Special Edition

Embedding Bullying Interventions into a Comprehensive System of Student and Learning Supports

Bullying can be extremely damaging to students, can disrupt an environment conducive to learning, and should not be tolerated in our schools.

Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education

Nobody denies school bullying is a major problem, but considerable controversy exists over the best way to address the problem. The following discussion presents (a) a brief analysis and synthesis of the current state of the art, (b) underscores the need to avoid another piecemeal set of policy and practice initiatives, and (c) stresses that the growing emphasis on school bullying provides an opportunity to accelerate development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system of student and learning supports.

Bullying: A Burgeoning Concern

The reality is that almost everyone has experienced and has been a witness to aggressive interpersonal behavior at one time or another (e.g., teasing, taunting, name calling, hitting, rejecting peers). About a third of teenagers report being bullied during a school year with about 7 percent indicating they were bullied every day (e.g., Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2009).

Ragozzino and O'Brien (2009) highlight the types of bullying described by researchers (e.g., Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007):

"Direct bullying is a relatively open attack on a victim that is physical (hitting, kicking, pushing, choking) and/or verbal (name calling, threatening, taunting, malicious teasing) in nature. Indirect bullying is more subtle and difficult to detect. It involves one or more forms of relational aggression, including social isolation, intentional exclusion, rumor-spreading, damaging someone's reputation, making faces or obscene gestures behind someone's back, and manipulating friendships and other relationships.

Students increasingly bully others using electronic communication devices and the Internet. Cyberbullying involves sending hurtful or threatening text messages and images with these devices in order to damage the target's reputation and relationships. This form of bullying can be very difficult for adults to detect or track, and almost half of those victimized do not know the identity of the perpetrator. Electronic bullying most commonly involves the use of instant messaging, chat rooms, and e-mail."

As Secretary Duncan suggests, bullying behavior in schools can be a major barrier to learning and teaching. And clearly it can be detrimental to the physical and psychological well being not only of many students but their families and all who work in a school.

Growing attention to bullying at school has led the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights to warn schools that, under some circumstances, bullying may trigger legal action (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Concern about bullying also has generated increasing emphasis on the behavior as a predictor of delinquency, violence, and other anti-social acts in adulthood (Bender & Losel, 2011; Farrington, Ttofi, & Losel, 2011).

As concerns about bullying have burgeoned, policy makers at federal and state levels have stepped up action. In August 2010, the federal government held the first-ever *Federal Bullying Prevention Summit* and has launched an interagency bullying resource website (http://stopbullying.gov). In March 2011, the *Anti-Bullying and Harassment Act of 2011* was introduced in Congress. And, so far, at least forty-five states have passed legislation related to bullying or harassment in schools.

In schools over the last 25 years, bullying prevention programs have received increasing attention. For even longer, schools have pursued strategies for punishing and controlling perpetrators. Intervention concern focused on victims has been less forthcoming.

One result of increased attention to aggressive behaviors at school is that a wider range of victimization has come under the rubric of bullying (e.g., various forms of physical and relational aggression and violence, acts of prejudice and discrimination, antisocial attacks, cyberspace attacks, physical and sexual harassment, etc.). This trend to overgeneralize blurs understanding of the bases for different aggressive behaviors and what to do to prevent victimization and raises cautions about premature labeling of students as bullies (Brown, 2008). Because of this trend, bullying is now designated as the dominant type of school violence and, thus, the dominant form of externalizing behavior.

Time to Refine the Definition to Better Account for the Victims

Various definitions of bullying have been formulated. Farrington and Ttofi (2010) have synthesized the common elements in discussing school bullying. Below we highlight the key elements; then, we suggest a few refinements.

As synthesized with specific reference to children and youth, Farrington and Ttofi highlight three key elements of bullying:

   (1) "physical, verbal, or psychological attack or intimidation that is intended to cause fear, distress, or harm to the victim"

   (2) "an imbalance of power (psychological or physical), with a more powerful child (or children) oppressing less powerful ones"

   (3) "repeated incidents between the same children over a prolonged period."

To further clarify these elements and to help differentiate bullying from other aggressive behaviors, Farrington and Ttofi stress that "It is not bullying when two persons of the same strength (physical, psychological, or verbal) victimize each other. Bullying primarily involves imbalance of power and repeated acts." And, they also stress that while bullying is a type of aggressive behavior, "it should not be equated with aggression or violence; not all aggression or violence involves bullying, and not all bullying involves aggression or violence."

All three elements can be seen as criteria for identifying a student as a bully, with the third element perhaps the one that clearly differentiates bullying from other aggressive behaviors.

Bullying is defined as *school bullying* not only when it occurs at school but also when the event happens on the way to or from school. As with other forms of violence, conditions at school in the surrounding neighborhood can minimize or worsen bullying.

Cyberbullying is seen as fitting the above definition (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, et al., 2008), with some research suggesting that it be viewed separately from physical, verbal, and relational forms of bullying (Wang, Nansel, & Iannotti, 2011).

