department moves  
from compliance to leading a transformation**

Excerpt from an October 2013 news article:

"The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) recently took a huge step forward to ensure children and families have greater learning support systems available within their schools. Schools and districts have been providing various levels of support on a piecemeal, case-by-case basis.

A Comprehensive System of Learning Supports provides a framework and structure to coordinate multiple activities that break down those barriers in a proactive, organized manner. It is a preventive approach rather than reacting after problems have manifested themselves in chronic absenteeism or disengagement....

The system should be fully rolled out in all of Alabama's school districts in three to five years. ... A District Leadership Team will be formed within each school system consisting of the superintendent plus four or five additional people. The District team will meet on a regular basis. In addition, each school will form its own team....

Introducing the plan, Chief of Staff Dr. Craig Pouncey stated it is "a school district's responsibility to try to do more than just provide instruction that will ensure children's success. We can remove barriers that prevent children from achieving at their highest potential"....

Dr. Linda Felton-Smith, Director of the Office of Learning Supports, said the ALSDE worked on the plan for more than a year. She emphasized that the plan was developed by folks in Alabama, in consultation with UCLA...."

<http://alabamaschoolconnection.org/2013/10/17/extra-learning-supports-arrive-for-alabamas-children/>

### **Getting Started**

Upon his appointment as Alabama's chief state school officer in 2012, Dr. Thomas Bice began reorganizing the leadership of the state department of education to develop and support implementation of an Alabama design for a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports. The goal was to ensure the work would be fully integrated into *Plan 2020*, the department's overall strategic plan for school improvement. Learning supports were designated as a major pillar of *Plan 2020*.

Alabama's design document for transforming student and learning supports is online at <http://web.alsde.edu/docs/documents/901/ALDOEDesignDocument.pdf>. Roll out of the design began with implementation in ten districts during the Fall 2013. Based on enrollment, some districts started with all of their schools, and some started with schools in selected feeder patterns. This coming school year 20-30 more districts will be added (almost 1/3 of Alabama's districts). The rest will be phased in over the next few years.

Assistance for capacity building is being provided through (a) onsite coaching support stemming from a collaborative effort with Scholastic, Inc. and (b) distance mentoring and coaching from our Center at UCLA.

## First Year Debriefing

In May 2014, the first cohort districts met with the state superintendent and state leadership for a celebration and debriefing. They shared what is involved in leading the work at the district level, what changes they have seen at schools and at the district level, how they have used data to drive the process, and what the strategic plan is for moving forward.

Among specifics highlighted were that a Learning Supports component provided a stimulus for:

- aligning various strategic plans and improving organizational structure and cohesion for the other two components (instruction and management)
- enhancing the focus on improving discipline and attendance
- using data for decision making

For the future, districts wanted more support for:

- regular, integrated meetings and communication among the districts
- drilling deeper into specific matters such as barriers to learning and teaching and how to address them, ongoing resource mapping and analysis to strengthen what is working, filling gaps, and eliminating ineffective and redundant practices
- enhancing supports for personnel

## Some Local Lessons Learned So Far About a State-wide Transformation

- Creating readiness and commitment requires forming partnerships (e.g., with the state teachers' union, the superintendents' association, the school principals association, the state school board association). Through these partnerships, leaders for the work were invited to speak throughout the year at a variety of venues. Word spread quickly and interest built state wide.
- A series of one day institutes and regional presentations are necessary to enhance awareness, readiness, and commitment and to support initial implementation.
- As part of enhancing readiness and commitment, it is essential to instill an in-depth understanding of the value of moving from a two-to-three-component framework for school improvement planning and organizing and designing a nonmarginalized approach to addressing barriers to learning and teaching at district and school levels.
- Progress greatly benefits from using a set of benchmarks to guide and support the work (rather than as a compliance tool).
- Attending Learning Supports Leadership Team meetings at a sample of schools is seen as a good step in helping gauge coaching needs.
- Regular use of conference calls and electronic tools such as webinars and emails is invaluable for enhancing and facilitating effective communication, coaching, and continuous technical assistance.
- Districts seem to mobilize well when the work is applied to a high priority problem, such as attendance. (For example, the department brought together the learning supports team leader, attendance officer, and the person responsible for the Graduation Tracking System from the first cohort districts to focus on the attendance problem and how the learning supports system could address it).

## Moving Forward

During the 2014-2015 school year, the first year cohort of districts will continue to receive coaching, while also serving as examples for a second year cohort. It is clearly understood that for transformation and sustainability to occur, two years of support must be provided to each school district. Additionally, both cohorts will receive professional development opportunities and information sharing through district and school visits, regional meetings, webinars, websites, email exchanges, and conference calls. In May 2015, the goal will be to bring both cohorts together as a third cohort starts its implementation with a focus on data results, systemic changes, and improved student achievement.

