

Major Reasons for Transforming K-12 Student/Learning Supports

Why transform K-12 student/learning supports? Here are three major reasons:

1. Ending the Marginalization of Such Supports

Currently, student/learning supports are not treated as a primary concern in school improvement policy and practice. Yet, they are essential for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and for reengaging disconnected students.

Marginalization leads to:

- Limited availability and access for many students and teachers
- Ad hoc, fragmented interventions
- Counterproductive competition for scarce resources
- Disproportionate impact on schools in low-income communities

Modern educational frameworks emphasize educating the whole child—academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. Marginalized supports undermine this vision. Ending marginalization and transforming student/learning supports is central to school improvement and promoting equity of opportunity for success at schools and beyond.

2. Ending the Fragmentation of Current Supports

Most schools provide a range of supports (e.g., counseling, behavior interventions, tutoring, special education). However, because these efforts are marginalized, implementation often is disconnected and reactive, resulting in inefficiencies and gaps.

Transformation enables schools to shift from reactive, crisis-driven actions to a proactive, integrated system. Such a system can build on the type of continuum outlined by MTSS. The intent is to unify and organize supports into a well-defined and delimited set of intervention domains across each tier of the continuum.* The ultimate aim is to develop a system that pursues prevention and early intervention in ways that reduce the amount of specialized assistance needed.

3. Reaching More Students, Families, and Teachers

Achievement and opportunity gaps persist, particularly for students from low-income families, English learners, and students with special needs.

Current supports often fail to meet to the complexity and diversity of student and teacher needs, particularly in underserved communities. Ending the marginalization and fragmentation of student/learning supports helps promote equity of opportunity for success at schools and beyond. Transforming supports is key to address systemic inequities.

Transforming student/learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system enables schools to

- assist more students, families, and teachers
- strategically restructure and build capacity using existing resources (rather than unrealistically hoping to fund additional personnel)
- make systemic change scalable across districts and states.

Conclusion

Frameworks like Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Whole Child approaches call for cohesive, tiered, and comprehensive systems that address barriers to learning and teaching. By addressing marginalization and fragmentation and by promoting equity, schools can better provide supports for many more students to succeed at school and beyond.

Student/learning supports are vital in fostering a positive school climate, student engagement, and social-emotional development. A comprehensive transformation of student/learning supports is not just beneficial—it is essential for improving availability, comprehensiveness, equity, cost-effectiveness, scalability, and sustainability.

A Couple of Resources

Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefguide.pdf>

*An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports:
A Month by Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing Resources*
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/agendapaper.pdf>

Call for Nominations:

National Award for Work on Transforming Student/Learning Supports

Nomination Deadline: December 1, 2025
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/award.pdf>

*Frameworks like MTSS and Whole Child approaches call for cohesive, tiered systems that address barriers to learning and teaching. The next step in building on such approaches involves organizing the many interventions into a well-defined and delimited set of intervention domains that cross each tier of the continuum. As illustrated below, the R&D prototype for these domains developed by our center calls for six interconnected domains of student/learning supports:

- *Classroom-Based Learning Supports*
- *Supports for Transitions*
- *Home Involvement and engagement*
- *Community Involvement and collaborative Engagement*
- *Crisis Response & Prevention*
- *Student & Family Assistance*

		Integrated Intervention Continuum (levels)		
		Subsystem for promoting healthy development & preventing problems	Subsystem for early intervention	Subsystem for treatment ("system of care")
Categories of Classroom & Schoolwide Student and Learning Support Domains	Classroom-based learning supports	e.g., personalized instruction	e.g., special assistance in the classroom provided as soon as a problem arises	e.g., referral for specialist assistance
	Supports for transitions	e.g., welcoming newcomers and providing social and/or academic supports	e.g., when problems arise, using them as teachable moments to enhance social-emotional development and learning	e.g., personalized supports for students returning to school from incarceration
	Home involvement & engagement	e.g., outreach to attract and facilitate participation of hard-to-reach families	e.g., engaging families in problem-solving	e.g., support services to assist families with addressing basic survival needs
	Community involvement & collaborative engagement	e.g., outreach to recruit volunteers	e.g., developing community links and connections to fill critical intervention gaps	e.g., outreach to reengage disconnected students and families
	Crisis response & prevention	e.g., promoting positive relationships	e.g., immediate response with physical and psychological first aid	e.g., referral for follow-up counseling
	Student & family special assistance	e.g., enhancing coping and problem-solving capability	e.g., providing consultation, triage, and referrals	e.g., ongoing management of care related to specialized services
		Accommodations for differences & disabilities		Specialized assistance & other intensified interventions (e.g., special education, school-based interventions)