From the perspective of identifying *bullying victims* (as contrasted to those victimized by other aggressive events), the three elements require some modification. In particular:

- the first element encompasses too many forms of externalizing behavior. The key point with reference to a bullying attack is the *intent/motivation to victimize another* (i.e., to produce physical and/or emotional harm).

- the power imbalance element doesn't account for differences in (a) circumstances and situations and (b) personal, social, and cultural values and norms. Also, while the bullying of a student may be precipitated by a more powerful individual (not always a child), others who join in may not be very powerful. Thus, this element needs to be qualified. For example, *Under circumstances and situations where there is an imbalance of power (verbal, physical, social, and/or psychological), bullying involves an individual with more power (sometimes joined by others) victimizing one or more individuals who do not appear to defend themselves from the harm.*

- While bullying often is a repeated pattern involving the same individuals, it is not clear why any attack *intended to victimize* another isn't bullying. Certainly, repeated incidents between the same children over a prolonged period produce many problems that require attention. *However, one such event can produce significant physical and/or emotional harm for the victim and others in the situation.*

At any rate, the problem for policy making and practice is that current definitions of bullying remain rather general, and as a result, too many aggressive behaviors are designated as bullying. While it is evident that most aggressive behavior at school can be a significant problem, it is also clear that the majority of aggressive behavior is motivated and dealing with it effectively requires appreciating differences in what motivates the behavior.

What Motivates Aggressive Behavior in General and Bullying Specifically?

To understand aggressive behavior, one must appreciate the roots of misbehavior, especially underlying motivational bases. For many individuals, misbehavior grows out of psychological needs, especially intrinsic motivational considerations (e.g., need to feel competent, self-determining, and connected with significant others). Intrinsic motivational theory encompasses not only notions of power and control, but the desire for popularity, wanting to develop close intimate relationships within a group, desires to create excitement, enhance security, and escape from fear – all of which are emphasized in the bullying literature. Over time, such motivational factors shape attitudes, dispositions, and related patterns of misbehavior (Deci & Moller, 2005).

Bullying can be proactive or reactive (Roland & Idsoe, 2001; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). *As such, it reflects approach or avoidance motivation.*

Noncooperative, disruptive, and aggressive behavior patterns that are *proactive* can be rewarding and satisfying to an individual because the behavior itself is exciting or because the behavior leads to desired personal and/or subgroup outcomes (e.g., peer recognition and enhanced status within a subgroup, feelings of competence or autonomy). Intentional negative behavior stemming from such approach motivation can be viewed as pursuit of deviance. Think about the bullying behavior associated with those designated as "jocks" (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2010a).

Misbehavior also can be *reactive*, stemming from avoidance motivation. This behavior can be viewed as protective reactions. Students with learning problems, for example, can be seen as motivated to avoid and to protest against being forced into situations in which they cannot cope effectively. For such students, many teaching and therapy situations are perceived in this way. Under such circumstances, individuals can be expected to react by trying to protect themselves from the unpleasant thoughts and feelings that the situations stimulate (e.g., feelings of incompetence, loss of autonomy, negative relationships). In effect, the misbehavior reflects efforts to cope and defend against aversive experiences.

Depending on many factors, proactive and reactive misbehavior may be direct or indirect and include aggression toward others, defiance, physical and psychological withdrawal, and diversionary tactics. What causes the behavior to take the form of bullying is unclear. Some suggest it is modeled; others point to peer norms and encouragement; others argue for reciprocal determinism.

Implications of Labeling Students as Bullies and Victims

It is widely acknowledged that those students labeled as bullies constitute quite a heterogenous group in terms of the reasons they become bullies. Bullies differ in terms of demographics, developmental level, motivation, gender, ethnicity, and more. The heterogeneity is reflected in where and how their bullying behavior is manifested and what is needed to reduce that behavior.

Victims are also a heterogenous group in terms of their characteristics and how a bullying attack affects them. They may be attacked because of personal characteristics and/or because of a specific subgroup identification. The impact of single or multiple events may be (a) mild to severe, (b) manifested narrowly or broadly, and (c) short- to long-term. Any degree of impact may be experienced as a problem requiring therapeutic attention.

It should be stressed, however, that mild, narrow, and short-lived problems should not be diagnosed as disorders. There is a long-standing pathological bias that permeates efforts to differentiate garden variety behavior, emotional, and learning problems from true pathology. And this continues to work against developing child and youth interventions (especially in schools) to promote healthy social and emotional development, prevent victimization, and intervene to address mild reactions.

In general, as with all labeling of students, classification of students as bullies and their targets as victims has a downside. All labeling is subject to error stemming from poor methodology, bias, and prejudice. Of particular concern is the bias toward labeling problems in terms of personal rather than social causation. This bias is bolstered by factors such as (a) attributional bias – a tendency for observers to perceive others' problems as rooted in stable personal dispositions and (b) economic and political influences – whereby a particular problem such as bullying rises in visibility and is assigned a high priority for policy making only because of the power of special interests.