See Linda Felton-Smith's presentation to the national AASA conference. Online at:  
<http://resources.aasa.org/ConferenceDaily/CDO-presentations/2014/Feb14-1400-Implementation-Comprehensive-System.pdf>

For more on the work in Alabama, go to *Where's It Happening: Trailblazing and Pioneering Initiatives* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>

## Gainesville City Schools, Georgia: *Trailblazing*

In 2009, UCLA in collaboration with Scholastic reached out to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) to establish a leadership initiative related to new directions for student and learning supports. As part of that initiative, Gainesville City Schools fully embraced development of a *Comprehensive System of Learning Supports* and has been widely featured for its accomplishments to date. To document the work, EDC was contracted to do a case study (see <http://www1.gcssk12.net/images/shared/other/rebuildingforlearning.pdf>).

### From the Gainesville Case Study

“In 2010, of 6,296 students enrolled in the school district, 78% were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Three of its eight schools have more than 90% of their students living in poverty. Gainesville's student population is divided between white (20%), black (19%) and Hispanic (55%) students.”

“Gainesville created new policies and modified or expanded on existing strategies, policies and practices to develop a system of student supports that enables learning.” In doing so, the “challenge was to build the capacity of the whole district system, so that the departure of any individual staff person would not deeply impact ... practice, program or policy in the district.” ... “The district also wanted to further develop the cohesiveness of their school programs to reduce costs and increase efficiency so that the district would be able to sustain funding for their school programs. Considering sustainability, the Gainesville team sought to address costly inefficiencies in services, especially during unstable budget periods that schools and districts experience as a result of their dependence on public financing. The Superintendent commented, ‘We can see the power in the coherence. It's like putting a machine together and getting it to work more effectively.’”

The district reports that early findings indicate increases in student achievement (more students achieving “exceeding expectations” on state testing than ever before and at every school), increases in graduation rates (up from 73.3% to 87.2%), and a decrease in disciplinary tribunals (down by 27%). They are currently processing data from this school year.

## Moving Forward

Superintendent Merrienne Dyer (who has just retired) provided the following updates:

- The Board of Education used the learning supports framework for orientation of the new superintendent. It served as an effective leadership transition tool for keeping the focus on students during the superintendent transition.
- A video was produced for learning supports training – <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/6810109/LearningSupports.mp4>
- By using the three component areas and six content areas for learning supports, schools improved in identifying learning supports strategies that directly impacted instructional goals.
- Data indicate that discipline referrals continue to decrease at every school. Most notably there were no middle school students referred to the Alternative School.
- A counseling position at the middle school was converted to a Learning Supports specialist whose main focus was on 40-50 students who needed consistent supports.
- The district worked with Georgia Juvenile Justice officials as a new Juvenile Code was implemented in January 2014. The Comprehensive System of Learning Supports served as the "community-based intervention model" called for in the new juvenile code policy.

The district is serving as a demonstration site and is being featured in superintendent workshops and in presentations at state and national conferences.

For more on the work in Gainesville, go to *Where's It Happening: Trailblazing and Pioneering Initiatives* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>

## Hawai`i, Iowa, Ohio, Louisiana, Illinois: *A step forward, sometimes a step back*

### Hawai`i

The first state we worked with extensively to create a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports was Hawai`i. In the mid 1990s, the state`s department of education designated an initiative to develop a *Comprehensive System of Student Supports* (CSSS). CSSS was initiated in Spring 1997 with the intent of developing the component in schools across the state. In 1999, the state enacted legislation to promote the work. See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/hilegislation.pdf> .

CSSS is built on the premise that when school-based supports are provided in a timely and effective manner, fewer students require more complex or intense services. CSSS is described as providing “proactive, positive, customized, and timely interventions, services, programs and/or supports in compassionate ways so *ALL* students will succeed to their greatest potential.”

A 2012 update showing the evolution of learning supports from its beginnings in the 1990's to today is online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/csss2012.pdf> . The update outlines a continuum of proactive student support and six critical arenas of learning supports. With respect to the continuum, the intent is to provide a full range of integrated interventions, programs, supports and/or services to improve student's academic and behavioral performance within and beyond classroom instruction. The department further states that:

The continuum addresses ... the severity, complexity, and frequency of each student's strengths and needs. It ensures that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. It directly and comprehensively focuses on:

1. addressing barriers to learning and teaching,
2. re-engaging students who have become disconnected from classroom instruction,
3. sustaining and enhancing learning opportunities for students who are succeeding in school, and
4. nurturing students' social, emotional, and behavioral development so growth is balanced and occurs in all domains.

