



Addressing Barriers to Learning

New ways to think . . .

Better ways to link



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Personnel Development for Education: Does the Process Enhance How Schools Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching?

Recently, a graduating senior told us he is going into teaching and has signed up for an expedited program. As of this fall, he will be teaching in an inner city school. He is quite concerned because a five week summer course is the only preparation provided. We offered whatever informal support our Center can muster and suggested he immediately contact those who will be supervising him to find out what formal, ongoing supports will be available.

This young man represents a challenge to all who are concerned about improving schools. The field needs him; but can he succeed given limited preparation and support? His situation raises major questions about personnel development practices for education (i.e., recruitment, preservice preparation, site induction, initial on-the-job support, continuing professional education). And, ultimately, it raises questions about how these matters influence personnel retention.

Personnel development for education has been a long-standing concern for us (e.g., Adelman, 1972), and at this critical juncture for the future of public education, it seems essential to expand exploration of every facet of the process. The need to do so is especially evident from the perspective of *What's missing in school improvement?* (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2005). From this vantage point, it is clear that current practices do too little to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Equity calls for paying special attention to the implications for enhancing what *all* education personnel learn about addressing learning, behavior, and emotional problems (Adelman & Taylor, 2006; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2001). Note the emphasize on *all* personnel. This includes teachers, student support staff, administrators, and the many others whose work in the field has an impact on students and their families. After reading the following, we encourage you to share your perspectives and recommendations with us as a basis for further discussion, analysis, and moving forward.

About the Challenge

It is especially challenging to improve personnel development at a time when school budgets are dwindling. The current reality is that many staff and administrative positions are being cutback, recent

recruits are being laid off, and personnel are being pushed into positions that are a poor fit for their interests and training. All this undermines efforts to recruit and retain the best and the brightest and negatively effects many schools and students.

At the same time, there is much that can be done to enhance the development of the pool of school, district, state, and federal education professionals and faculty who prepare such personel. And, it is essential to remember that this includes not only teachers, but also the personnel who provide student/learning supports, administrators at all levels, and those involved in training, research, and policy formulation.

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About Personnel Development for Education

There is widespread debate about all facets of how to enhance the capacity of personnel working in education. This is particularly evident when the focus is on improving how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

There are those who seem to think anyone can walk into any setting and be a good teacher, student support professional, or administrator. Others suggest that all the field needs to do is recruit bright, talented individuals and provide them with a brief orientation and the right toolkit.

Most education leaders, however, advocate for extensive preservice preparation, followed by carefully designed opportunities for continuous learning. But, there is disagreement among such advocates about the content and design of preservice preparation, and for the most part, continuing professional development is narrowly focused on direct and often ineffective strategies for improving achievement scores.

Whatever one's view of personnel preparation, it is clear that the general expectation is that all education professionals must produce high level results. And, this expectation is held regardless of the newness of a professional to a given position, major variations among populations served, and negative contextual factors (e.g., schools and districts with inadequate resources and support). In effect, the presumption seems to be that, from day one on the job, new professionals will be highly knowledgeable about and able to implement effective practices in carrying out their assigned responsibilities.

Other professions (e.g., medicine, law) recognize that job situations and demands vary greatly. Differences stem from (a) who chooses to pursue the profession, (b) the nature and scope of a person's education and socialization into the profession, and (c) whether there is a good fit between the person and the setting in which they work (including ongoing professional and personal support and in-depth learning opportunities). Differences require specific attention in planning professional development.

With the above matters in mind, concerns about professional development for education begin with the problem of *recruiting* cadres of the best and brightest into a *career commitment* related to improving public education. Then, such professionals must be provided a *preservice program* that ensures that as newcomers to a job they have the level of competence to do more than cope and survive each day.

As newcomers arrive at a workplace, they must be provided with a well-designed *induction* program. The intent is to ensure they are welcomed and provided professional and personal transition supports to enable them to function effectively in the culture of that particular site. Guidance about entering into the decision making infrastructure also is desirable. And, since induction influences professional socialization, such programs must not counter the idealism and commitment to improving schools that is the hallmark of a new generation of education professionals.

Overlapping the induction program is the need for several mechanisms to provide *personalized on-the-job* learning so that the professional is able to experience higher levels of effectiveness. The aims, over time, are to (a) facilitate development to a level of mastery and (b) promote consistent feelings of job competence, self-determination, and accord with those with whom one works.

And, in keeping with efforts to *retain* good professionals, opportunities must be available for career advancement, and programs must be available to facilitate progress up a career ladder.