Designating a student as a bully or a victim can be a life shaping event. Many hear such labels as an indication of internal pathology or at least as an indication that the student has a severe, pervasive, and chronic problem. It is a commonplace to stereotype bullies as having low self-esteem and being poor students and those who are attacked as having victim personalities and as candidates for post traumatic stress syndrome and depression. Even bystanders are seen either as bullying supporters or as potentially traumatized. Such stereotyping contributes to self-fulfilling prophecies and a deemphasis of an individual's positive attributes. And, of course, any environment/contextual factors shaping the behavior are downplayed, and this works against efforts to make changes that enhance a positive school climate.

Clearly, bullies, those who are bullied, or those who witness bullying should not be ignored. But, remember, most students fit into one or more of these groups, and most will grow into reasonably healthy adults. Also, remember that overemphasis on classifying problems in terms of personal pathology skews theory, research, practice, and public policy.

Bullying perpetrators need to be viewed as individuals; so do those who are attacked and the bystanders. And, as with all interventions, a personalized approach to identifying and meeting needs is essential, as is an awareness of strengths, special talents, and what is known about resilience (Ungar, 2011).
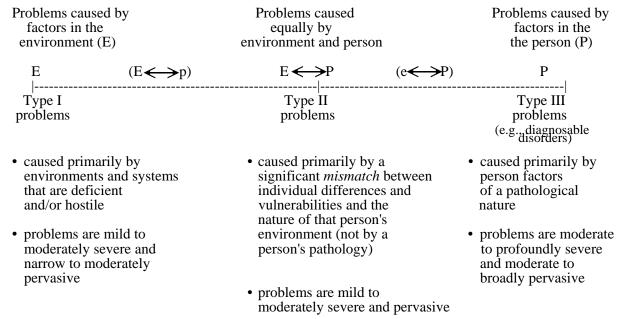
Bullying is a Transaction

No single factor provides an adequate understanding of complex behavior such as bullying. Indeed, the causes of all behavior are best explained in reciprocal determinist (transactional) and dimensional terms (Adelman & Taylor, 1988; Bandura, 1978). A transactional perspective ensures consideration of ecological viewpoints (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010; Ungar, 2011), while not losing site of the individual's contribution to a given behavior. Exhibit 1 illustrates the point.

When misbehavior takes the form of bullying, a transactional model considers whether the primary instigating factors leading to the behavior stem from conditions in (a) the environment, (b) personal characteristics, or (c) a specific set of transactions. For example, some neighborhood, home, and school environments (as well as the internet) seem to be breeding grounds for aggressive behavior in general and for developing bullies and even groups of bullies (e.g., participation in gangs, cliques, and other peer groups that endorse aggressive behavior; living in an abusive family; exposure to corporal punishment at school; opportunities and incentives to aggress against others at school). Aside from those who are diagnosed with a psychopathological disorder, examples of personal characteristics associated with the development of bullying behavior include tendencies to seek excitement through aggression, be easily frustrated, have temper outbursts, react against rules and authority, and be antisocial.

Appreciating the transactional facets of bullying simultaneously emphasizes the role of context including bystanders and of both the bully and the victim.

Exhibit 1

A Continuum of Problems Based on a Transactional Understanding of Cause*

PRIMARY SOURCE OF CAUSE

Problems caused by factors in the environment (E)	Problems caused equally by environment and person	Problems caused by factors in the the person (P)

$$E \qquad (E \longleftrightarrow p) \qquad E \longleftrightarrow P \qquad (e \longleftrightarrow P) \qquad P$$

|---|---|

Type I problems	Type II problems	Type III problems (e.g., diagnosable disorders)

- caused primarily by environments and systems that are deficient and/or hostile

- problems are mild to moderately severe and narrow to moderately pervasive

- caused primarily by a significant *mismatch* between individual differences and vulnerabilities and the nature of that person's environment (not by a person's pathology)

- problems are mild to moderately severe and pervasive

- caused primarily by person factors of a pathological nature

- problems are moderate to profoundly severe and moderate to broadly pervasive

*Using a transactional view, the continuum emphasizes the *primary source* of the problem and, in each case, is concerned with problems that are beyond the early stage of onset.

Adapted from the work of Adelman & Taylor and published in various resources.

Factors Influencing Bulling
(from Ragozzino and O'Brien, 2009)

"There are numerous individual, peer-level, school-level, familial, and community factors that influence bullying. At the level of the peer group, social theories describing why bullying increases during late childhood and early adolescence include homophily theory, dominance theory, and attraction theory, and there is some research evidence supporting each.... Homophily theory states that people tend to form friendships and spend time with those who are similar to them in certain key ways. Students tend to hang out with others who bully at the same frequency, and among these bully-prone groups, bullying frequency increases over time. According to dominance theory, students use bullying as a strategy for moving higher in the social pecking order, particularly during the transition from elementary school to the middle grades, when patterns of social hierarchy are being established. Attraction theory posits that as children enter middle school, their attraction to aggressive peers increases.