The six arenas are adapted from the UCLA Center's prototype. In Hawai'i's framework, they are designated as:

- personalized classroom climate & instruction to enable & re-engage students
- prevention and early intervention
- family-school-community partnerships
- support for transitions
- community outreach & involvement and support (including volunteers)
- crisis prevention and assistance

For more about CSSS, see:

>the Department of Education website: <http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/StudentLearning/PersonalizedLearning/Pages/home.aspx>  
 >*Where's It Happening: Trailblazing and Pioneering Initiatives* –  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>

## Iowa

In 2004, the Iowa Dept. of Education and the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development created a design entitled: *Enhancing Iowa's Systems of Supports for Development & Learning*  
[https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/113006\\_spec\\_Dev-our-Youth.pdf](https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/113006_spec_Dev-our-Youth.pdf)

As Judy Jeffrey, former chief state school officer for Iowa stated in the introduction:

"Through our collective efforts, we must meet the learning needs of all students. Not every student comes to school motivationally ready and able to learn. Some experience barriers that interfere with their ability to profit from classroom instruction. Supports are needed to remove, or at least to alleviate, the effects of these

barriers. Each student is entitled to receive the supports needed to ensure that he or she has an equal opportunity to learn and to succeed in school. ...

If every student in every school and community in Iowa is to achieve at high levels, we must rethink how student supports are organized and delivered to address barriers to learning. This will require that schools and school districts, in collaboration with their community partners, develop a comprehensive, cohesive approach to delivery of learning supports that is an integral part of their school improvement efforts."

Considerable initial work was accomplished toward introducing the design across the state and integrating at the state and regional education agencies. For a perspective on that work, see <https://www.educateiowa.gov/pk-12/learner-supports/learning-supports-initiative> .

Then, Judy Jeffrey retired and a new chief state officer was appointed. This put a damper on the initiative. Nevertheless, the work remains infused in many facets of what the department does. See <https://www.educateiowa.gov/search/learning%20supports> .

Moreover, others across the country continue to build on Iowa's work (e.g., establishing learning supports' coordinators at its regional educational agencies, resource mapping tools, accountability framework, district self-study guide). See *Where's It Happening: Trailblazing and Pioneering Initiatives* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>.

## O hio

In 2007, Ohio's State Department of Education developed a set of *Guidelines for a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*. Since then, the department has conducted workshops and webinars to enhance understanding of the what districts and schools can do to develop such a system. Go to *Where's It Happening: Trailblazing and Pioneering Initiatives* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm> to see the guidelines and link to :

- Student Success: A Comprehensive System of Learning Supports (brochure)
- April 2012 Dept. of Education Webinar featuring presentation by UCLA Center

## L ouisiana

In 2009, the Louisiana state department of education recognized the need to braid and develop all available resources in ways that would better address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. The work was driven by the realization that those responsible for school improvement efforts needed new directions if they were to effectively reduce dropout rates and close the achievement gap. The department produced a design document for its *Comprehensive Learning Supports System* and began an implementation process; see <http://www.louisianaschools.net/ldc/uploads/15044.pdf> . Also developed was a guidance for *Funding Stream Integration to Promote Development and Sustainability of a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*; see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fundingstream.pdf> . Both these resources have found considerable use in other states.

As too often happens, the initiative in Louisiana ended prematurely at the state level with the appointment of a successor to the state superintendent who had introduced the work. However, one district in the state, Grant Parish, has continued to move forward with the Louisiana design.

### Grant Parish Comprehensive Learning Support Policy (excerpt)

"Grant Parish Schools recognize that for some of our students, improvements in instruction are necessary but not sufficient for their success in the classroom. We recognize that there are economic, neighborhood, family, school, peer, and personal circumstances that can create barriers to teaching and learning. Grant Parish Schools believes the role of each school and the district is to promote development of the whole child and ensure equity of opportunity. This includes addressing barriers to learning by creating a comprehensive system of supports.... The learning supports component is created in the classrooms, school-wide and/or community to address barriers to learning and teaching in an effort to re-engage disconnected students. ...

Each school will develop a comprehensive and systemic learning supports component to support the management and instructional component. ... The Learning Supports Component, headed by the Assistant Principal, or designee, will meet monthly and guide development of a comprehensive system at their school to support engagement and reduce barriers to learning and teaching.... Each Assistant Principal will create Resource-oriented support teams to bring together representatives of all relevant programs and services. ...