Each of the facets of professional development is highlighted below.

Recruitment: *Can We Do Better?*

Because of the prediction that the nation's schools will need to employ over two million teachers in the coming decade, there has been great concern about recruitment. In addition, in some locales, finding certain categories of student support professionals and well-qualified administrators also has been difficult.

It is clear that the recruitment problem can be ameliorated by increasing personnel retention. However, several factors make both retention and recruitment difficult. These include:

Education as a field is often demeaned. The constant drone of criticism aimed at public schools makes a long-term career in education a hard sell to a large segment of the "best and brightest" college graduates across the country. The problem is compounded by the higher status placed on other career choices open to them. Beyond concerns about professional status, the instability and sparse nature of public education financing also makes the field less than attractive to many when they are deciding on a career.

Concern about working in low performing schools.

Federal law sets dates and consequences for schools and their professional personnel in situations where student performance continues not to meet specified standards. As more and more consequences are administered, recruitment to schools designated as “failing” can be expected to be more difficult.

Concern about working with the most difficult students and families. It is clear that entrants into the field are likely to be assigned to schools in economically distressed locales. The image of working in such schools is that they are unsafe, with the majority of students not only being hard to handle but also unmotivated to learn what the school wants to teach. And, a common impression is that families not only are unsupportive but are angry at the schools.

Given the widespread negatives generated about public education, it is not surprising that recruiting a higher proportion of college graduates is difficult. It has been suggested that programs such as *Teach for America* demonstrate how to attract high quality university students to the field. That a specific program can recruit a relatively small cadre of such individuals is not in question. As with so many concerns in public education, the problem is how to replicate on a large scale what a small demonstration program can do. And, as increasingly is noted, the focus cannot just be on recruitment, programs also must attend to retaining those who turn out to be good at their job. Clearly, the number needed could be significantly reduced if fewer personnel left for reasons other than retirement.

One set of prominent policy recommendations for redressing the recruitment problem is to offer financial incentives. These include pay differentials and signing bonuses; scholarships, tuition reimbursement, and loan forgiveness; housing assistance, moving expenses, and free utility hook-ups; state income tax credits; multi-year bonuses; tuition for pursuing continuing education and advanced degrees; college tuition for their children. In addition, a variety of non-financial incentives have been proposed such as alternative credentialing pathways and initial reductions in job demands, and mentoring and other job supports. Also, recommended are marketing campaigns, recruitment fairs, “priming the pipeline” by reaching into middle and high schools to “groom” future recruits for education, and ensuring certification/credentialing reciprocity across states.

However, as with so many recommendations for improving the development of education professionals, adoption in policy and practice of the most promising recruitment ideas has been sparse, piecemeal, and

marginalized. And, the focus mainly has been on *teacher* recruitment (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, n.d.).

Preservice Preparation and Initial Socialization:
Can We Broaden the Focus?

There is considerable disagreement about what preparation individuals need before they go to work in a public education worksite. Debate arises about what knowledge, skills, and attitudes are needed for every teaching, support, and administrative position.

It is a given that teachers must be proficient with respect to specific academic subject matter. Beyond that, they and all other education professionals need grounding in the following matters:

- (1) *Facilitating learning in schools in keeping with diversity and social justice*, including a focus on
 - development and learning
 - interpersonal/group relationships, dynamics, and problem solving
 - cultural competence
 - group and individual differences
 - intervention theory; legal, ethical, and professional concerns,
 - applications of advanced technology
- (2) *Learning supports*
 - classroom and school-wide processes for facilitating the learning for those willing and able to engage in the planned curriculum
 - classroom and school-wide processes for enabling and facilitating the learning of those manifesting common learning, behavior, and emotional problems
 - classroom and school-wide processes for re-engaging those who have become actively disengaged from classroom instruction
- (3) *Organizational and operational considerations*
- (4) *How to advance the field of education.*

There is little agreement on the best ways to facilitate preservice preparation. For the most part, the field seems to have adopted a limited apprenticeship model with too few opportunities to see master professionals at work. Preservice programs generally have not used school sites well, especially in preparing personnel to work in economically distressed locales and with a broad range of colleagues.

Add to this how little preservice attention is given to the socialization facets of professional development. Every program shapes and reshapes how the next generation of professionals understands and feels about (a) the societal functions of public education, (b) what must be done to advance the field, and (c) the leadership role professional educators need to play. Defining this socialization agenda remains more a footnote than a central focus.