Family interaction patterns may also influence peer interaction patterns. Children who are both victims and perpetrators of bullying at school are much more likely to also bully and/or be victimized by siblings.... Parents of children who bully others are more likely to lack emotional warmth and be overly permissive.... Parents of victimized children, in contrast, are more likely to be highly restrictive, controlling, and over-involved...."

Interventions: Current State of the Art

As noted, much of the intervention focus at schools is on reducing bullying through social control strategies and bullying prevention programs. Little intervention attention is paid to underlying causes and to differentiating among bullies with respect to motivation. Where prevention programs are in place, the emphasis is mostly on classroom-curricular approaches and some school contextual strategies.

It appears that few schools have well-designed approaches for addressing the impact on those bullied or bystanders. And counseling interventions to turn perpetrators around are mostly discussed in terms of guidelines and principles (e.g., see http://www.stopbullying.gov/community/tip_sheets/mental_health_professionals_bully_others.pdf).

About Interventions to Prevent Bullying

Most interventions to prevent bullying are designed as stand-alone programs and initiatives for all at a given school level (i.e., lower and upper elementary, middle, and high school). They focus extensively on increasing awareness about bullying and decreasing aggressive behaviors. The emphasis in reducing bullying is on (1) person-oriented changes (e.g., affecting cognitive, social, and emotional learning and development and changes in peer dynamics) and (2) changes in school rules about behavior and how the school handles misbehavior.

With respect to the latter, discussions for many years have stressed the need to do more to address the role the school environment plays in exacerbating or protecting against bullying (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999; Pepler, Craig, Ziegler, & Charach, 1994). The prevailing view currently is that school practices and policies should emphasize strategies designed to

- reduce conditions that contribute to bullying at school

- pursue school-wide approaches that establish a positive school culture and climate

- build on the foundation of school-wide approaches in implementing classroom programs

- personally intervene to turn bullies around and respond to any problems experienced by those who are bullied and those who witness bullying.

Consistent with this, researchers such as Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, and Hymel (2010) have called for social-ecological intervention to address peers and families and other factors that promote and sustain bullying perpetration. They stress that too many bullying prevention approaches do not account for "the changing demographics of communities and fail to incorporate factors such as race, disability, and sexual orientation." At the same time, they argue that interventions need to pinpoint the "relatively small percentage of students are directly engaged in bullying perpetration (typically 10%–20% of students are the perpetrators of bullying)."

With respect to results, Merrell, Gueldner, Roos, and Isava's (2008) meta-analysis focused on a broad range of school bullying intervention programs (e.g., whole school anti-bullying programs and interventions implemented with small groups of targeted students, in individual classrooms, or in clusters of selected classrooms). These researchers conclude that "school bullying interventions may produce modest positive outcomes, that they are more likely to influence knowledge, attitudes, and self-perceptions rather than actual bullying behaviors; and that the majority of outcome variables in intervention studies are not meaningfully impacted." Farrington and Ttofi (2010) report findings of a meta-analysis of 44 evaluations of bullying prevention programs and conclude: "overall, school-based anti-bullying programs are effective in reducing bullying and victimization (being bullied). On average, bullying decreased by 20% – 23% and victimization decreased by 17% – 20%."

> As the above meta-analyses indicate positive findings are modest; some programs were effective, others were not. And those that were effective may or may not fit settings that differ from the ones where evaluations showed positive outcomes. Another concern is that the evaluations generally have not looked for negative outcomes.

About Interventions for Perpetrators, Peers who Support Bullying, and Students who are Negatively Affected

From a educational and general well-being perspective, it is clear that students who bully and those who are affected by the actions of bullies warrant a personalized intervention focus. First, however, given a reciprocal determinist framework, the causes of bullying and peer encouragement of bullying need to be viewed in context. For us, the first intervention concern always is that of reducing conditions in the environment that contribute to bullying behavior. This includes working collaboratively with students and other school stakeholders to modify external factors triggering and maintaining bullying behavior (e.g., reducing the chances of a bully acting out). Secondly, the focus is on individual and group developmental and psychological factors contributing to the behavior.

It should be noted, however, that limited attention has been given to directly addressing motivational and developmental concerns related to individuals who bully and those who support bullying. This also is the case with respect to assisting those affected by bullying.

With respect to personalized intervention, researchers regularly stress the importance of addressing the "unique problems of bullies, victims, and bully-victims" (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003). In a recent discussion of bullies and those who are bullied, Graham (2009) expands on the matter stating:

> "Understanding facts versus myths about bullies and victims is important for intervention. The problems of victims and bullies are not the same. Victims of harassment need interventions that help them develop more positive self-views and that teach them not to blame themselves for their experiences with harassment. Interventions for bullies do not need to focus on self-esteem. Rather, bullies need to learn strategies that help them control their anger and their tendency to blame other people for their problems. And peers need to learn that bullying is a whole school problem for which everyone is responsible. There is no such thing as an innocent bystander."