The Comprehensive System of Learning Supports should be fully integrated with other school and district program efforts to improve instruction and maximize the use of resources at individual schools. All interventions are to be tailored to the diversity of students and families in each of our schools. The design should encompass a variety of interventions that mesh with community efforts to prevent problems, respond as early as feasible after a problem surfaces, and provide for students with severe and chronic problems..."

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/grantpolicy.pdf>

See Grant's brochure for their Comprehensive Learning Supports System at

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/grantbrochure.pdf>  
and the Learning Supports section on their website <http://gpsbtech.ipower.com/cls.htm>

## Illinois

As part of the Illinois State Board of Education's on-going efforts to support district/school improvement planning, four content teams were established in 2012 to provide resources and professional development for Common Core Standard implementation. The teams include data and assessment, math, English language arts (ELA), and learning supports. In FY2013, each team produced resources and facilitated professional development.

*Excerpt from the IL Board of Education website section on Learning Supports*  
( <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/learningsupports/default.htm> )

Equal attention to Learning Supports is essential so that:

- Every student will demonstrate academic achievement and be prepared for success after high school;

- Every student will be supported by highly prepared and effective teachers and school leaders; and
- Every school will offer a safe and healthy learning environment for all students

#### A Comprehensive System of Learning Supports:

- Promotes the necessary conditions for learning which includes:
  - A safe, caring, participatory, and responsive school climate and;
  - The development of academic, physical, social, emotional, and behavioral competencies.
- Addresses barriers to learning and teaching such as: bullying, disengagement, absenteeism, and behavioral health issues.

A Comprehensive System of Learning Supports is fully integrated with the Curriculum and Instruction System and the Governance/Management System, as part of the district/school improvement policy and practice. This may involve:

- Identifying risk factors within the community;
- Identifying protective factors;
- Developing home-school-community partnerships;
- Utilizing data-based decision making to determine needs and gaps in resources/services;
- Unifying all direct efforts to promote necessary conditions for learning and address factors interfering with learning and teaching;
- Allocating/reallocating resources across schools, staff and instructional improvement;
- Taking advantage of natural opportunities to promote the academic, physical, social, emotional, and behavioral development of all; and
- Assessing how well a district/school promotes conditions for learning and addresses barriers to teaching and learning as part of school improvement planning process.

Regional Learning Supports Specialists (LSSs) were employed to develop and conduct professional development to build the capacity of all personnel to understand the conditions necessary for learning. This past year, these Specialists presented sessions at spring conferences throughout the state. The Learning Supports Specialists also participated in the development and dissemination of a monthly newsletter. The contents of these are now being compiled into a comprehensive guide to promote optimal conditions for learning in the classroom. The infrastructure for the Learning Supports Specialists was developed so that they are now full and equal participants with the other content area specialists.

The ISBE Learning Supports webpage provides contextual information to support the development and implementation of the necessary conditions for students to learn and teachers to teach. A-Z topical pages are linked to the page, covering topics such as bullying prevention, climate, engagement/re-engagement of students, etc. and providing internal and external links for finding additional information. See <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/learningsupports/default.htm> .

## Minnesota: *Another beginning*

Our Center first brought its prototypes for transforming student and learning supports to Minnesota in the 1990's. In 1997, the Wilder Foundation asked the Center to introduce the work to the Achievement Plus schools in St. Paul. In the same period, we worked with several schools in Minneapolis. On another occasion, those involved in the federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative in St. Paul did some piloting of the frameworks. This early interest led us to conduct a state summit in 2003 and a follow up leadership institute in 2005 as part of the *New Directions for Student and Learning Supports* initiative.

Over the past few years, the initiative has reentered the state. Two districts, Stillwater Area Public School District and Bloomington School District, have been exploring ways to unify and develop a comprehensive system of learning supports. As they progress, the intent is to make them key demonstrations and the catalytic stimulus for other districts to network and support movement for transforming student and learning supports.

### Stillwater

To guide and monitor development of a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports, Stillwater Area Public Schools established a District Learning Supports Leadership Team. The team includes representatives from each educational level, beginning with early childhood and continuing through community education. The initial collaborative focus has been on enhancing understanding of how to address barriers to learning and teaching in a comprehensive and systematic way. As part of the process, a district-wide Intervention Supports working group was established to map current interventions and work collaboratively to identify and prioritize needs and develop an integrated approach to interventions using the prototype developed by UCLA.

Currently, efforts are underway to expand school improvement policy and accountability to embrace the three component framework and to link Response to Intervention to a comprehensive system of learning supports. In addition, the legislature recently passed the *Minnesota Safe & Supportive Schools Act* which places new requirements upon anti-bully prevention programming and supports. Stillwater's focus on this is being framed within the larger perspective of a learning supports system and the emphasis on whole child development.

