

10/15/11

To: Participants – *District and State Collaborative Network for Developing Comprehensive Systems of Learning Support*

From: Center at UCLA (Howard Adelman & Linda Taylor, Co-directors)

Re: Initial Comments

As can be seen from the participant initial, the network includes district superintendents, principals, representatives from state departments of education, regional/county offices of education, key district and school staff, and a range of community organizations that work with and support schools (including universities).

As one of the first steps for network participants, we are gathering info on specific matters each would want the network to explore (e.g., specific interests, needs related to moving in new directions, how the network might help). Participant interests, questions, concerns, advice will help guide initial general network information sharing and exchanges.

To keep participant emails from being flooded, general contributions are sent to the Center at UCLA (adelman@psych.ucla.edu or Ltaylor@ucla.edu). These are then synthesized and sent to the collaborative network.

In general, when a specific concern is raised, a quick, direct response is made with whatever information the Center can provide and the request is sent out to the network (and sometimes to others with whom the Center is in contact who have specific expertise). As information is received, the Center synthesizes it for distribution to the network and others.

Of course, if a participant wants to email any individual and subset of the network, they are free to do so. (The Center can provide the relevant email addresses if needed.)

Here is a brief sample of initial input we have received so far and have been circulated for responses from those in the network who have relevant experiences.

General Concern: "Need some better approaches to the dropout problem."

Center Note: Recent Center report on this concern.

From a District Superintendent: "In our community, there are deep seated resentments based on lack of support in schools that makes the community less of a partner than is necessary for us to succeed. It prevents the youth of the community from becoming authentically involved in their futures inasmuch as the community promotes a lack of incentive relating to educational gain and future opportunity. There is a cultural divide in how teaching and learning is done. There is very little respect for educational practices, we have major discipline issues as well as very low academic achievement. Our students are inherently influenced by the less than enthusiastic and pervasive attitudes of the culture, which results in students behavior and a school climate that goes against the grain of the natural instinct of youth to learn and requires of the institution to spend an inordinate amount of time dealing with issues that are unrelated to educational integrity. There is an underlying sense that we -- the educators -- need to do much more listening and be much more patient as we 'ask' the students to come along with us to experience the wonders of education. I believe that there is a great deal to learn on this front. I look forward to the opportunity explore this with the network."

From an Assistant District Superintendent: “We have a new initiative in our district to develop a systems approach to identifying students at risk and create structures of support these students. This work will focus on attendance, achievement and attachment. We are looking for guidance as to what we need to do as a district to move forward with a successful plan. We would be very interested in talking with the leadership in other districts that have taken the initial steps in establishing a comprehensive learning support system. We want to know what to do and what not to do.”

Center Note: We connected this district with one of the AASA/Scholastic/UCLA Lead District Superintendents as an initial step.

From a Student Services Support supervisor: “Related to a comprehensive system of learning supports, my main interest is in a) what roadblocks people struggle to overcome, b) promising practices, and c) ideas that looked good on paper but really bombed when implementation was tried (with musings about why they didn't work).”

From a teacher: “I presented a proposal to the cabinet of our district to implement a learning support component. My idea was well received and I was told the district would consider the idea if there was funding available. (Don't call us, we'll call you.) I need support and resources to implement the program. Our new Director of Alternative Education is interested in the idea and suggested that I create a team to explore next steps. I need resources, guidance and support. What have others done to get started?”

About Social-Emotional Learning. “Need information on grants for purposes of advocating and training schools (& collaborative partners) in a systems approach to social and emotional wellness (i.e., advocating for SEL in schools, training schools and partners in how to develop a framework to begin the systems-change process, etc.). Helping schools integrate Social-Emotional Wellness with existing efforts, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RtI). They continue to function in a fragmented fashion. Getting administrator buy-in in times of economic hardship.”

About special education: “How do we change the current culture of schools and education, and make that paradigm shift from a traditional/industrial era of teaching to one based on teaching to all different kinds of learners so that eventually kids who are considered special needs students will just become students - so that it is not us (special education students) and them (general education students), but just US. Special Education should not be treated as different from mainstream education”

About University Prep Programs: “I am interested in how to incorporate teaching courses on learning supports (social and emotional skills, prevention, school climate, community partnerships, outreach to families, etc.) in both graduate and undergraduate courses in education and psychology as a start. I think doing so would be of benefit to teachers, psychologists, school social workers, administrators, etc. I've seen very little data in this area and I would love to see examples of courses that help to move the field forward. Is there information that I'm missing that is already making headway in this regard?”

In the near future we will post a synthesis of the network responses related to above concerns shared.

Finally, let us hear from you about any and all suggestions for making the network productive.