Working with Bullies. Strategies recommended for working directly with bullies essentially are generalized from those used with acting-out students and in responding to relational aggression (Child Trends, 2011; Doll & Swearer, 2006; Zins, Elias, & Maher, 2007). The increasing attention to relational aggression has led to a particular focus on interventions for bullying behavior by girls (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2010b; Leff & Crick, 2010). For example, some success has been reported in the use of brief strategic family therapy to reduce psychological and social problems of bullying girls (Nickel, Luley, Krawczyk, et al., 2006).

It is recognized that, among some peer groups, bullying is seen as normative and thus acceptable behavior (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). This makes it tempting to do group interventions with bullies (and those who encourage bullying). However, the research findings of Dishion and his colleagues provide a cautionary note about moving in this direction (Dishion, Capaldi, & Yoerger, 1999).

Working with Victims and Bystanders. Recently, the U.S. Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services released, *Evidence-Based Practices for Children Exposed to Violence: A Selection from Federal Databases,* which summarizes studies and program evaluations (http://www.safestartcenter.org/pdf/Evidence-Based-Practices-Matrix_2011.pdf). Despite the title, the evidence-based practices cited focus on prevention services and activities.

Personalized interventions specifically designed for victims (including observers) of bullying are relatively rare, usually consisting of short term individual and group counseling designed to help those affected. Examples of group social skills and counseling efforts are provided by DeRosier (2004) and by Hill (2006). These psychoeducational interventions are designed to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to deal more effectively with bullies, including ways to avoid provoking bullies, increase assertiveness, and personally cope with emotional distress. Pöyhönen, Juvonen, and Salmivalli (2010) focus on teaching peers ways to defend victims, and they especially argue for encouraging high-status students to do so. Such strategies are especially critical in situations where the school cannot guarantee freedom from attack.

Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, and Hymel (2010) postulate that "strategies to foster positive bystander responses in bullying situations may be more effective with younger, elementary students than with older, secondary students, given evidence that younger students are significantly more likely to take direct positive action as bystanders (e.g., direct intervention, helping the victim, talking to adults) and that passive (do nothing) and aggressive (get back at the bully) responses increase with age."

> With respect to ensuring a collective response to school bullying and victimization, Juvonen, Graham, and Schuster (2003) state: "it is essential 1) to educate teachers about ways in which schools can alter social norms toward bullying, 2) to assist them to intervene effectively with incidents of bullying, and 3) to work together with clinicians to deal with the symptoms of bullying and victimization." In their discussion of peer victimization, Card and Hodges (2008) also note the importance of working with teachers and other staff so that they learn to "recognize instances of victimization and collaboratively develop plans to intervene."

Embedding Bullying Interventions into Other School Initiatives: Moving toward Comprehensive Approaches

As with other complex behavior, emotional, and learning problems, bullying research indicates that narrowly conceived, stand-alone interventions are insufficient (Ttofi & Farrington, 2009; Vreeman & Corroll, 2007). Researchers such as Olweus, Limber, Espelage, and Swearer have long emphasized bullying reduction requires a multifaceted and integrated approach. Included in such an approach would be early age intervention, strong leadership and commitment, capacity building (with a strong focus on personnel development and enhancing cultural sensitivity), and parent and community involvement.

As interventions to reduce bullying become increasingly multifaceted, they overlap school efforts to address all forms of aggressive and acting-out behavior. And, it is not surprising that reviews of strategies and approaches for preventing or reducing these forms of externalizing behavior in children and adolescents report similar intervention trends and limited findings.

Thus, it is noteworthy that a current trend is to move toward more comprehensive approaches by embedding bullying interventions into other school initiatives designed to address barriers to learning and teaching and promote social and emotional learning.

In pursuing their mission, schools have consistently had to address a broad range of behavior, learning, and emotional problems. This has led to development of a variety of student and learning support programs and services. Some of these are directly concerned with bullying. Others, such as initiatives focusing on schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), social and emotional learning, mental health in schools, and school climate, are embedding bullying concerns into their frameworks.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

The Illinois PBIS Network (2010) provides an examples of the move to embed bullying into PBIS. The Network website states: "Preventing and decreasing such specific and insidious behavior as bullying requires a systemic approach involving all staff, all students, as well as

family/community. A school-wide system of PBIS, with its whole school focus on social climate and behavior change, offers a framework for effectively installing a bully prevention process. Additionally, PBIS has a strong focus on partnering with families and community, a necessary component of effective bully prevention efforts."