### Bloomington

In 2013, key administrators moved from the Stillwater Areas School District to the Bloomington School District and introduced development of a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports. To this end, a District Learning Supports Coordinator position was established.

To create readiness and commitment, formal presentations and “trainings” and informal meetings and discussions were held at district and school levels. At both levels, initial mapping and analyses of resources were conducted using the six content areas delineated by the UCLA prototype.

*Learning Supports* has been made an equal player with *Instruction* and *Management* in school improvement efforts, and organizational leadership is being enhanced at both the district and building levels in keeping with the three component framework. The district reports that this is enabling a more systematic and effective focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and enhancing equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school.

Excerpt from a Bloomington news release

### **District moves toward a comprehensive system of learning supports**

Bloomington Public Schools is developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports as part of a commitment to equip all students with 21st Century skills, motivation and passion for learning. The district's learning supports work includes partnering with families and the community "to more efficiently implement strategies and practices that improve student achievement," according to Superintendent Les Fujitake. "It unifies and moves student supports away from reacting to problems toward system development with a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention," Fujitake added....

The Comprehensive System of Learning Supports framework is based on more than 40 years of research by Drs. Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor from a policy and practice center at UCLA..

"In unifying and developing a comprehensive system to directly address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students, Bloomington has joined an elite group of state and district leaders as trailblazers for new directions for student and learning supports," notes Adelman and Taylor. "The new system will accelerate the district's efforts to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school and reduce dropout rates, narrow the achievement gap, and strengthen school improvement."...

The intent is to fully integrate the learning supports system as a primary component of our school improvement plan, including existing efforts such as Pathways to Graduation. This involves:

- Reframing current student/learning supports programs.
- Re-deploying resources.
- Developing classroom and school-wide approaches, including learning supports found effective in the state's high-poverty/high-achieving schools.
- Developing the capacity to implement learning supports through leadership training.
- Developing and implementing accountability indicators directly related to the learning supports system, and integrating them into school improvement accountability.

Schools have also begun to map existing interventions into a six-area, three-tiered framework to find and eliminate redundancies and fill gaps in services for students.

"The development of a comprehensive system of learning supports is allowing us to bring our district's strategic plan to life by ensuring that every learner, from birth to adult, is successful on their pathway to college and career readiness," said Chris Lennox, Assistant Superintendent. ...

To enable effective use of learning supports, school and community resources are unified in a learning supports component and fully integrated with instructional efforts and interventions and professional development."

<http://www.bloomington.k12.mn.us/node/3117127>

Continued readiness and commitment building, mapping at all buildings, and auditing current surveys, as well as integrating with instructional practices are all parts of the implementation process. The district's immediate focus is on two workgroups. One dealing with a full continuum of mental health support and the other addressing hunger issues. And there is a focus on integrating existing Response to Intervention practices into the larger framework of Learning Supports.

This summer each Building Leadership Team (BLT), which consists of the leads for instruction, learning supports, and management, will attend a leadership academy. The focus will be on site data and general information related to each of the three components and on creating yearly goals and 45 day action plans to be revisited throughout the year.

The District Learning Supports Coordinator reports:

“People are feeling like the alignment to the three component framework has done two things. It has begun to align all of the seemingly disparate work that has gone on for years within all areas of the organization and has created a structure where Learning Supports is not only an equal player with Instruction and Management but a player that people are seeing as something that has been missing and is desperately needed if we are going to prepare students for a productive future.

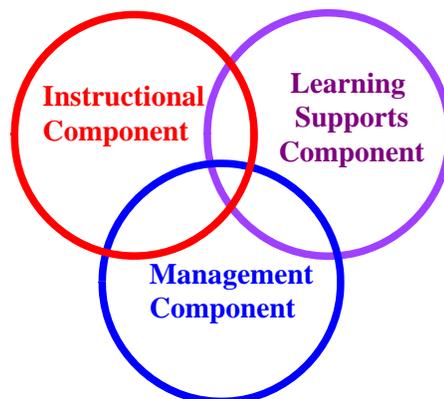
I don't think any of us realized that the structure ... created for Learning Supports to live and thrive was also missing from both Instruction and Management. The idea that we need to have focus - ensure committees, teams, initiatives work together into an integrated, unified, comprehensive continuum of services - work is data driven - workgroups become the engine that enables good, thoughtful change to happen. All of these ideas have helped us "clean up" all areas of our organization. It has allowed the work of Learning Supports to have an even greater effect because it is built into a more functional organization overall.

