
Integrating Learning Supports into the Infrastructure of a Small School

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infra_small_school_notes.pdf

Obviously, a small school has less staff and other resources than most larger schools. Nevertheless, the three major functions necessary for school improvement remain the same in all schools, namely (1) improving instruction, (2) providing learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching, and (3) enhancing management and governance.

The challenge in any school is to pursue all three functions in an integrated and effective manner. The added challenge in a small school is how to do it with so few personnel. The key is to use and, to the degree feasible, modestly expand existing infrastructure mechanisms.

The figure on the next page is a modification for small schools of the school level infrastructure prototype we have proposed (see references). The illustration maintains the focus on all three major functions. However, rather than stressing the involvement of several administrative leaders and numerous staff members, the emphasis is on the role a *School Leadership Team* can play in establishing essential infrastructure mechanisms.

With less personnel, a principal must use who and what is available to pursue all three functions. Usually, the principal and whoever else is part of a school leadership team will lead the way in improving instruction and management/governance. As presently constituted, however, such a team may not be prepared to advance development of a comprehensive system of learning supports. Thus, someone already on the leadership team will need to be assigned this role and provided training to carry it out effectively.

Alternatively, someone in the school who is involved with student supports (e.g. a pupil services professional, a Title I coordinator, a special education resource specialist) can be invited to join the leadership team, assigned responsibility and accountability for ensuring the vision for the component is not lost, and provided additional training for the tasks involved in being a Learning Supports or Enabling Component Lead.

The lead, however chosen, will benefit from eliciting the help of other advocates/champions at the school and from the community. These all can help ensure development, over time, of a comprehensive system of learning supports.

A resources-oriented mechanism focused specifically on learning supports is needed to ensure component cohesion, integrated implementation, and ongoing development. If there are several staff at the school who are especially concerned with enhancing learning supports (e.g. pupil services professionals, Title I coordinator, a special education staff, regular classroom teachers, outside agency staff working with the school), they can form a Learning Supports Resource Team. If there is no way to form a separate team, the agenda can become a periodic focus for a case-oriented team. If neither of these approaches is workable, the School Leadership Team needs to take on the essential set of resource-oriented tasks.

Finally, small work groups provide an opportunity to mobilize and utilize the talents of any and all school and community stakeholders. Because most schools have a great deal to do in developing a comprehensive system of learning supports, several such groups are desirable.

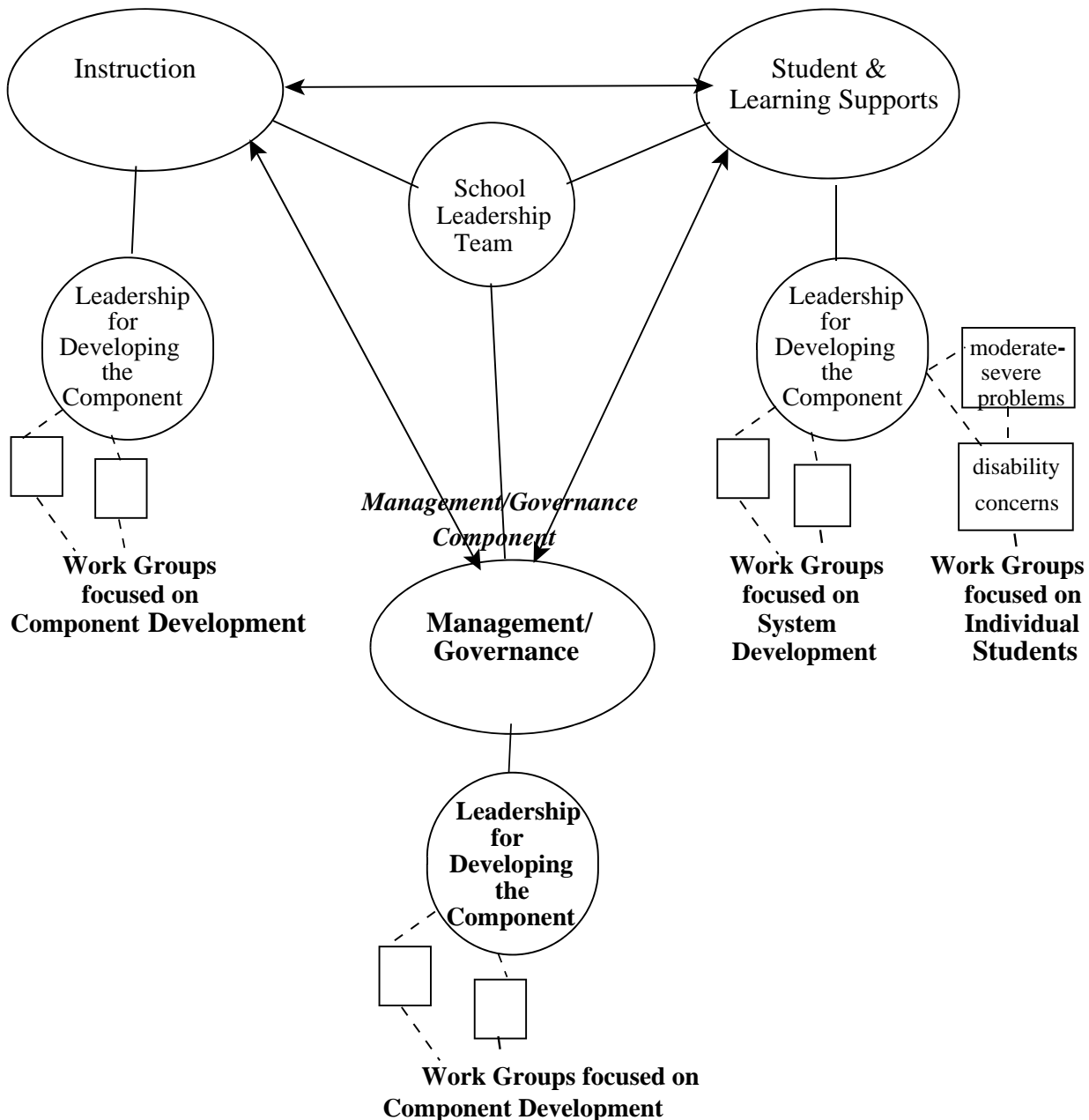
The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA.

Write: Center for Mental Health in Schools, Box 951563, Los Angeles, CA 90095- 1563
Phone: (310) 825-3634 | E-mail: smhp@ucla.edu | Website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

Example of an Integrated Infrastructure at a Small School*

Facilitating Learning/Development *Instructional Component*

Addressing Barriers to Learning *Enabling or Learning Supports Component*



*The infrastructure for a comprehensive system of learning supports should be designed from the school outward. That is, conceptually, the first emphasis is on what an integrated infrastructure should look like at the school level. Then, the focus expands to include the mechanisms needed to connect a family or complex (e.g., feeder pattern) of schools and establish collaborations with surrounding community resources. Ultimately, central district units need to be restructured in ways that best support the work at the school and school complex levels.

For Related Center Resources, see the toolkit for *Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* – especially Section B on Reworking Infrastructure – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>