Ross, Horner, and Stiller (2008) identify the following six key features of PBIS as ideal components of effective bully prevention:

- The use of empirically-tested instructional principles to teach expected behavior outside the classroom to all students.
- The monitoring and acknowledgment of students for engaging in appropriate behavior outside the classroom.
- Specific instruction and pre-correction to prevent bullying behavior from being rewarded by victims or bystanders.
- The correction of problem behaviors using a consistently administered continuum of consequences.
- The collection and use of information about student behavior to evaluate and guide decision-making.
- The establishment of a team that develops, implements, and manages the BP-PBIS effort.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Another example of efforts to embed bullying is seen in the current push by advocates for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Ragozzino and O'Brien (2009) state: "While bullying is a pervasive problem in many schools, schools can take specific steps to improve the school climate and encourage positive interactions designed to reduce or prevent bullying. Schools using a social and emotional learning (SEL) framework can foster an overall climate of inclusion, warmth, and respect, and promote the development of core social and emotional skills among both students and staff. Because bullying prevention is entirely congruent with SEL, it can be embedded in a school's SEL framework."

The SEL framework is described as having the following "five core categories of social and emotional skills:

- Self-awareness—accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths/abilities, and maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence
- Self-management—regulating one's emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting personal and academic goals and then monitoring one's progress toward achieving them; and expressing emotions constructively
- Social awareness—taking the perspective of and empathizing with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; identifying and following societal standards of conduct; and recognizing and using family, school, and community resources
- Relationship skills—establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; and seeking help when needed
- Responsible decision-making—making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate standards of conduct, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; and contributing to the well-being of one's school and community."

These skills are described as enabling children to "calm themselves when angry, initiate friendships, resolve relationship conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices. To develop these capacities, children need to experience safe, nurturing, and well-managed environments where they feel valued and respected; to have meaningful interactions with others who are socially and emotionally competent; and to receive positive and specific guidance" (Ragozzino and O'Brien, 2009).

Comprehensive System to Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Our Center goes a step beyond the PBIS and SEL efforts by advocating for embedding all efforts to provide student and learning supports into a system to address barriers to teaching and learning. Rather than establishing so many separate initiatives and enacting so many piecemeal and fragmented policies for specific subgroups of students and problems, we highlight the commonalities in the underlying dynamics causing behavior, emotional, and learning problems. Our intent is to fully embed the concerns about behavior, learning, and emotional problems into a system of student and learning supports designed for all students. And we see the growing emphasis on school bullying, safe schools, and enhanced school climate as opportunities to accelerate development of such a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system (National School Climate Council, 2010).

As Exhibit 2 graphically illustrates, the aim is to move from a two- to a three- component framework (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011a). The third component is focused on addressing barriers to learning and teaching (such as behavior problems) and re-engaging disconnected students. This component is intended to be fully integrated with efforts to improve instruction and management/governance and pursued as a primary and essential component of school improvement policy and practice.

From this perspective, interventions to address concerns associated with many designated subgroups can be embedded into a truly comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system for addressing problems and enabling success at school. This does not mean ignoring or marginalizing any problem or subgroup. To the contrary, the point is to directly address common underlying factors interfering with students benefitting from good instruction and to do so in a way that avoids fragmentation, redundancy, and counterproductive competition for sparse resources.

To provide templates for establishing a comprehensive system, our Center has developed intervention and operational infrastructure frameworks (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, b). Moreover, we stress a reciprocal determinist understanding of learning and behavior as a foundational building block. Such an understanding recognizes the importance of the match (or fit) between the environment and the person. From this perspective, it stresses the importance of school staff, students, their families, and other community stakeholders working collectively to ensure access to (1) learning opportunities that are good fit and, whenever necessary, (2) student and learning supports (also with an emphasis on a good fit).

Increasingly, a comprehensive system is viewed as essential for promoting the well-being and intrinsic motivation for school success of all students, their families, and the school staff and as a key element in facilitating emergence of a positive school climate. To these ends, such a system is being introduced into pioneering state and local education agencies across the country (Center for Mental Health in School, 2011b).

Exhibit 2
Moving From a Two- to a Three-Component Framework for Improving Schools-

A. Current School Improvement Framework

PRIMARY FOCUS	SECONDARY/MARGINALIZED FOCUS
Direct Facilitation of Learning (Instructional Component)	**Addressing Barriers to Learning & Teaching** (Learning Supports—Not a Unified Component)

- High quality teachers
- Improved academic assessment systems
- Standards-based instruction
- Staff development

Despite the fact that student and learning supports are essential to student success, they are not implemented as a comprehensive system and are not treated in school improvement policy and practice as a primary component of school improvement.