The excitement for this movement has been building throughout the year. This summer's 3-Component Leadership Academy will be the line in the sand for the organization as a whole to function together within the 3-component framework. We are calling it the start to a collective commitment to ensure student success.”

See Bloomington's moodle site at

<https://moodle2.bloomington.k12.mn.us/course/view.php?id=674>

### Three Component Framework



## LaCrosse, WI and Phoenix, AZ: *Two districts exploring the possibilities*

Over the years, we have used many means and ways to share information about and encourage the transformation of student and learning supports. Networks have emerged to facilitate colleagues exchanging ideas and for promoting change. As a result, each week, we hear from a great many interested parties. For some, this evolves into a decision to move forward. Over the last year, this was the case for both La Crosse and Phoenix.

### **L**aCrosse

Similar to the situation in Minnesota, the Center at UCLA has had a long relationship with a range of education leaders in Wisconsin. This included sponsoring a state summit, presenting to student support services organizations and regional and district leaders, and ongoing communication with the state department.

LaCrosse's current interest focuses on providing a proactive and integrated system of support for the community's children and families. To this end, in 2011, 2012, and 2013, the district superintendent arranged for the annual County Collaborative Conference to focus on barriers to learning. (The conference brings together county employees from about 10 different counties in the region, representing several school districts.) Using the frameworks for a unified and comprehensive system of learning support, the collaborative mapped resources, identified gaps, and planned for an infrastructure that would enhance the impact of their work to support children and youth. See the video [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QmhekE7\\_\\_k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QmhekE7__k)

Here is an excerpt from their website that outlines what they describe as "a community-wide effort from the heart" <http://www.lacrossepartnersinlearning.com/about-us/mission-vision> .

The City of La Crosse, La Crosse County and School District of La Crosse have led a community-wide collaboration to develop an innovative initiative to help ensure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school with a strong start toward a positive future.

*Mission:* ... to create a systemic approach where the City of La Crosse, La Crosse County, School District of La Crosse, and other youth and human service agencies can come together to identify barriers and work systematically to mitigate these barriers to best meet the needs of children and families.

*Vision:* ... by working together we can create a comprehensive learning supports system for prevention, early intervention and systems of care. ... by working collaboratively with more resources concentrated on prevention, the need for intensive systems of care will be reduced over time.

#### *Six Content Arenas:*

1. Crisis Assistance and Prevention – ... provides follow up care as necessary to ensure immediate assistance in emergencies so students can resume learning. The Crisis Team formulates a response plan and takes leadership for developing prevention programs to create a caring and safe learning environment (e.g. developing systems to promote healthy development and prevent problems; bullying and harassment programs).

2. Support for Transitions – ... provides support programs for newcomers as well as daily transition programs (e.g. before school, after school). There is broad involvement in planning for transitions (e.g. grade to grade, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school; in and out of special education programs.)

3. Classroom-Based Approaches to Learning – ... opens the classroom door to bring available supports in (e.g. peer tutors, volunteers, aids training to work with students in need; resource teachers and support staff to work in the classroom as part of the teaching team). Support is provided for classroom and school-wide approaches that are used to create and maintain a caring and supportive climate.

4. Home Involvement in Schooling – ... addresses specific support and learning needs of families (e.g. support services for those in the home to assist in addressing basic survival needs and obligations to the children; adult education classes to enhance literacy, job skills, English-as-a-second language, citizenship preparation.) Stakeholders assist in enhancing home support for learning and development (e.g. family literacy; family homework projects, family field trips).

5. Community Outreach for Improvement and Support – ... provides capacity building to enhance community involvement and support of youth (e.g. public and private agencies, colleges and universities, local residents, artists and cultural institutions, businesses and professional organizations, service, volunteer and faith-based organizations). Stakeholders work to reach out to students and their families who don't come to school regularly, including truants and dropouts.

6. Student and Family Assistance – Stakeholders ... provide extra support as soon as a need is recognized and doing so in the least disruptive ways (e.g. pre-referral interventions in classrooms; problem solving conferences with parents; open access to school, district and community support programs). Community members provide access to direct interventions for health, mental health, and economic assistance (e.g. school-based, school-linked, and community-based programs and services).

## **P**hoenix

In August 2013, the Center at UCLA received the following email:

“I am the Director of Student Services for the Phoenix Union High School District.... I have been reading and studying your UCLA Model for Student Learning Supports for the past several months. As the leader of this division, I plan to restructure student services into the six categories you suggest and to redeploy the 160-plus staff we have in our district to support student learning. Just as the literature states, we are fragmented in our approach to delivering student services. I recently assembled a team that represents every role we have in the district for student services. Each team member is very interested and passionate about this work. Together, we plan to restructure our student support services around the UCLA Model of Student Learning Supports. For the first time in the history of Phoenix Union, we are bringing all the support services teams from across the district together. ... Although we have approximately ten or more individuals on each campus who deliver support services to students, some of them do not know each other.