- Shared governance
- Improved data collection systems
- Increased accountability
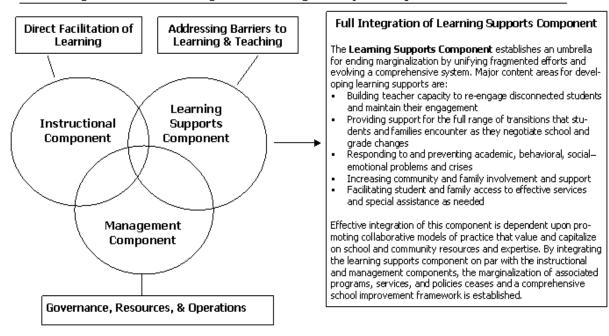- Building-level budget control and management
- Flexible funding

A few examples of programs currently implemented are:

- School-wide positive behavioral supports and interventions
- Response to intervention
- Safe Schools, Healthy Students Program
- Coordinated School Health Program
- Full Service Community Schools Initiatives
- School-Based Health Centers
- Specialized Instructional Support Services
- Compensatory and special education interventions
- Bullying prevention
- Family resource centers
- Foster Child and Homeless Student Education

Governance, Resources, & Operations (Management Component)

B. Needed: Policies to Establish an Umbrella for School Improvement Planning Related to Addressing Barriers to Learning and Promoting Healthy Development

Direct Facilitation of Learning	Addressing Barriers to Learning & Teaching

Instructional Component

Learning Supports Component

Management Component

Governance, Resources, & Operations

Full Integration of Learning Supports Component

The **Learning Supports Component** establishes an umbrella for ending marginalization by unifying fragmented efforts and evolving a comprehensive system. Major content areas for developing learning supports are:

- Building teacher capacity to re-engage disconnected students and maintain their engagement
- Providing support for the full range of transitions that students and families encounter as they negotiate school and grade changes
- Responding to and preventing academic, behavioral, social–emotional problems and crises
- Increasing community and family involvement and support
- Facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed

Effective integration of this component is dependent upon promoting collaborative models of practice that value and capitalize on school and community resources and expertise. By integrating the learning supports component on par with the instructional and management components, the marginalization of associated programs, services, and policies ceases and a comprehensive school improvement framework is established.
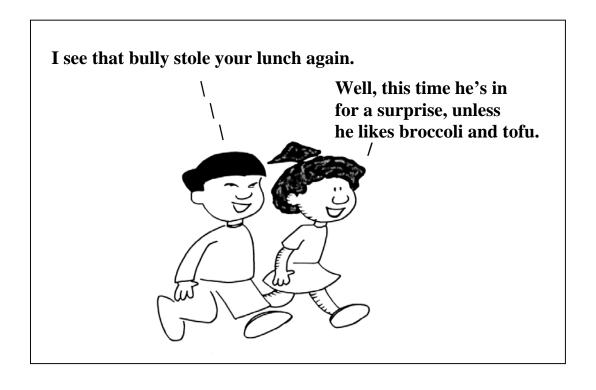
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Concluding Comments

The time has come to move away from stand-alone programs for addressing problems such as bullying and other specific types of problems manifested by students. Such programs add to the marginalized, fragmented, and piecemeal approach to student and learning supports that has dominated schools for far too long.

Rather than pursuing one more discrete program focused on a specific concern, it is essential to use each concern that rises to a high policy level as an opportunity to catalyze and leverage systemic change. The aim should be to take another step toward transforming how schools go about ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. To this end, it is time to develop a comprehensive system of interventions for addressing the full range of barriers to learning and teaching and for re-engaging disconnected students. Such a system is needed to coalesce an intervention continuum ranging from programs for primary prevention (including the promotion of mental health) and early-age intervention -- through those for addressing problems soon after onset – on to treatments for severe and chronic problems.

Addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students is a school improvement imperative. Developing and implementing a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system of student and learning supports is the next evolutionary stage in meeting this imperative. It is the missing component in efforts to close the achievement gap, enhance school safety, reduce dropout rates, shut down the pipeline from schools to prisons, and promote well-being and social justice.

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Moving Forward

*In case you missed the series of recent policy briefs from our Center,
below is some info on each:*

>Embedding Mental Health into a Learning Supports Component: An Essential Step for the Field to Take Now

The time has come for ending the counterproductive competition that arises from efforts that push separate, narrow agenda for student and learning supports. No single program or service can address the range of factors interfering with equity of opportunity to succeed at school for the large number of students affected. And the competition for resources resulting from separate advocacy for such programs and services, such as those associated with mental health in schools, is contributing to the continuing marginalization and resultant fragmentation of such endeavors and the fact that they reach only a small proportion of the many students who should be beneficiaries.

The bottom line in terms of policy is that it is time to adopt a comprehensive concept such as learning supports as the umbrella under which those who push for expanding the focus on mental (and physical) health must learn to embed themselves. A health agenda (and especially a clinical health agenda) by itself is too narrow to fit into the broad mission of schools in our society and is inadequate for enabling equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school. We can continue to build a few islands of excellence (demonstrations, pilots) and "Cadillac models," but with over 90,000 schools in the U.S.A., the scale of need demands moving quickly in fundamentally new directions. – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/embeddingmh.pdf

>About Short-term Outcome Indicators for School Use and the Need for an Expanded Policy Framework

This brief (1) defines indicators, (2) places the concept into the context of the various ways indicators can be used in education, (3) explores some specific considerations and concerns that arise in evaluating results, (4) offers a categorization and examples of short-term outcome indicators for school use, and (5) stresses the need for policy makers to expand the accountability framework for schools. – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/outind.pdf

>Understanding Community Schools as Collaboratives for System Building to Address Barriers and Promote Well-Being

This brief reviews different agenda for establishing school-community connections in general and community schools specifically. A Comprehensive Community School is discussed as an entity that emerges from system building by school-family-community collaboratives. Establishing effective collaboratives requires policy that supports shared governance, a well-designed operational infrastructure, and the weaving together of overlapping institutional missions and resources. Policy implications for facilitating the types of systemic changes involved are underscored. – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/communitycollab.pdf

>Moving Beyond the Three Tier Intervention Pyramid Toward a Comprehensive Framework for Student and Learning Supports

Introduction into federal policy of response to intervention (RTI) and positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS) led to widespread adoption and adaptation of the three tier intervention pyramid. As originally presented, the pyramid highlights three different levels of intervention and suggests the percent of students at each level. While the focus on levels has made a positive contribution, the pyramid is a one dimensional intervention framework. Continuing overemphasis on the pyramid is limiting development of the type of comprehensive intervention

framework that policy and practice analyses indicate are needed to guide schools in developing a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system of student and learning supports.

This brief underscores the limitations of the pyramid as an intervention framework and illustrates a mulitdimensional intervention framework and the type of expanded school improvement policy that can foster development and implementation of a comprehensive and coherent system. – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/threetier.pdf

>Connecting Schools in Ways that Strengthen Learning Supports

Given dwindling budgets, collaborations that can enhance effective and efficient use of resources increase in importance. This is particularly important with respect to efforts at schools to provide student and learning supports. Schools that formally connect to work together can be more effective, realize economies of scale, and enhance the way sparse resources are used for intervention and capacity building. This brief (1) discusses the concept of a family of schools and the type of operational infrastructure that enables schools to connect formally and on a regular basis, (2) highlights examples of how a family of schools can enhance student and learning supports, and (3) suggests key policy implications. –
 http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/connectingschools.pdf

>School Attendance: Focusing on Engagement and Re-engagement

Every student absence jeopardizes the ability of students to succeed at school and schools to achieve their mission. School attendance is a constant concern in schools. Average daily attendance rates are a common determiner of school funding, so schools funded on the basis of average daily attendance have less resources to do the job. Students who are not at school cannot receive instruction. Academic achievement scores are correlated with school attendance. Excessive school absence is a precursor of school dropout. Some youngsters who are truant from school engage in behaviors that are illegal. And the negative correlates related to school attendance problems go on and on. – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schoolattend.pdf

>Immigrant Children and Youth: Enabling Their Success at School

A great deal has been written about immigrant children and youth. This brief focuses on implications for school improvement policy and practice. Discussed are (1) different reasons families migrate, (2) concerns that arise related to immigrant students, (3) prevailing school practices for addressing immigrant concerns, (4) a framework for broadening what schools and communities do, and (5) implications for policy. –
 http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/immigrant.pdf

Also, the following Information Resource has produced considerable interest:

>Example of Funding Stream Integration

Moving student and learning supports out of a marginalized and fragmented status in school improvement policy and practice always has required integrating and redeploying existing resources. Education funding cutbacks are making such efforts even more pressing. With this in mind, the Louisiana Department of Education has gone on to develop a manual and tools to assist local education agencies in understanding how to integrate multiple funding sources to accomplish efforts such as the development of the state's design for a Comprehensive Learning System. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fundingstream.pdf

Next Steps in the UCLA Center Call to Action Initiative

29 national and state organizations have signed on with National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) related to our Center's New Directions Policy Framework - *Enhancing the Blueprint for School Improvement in the ESEA Reauthorization: Moving from a Two to a Three Component Approach* –
   http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enhancingtheblueprint.pdf

See "Promoting the Critical Role of Learning Supports in Policy, Practice, and School Improvement" by Anastasia Kalamaros Skalski - in the National Association of School Psychologists' NASP Communiqué, Vol. 39, #5, January/February 2011.
Online at: http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/mocq395Advocacy.aspx

The next step being spearheaded by NASP is to mobilize a letter writing campaign through their Advocacy Action Center (AAC) on their website.

   Go to Http://capwiz.com/naspweb/issues/alert/?alertid=28684501&type=CO
   Click on advocacy.
   Click on AAC.
   Click on write your elected officials. (A list of topics comes up)
   Click on the letter that addresses learning supports.

It takes only a minute to input contact info and send a letter. It goes to all of your elected officials. You can edit it too – add or delete.

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Want resources?
   Need technical assistance?

Use our website: **http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu**
Or contact us at
E-mail: **smhp@ucla.edu**   Ph: **(310) 825-3634**
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
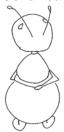
For the latest on Center resources and activities, see **http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu** – click on *What's New*

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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

Why were you late for school?

Because the sign told me, ***School ahead, go slow.***