...we trust you and your team will guide us. Your website has proven to be very helpful to us.... we have a tremendous opportunity to guide our principals to incorporate

student learning supports into the new design of their Continuous School Improvement Plans using the learning supports framework.”

The assembled team decided to meet seven times over the year and to communicate and debrief with the Center all along the way to ensure the work was moving in the right direction. At a meeting in September, they focused on having school teams identify and categorize barriers to learning at each school and then identify interventions on the campus that could address each of the identified barriers. This clarified for the teams that they had some programs in place to address a few barriers to learning, but not others. The teams also began to realize the fragmentation not only at their schools, but across the district.

“We introduced them to the Six Arenas of learning supports (classroom, transitions, home involvement, community outreach, crisis, student/family assistance). We gave them guiding questions to frame their thinking around the Six Arenas. The teams were asked to identify which of the Six Arenas were the strongest at their school and which one created some challenge for them. After this was processed, we provided each team with a poster size template of the Six Arenas. We asked the teams to identify and begin to categorize the resources they had at their school around the Six Arenas.”

Drawing on resources from the Center at UCLA, the district convened monthly professional development sessions with the Student Support Service staff on all 16 high school campuses. This includes 11 different job titles - with large campuses having 1 person in each position, and small schools having at least a traveling counselor and social worker.

In focusing on the six content arenas, they started with Crisis Assistance and Prevention and by the January meeting moved on to the arenas of Transition and Home Involvement. At the February meeting, they reviewed survey results for the other 3 arenas (Student and Family Assistance, Community Support, and Classroom-Based Approaches).

“During the resource mapping activity, the student services staff discovered they did not have resources to address some of their students barriers to learning. We had the student services teams identify the arenas where they had gaps. We then identified community agencies that could partner with us to fill in those gaps. During the last Student Services Professional Learning Community session, we held a Resource Fair where all the student services teams from across the district connected with the agencies that provided the service in the arena where they had identified gaps. Now that we have organized our resources around the six arenas and filled in the gaps, we need to determine our next steps for the upcoming year.”

Based on the work so far, they think it is time to put together a district design document to show the commitment to a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports. And they are planning to present to various groups, including the Curriculum Division, the Executive Team (Assistant Superintendents), Principals, Assistant Principals, and the Board.

**See the Center’s System Change Toolkit for**

*Transforming Student Supports into a Unified & Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

## Critical Lessons Learned About Facilitating Transformation

The following are some basic matters learned from the work described in this issue.

*Transformation requires articulation of a well-formulated design and strategic planning.* Preparation of a design document is a critical step in fostering understanding of desired changes. The design frames and details intended changes in policy, intervention, and operational infrastructure. The strategic and action plans clarifies how systemic changes will be accomplished. Such planning accounts not only for situational opportunities, strengths, and limitations, but addresses how to handle interfering factors that can undermine the work. Special attention is paid to how existing resources will be redeployed and ways to achieve economies of scale.

*Creating readiness, commitment, and engagement must include strategies to deepen understanding and counter misinterpretations of intended changes.* It is essential to do this early to minimize the problems that will arise from uninformed “grape vine” gossip. And given the inevitability of staff changes, there is need for a mechanism to bring newcomers up to speed.

*Transformation requires escaping “project mentality” (sometimes referred to as “projectitis”).* School improvement history is strewn with valuable innovations that were not sustained. A common tendency is for those involved in a transformation process to think about it as only a temporary project (e.g., “It will end when this superintendent/principal leaves.”). This mind set often leads to adoption of transformation language but not substantive changes; that is, “cosmetic” rather than substantive changes are made. In addition, focusing demonstrations at one or two sites can work against replication and can contribute to maintaining existing societal inequities. Countering project mentality requires major attention to the processes involved in bringing prototypes into practice in complex organizations, replicating them to scale, and sustaining them. (See *Bringing New Prototypes into Practice: Dissemination, Implementation, and Facilitating Transformation* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/implrep3.pdf> .)

*Champions/advocates should be constituted as a steering group.* A steering group consisting of a core of high level decision makers seems essential in championing and guiding transformation and removing barriers to moving the work forward. Also valuable is cultivating an additional cadre of influential advocates who are highly motivated not just to help get things underway, but to stay engaged to ensure substantive change and sustainability.

*Administrative leadership and workgroups must be developed.* Transformation requires that the work not just be tacked on to someone who is already overly committed. Job descriptions should be modified to reflect new responsibilities and accountabilities and provision must be made for capacity building related to new functions. (See sample job descriptions are provided in our Center’s System Change Toolkit – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm> ). And because they are called upon to do many things that may be unpopular with some stakeholders, it is essential to put appropriate protections in place for those on the front line of change.

*Coaching & mentoring must go beyond building a few good personal relationships to ensure development of capacity for systemic change.* Fundamental and sustained system changes require developing effective working (and not just personal) relationships among a wide spectrum of those involved. (See *Guide for Planning Coaching for SEAs/LEAs to Establish a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/coaching.pdf> .)

*Reworking the operational infrastructure is required for both daily implementation and for facilitating systemic change.* Transformation requires steering, planning, and implementation mechanisms that are effectively woven together. While the need for a transformation leader and implementation team generally is appreciated, the importance of establishing other temporary mechanisms for systemic change often is not. (See the coaching guide cited above.)

*Resistant parties need special invitations to participate.* To the degree feasible, it is of value to make continuous efforts to reach out and include in work groups those who are resistant to the transformation and who are reluctant to give up protecting their turf.

*Regular reviews of plans and monitoring how they are carried out and revisiting agreements are essential to enabling progress.* Complex transformation requires use of benchmarks that focus directly on addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Use of such benchmarks is the basis for formative evaluation designed to improve the work and for reviewing and revising initial agreements and procedures. Reviews should focus on essential elements of the transformation. (See *Five Essential Elements of a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essentials.pdf>.)

*Data gathering related to outcomes is essential, but needs to be analyzed with respect to the stage of transformation and should focus on the whole child.* In particular, conclusions about outcomes are premature until the transformation is successfully in place and has been for a sufficient period of time. And from a whole child perspective, outcomes related to such matters as social-emotional learning are as important as traditional academic achievements. In this last respect, accountability frameworks need to be expanded. (See *Expanding the Accountability Framework for Schools* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/account.pdf>.)

We had just finished a presentation on new directions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching, when a member of the audience confronted Linda. In an exasperated tone, he complained:

***What you discussed is nothing but common sense!***

He then waited for her to offer a defense. She smiled and said simply:

***You're right!***

Despite the common sense reality that school improvement policy and practice must move forward in transforming student and learning supports, it has taken some time for major efforts to emerge. In the meantime, external and internal barriers to learning and teaching have continued to pose some of the most pervasive and entrenched challenges to educators across the country, particularly in chronically low performing schools. Failure to directly address these barriers ensures that (a) too many children and youth will continue to struggle in school, and (b) teachers will continue to divert precious instructional time to dealing with behavior and other problems that can interfere with classroom engagement for all students.

Transforming student and learning supports is key to school improvement. To this end, this special edition has highlighted examples from trailblazing efforts at local, district, regional, and state levels. And we want to take this opportunity to congratulate the many trailblazers for all they have accomplished and to thank them for what they have taught us.

## **2014 – Taking Time to Transform!**

**O**ver a school year, it is hard to find enough time to stop, think, and plan new ways of doing things. It is a bit like Winnie the Pooh’s experience going downstairs. As Milne describes it:

*“Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he know, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it.”*

At most schools, staff have had to keep “bumping their heads” as they struggle each day to meet the demands on them. Summer provides an opportunity to think long enough to plan better ways to become proactive and more effective. In particular, it allows staff who work year round to further develop student and learning supports into a more effective system.

The Center has a variety of resources related to how to develop a unified, comprehensive and equitable system for addressing barriers to student learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. These resources are free and readily accessible. See, for example:

>***Beginning Steps in Personnel Development Related to Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*** – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/personneldevelopment.pdf>

This is a brief guide to free online resources intended to provide an introduction to the concepts and practices that form a comprehensive system of learning supports and how to get such system development moving forward.

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***Invitation: Want to share where it’s happening?***

***Want help in transforming student/learning supports?***

Contact us:

E-mail: [smhp@ucla.edu](mailto:smhp@ucla.edu) or [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

Phone: (310) 825-3634

Use our website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

*Not receiving our monthly electronic newsletter (ENEWS)?*

*Or our weekly Practitioners’ Interchange?*

Then, send your request to [smhp@ucla.edu](mailto:smhp@ucla.edu)

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***If we learn from our mistakes,  
today should have made me pretty smart.***



The Center for Mental Health in Schools operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project in the Dept. of Psychology, UCLA.

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*... and a host of graduate and undergraduate students*