Enhancing Capacity to Engage and Re-engage Students

Teachers, student support staff, and administrators tell us that their preservice programs did provide a brief introduction to the topic of engaging students in learning. However, apparently no one discussed the reality of how many students they would encounter who have actively disengaged from classroom instruction.

Given the failure of preparation programs to make disengagement a significant focus, it is not surprising that most school staff feel poorly prepared to re-engage disengaged students. This situation is extremely perplexing since disengagement is highly associated with behavior problems and dropout rates.

Re-engagement, of course, represents a substantially more difficult motivational problem that requires moving beyond thinking about motivation only in terms of rewards and punishments. And, so the question arises:

How well have preparation programs integrated what is known about *intrinsic* motivation?

Site Induction, Initial Support, and Continuing Socialization: *Do We Teach About All This?*

Good induction programs “extend beyond the friendly hellos, room key and badge pick-ups and buddy programs. While these are necessary ..., high-quality induction programs ... help [newcomers] survive and thrive in their new environments.”

American Federation of Teachers

Few entering a new worksite are not at least a bit anxious about how they will be received and how they

will do. For years, at too many sites, little thought was given to induction beyond cursory introductions and orientation. As a result, many newcomers were frustrated and even traumatized, especially those assigned to schools housing a great many “hard-to-reach and teach” students.

Currently, various forms and degrees of mentoring, coaching, collaboration, and teaming are in operation at many locales. However, such practices still are not commonplace, and their scope mostly is determined idiosyncratically and by available time.

Minimally, a good induction program requires infrastructure mechanisms for planning and implementation of

- welcoming
- *professional* (and as feasible *personal*) support and guidance from colleagues and administrators to enable new staff to function effectively over the initial months of employment
- initial inservice education (which hopefully is targeted and personalized to meet the individual needs of the newcomer)
- ready access to learning/student supports (personnel, resources, strategies, and practices specifically designed to *enable* all students to have an equal opportunity to succeed at school) .

Optimally, a good induction program is designed to ensure that socialization of education personnel includes participation in decision making and doesn’t undermine idealism and new ideas and practices that can advance the field. The reality is that socialization at a site often subverts budding positive beliefs and attitudes.

Continuing Professional Education and Ongoing Socialization

“Proper placement and sound supports for [newcomers] need to be in place as they continue to hone their knowledge and skills. If they continue to work without a net, they will likely turn away from the profession or be less effective than we need them to be, regardless of the quality of their preparation.”

Sabrina Laine (in Rochkind, et al, 2008)

Given that preservice education generally is designed with beginning levels of functioning in mind, systematically designed programs to enhance job-related knowledge, skills, *and attitudes* are essential. This requires infrastructure mechanisms for planning and implementation of continuous learning programs, both at worksites and in other appropriate venues.

With a view to maximizing the value of job-related learning, targeted and personalized inservice education are ideals. In this respect, mentoring, coaching, collaboration, and teaming provide an important foundation for daily on-the-job learning that goes beyond trial and error. In a well-designed personalized inservice program, personnel should perceive the content as relevant and experience the process as one that (a) maximizes feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness to significant others and (b) minimizes threats to such feelings.

In describing five high schools in a low-income area, Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) commend their commitment to continuing learning, noting that:

“Overall, the schools allocate 7 to 15 days to shared learning time throughout the year. In addition, they organize substantial time during the week – usually several hours – for teachers to plan and problem solve together. With teachers meeting regularly in grade-level teams, the schools have venues for examining student progress, creating a more coherent curriculum, and enabling teachers to learn from one another. ... Mentoring and coaching systems for new and veteran teachers also augment professional learning. In staff meetings, teachers engage in focused inquiry about problems of practice....”

All the focus on teachers’ continuing education is essential and highly commendable. At the same time, we again emphasize that the ongoing learning needs of student support staff and many others working in education requires greater attention, and this would enhance their potential contribution to teacher inservice education.

In stressing personalized and targeted continuing professional development, we recognize that there are also a variety of general school and district concerns requiring inservice time. Staff meetings provide one vehicle for addressing such concerns, and, increasingly, technology provides several types of delivery mechanisms.

We also note that, as is the case with the hidden curriculum related to classrooms instruction, all forms

of continuing education affect ongoing professional socialization. And, undoubtedly, this has a significant impact on decisions about staying in the field.

Retention: ***Can We Hold onto Personnel?***

Predictions of shortages in many categories of education personnel are widespread. The problem of recruitment is exacerbated by the rate of early departures. For example, data for the U.S.A. indicate that about 15% of new teachers leave within the first year; 30% within three years; and 40-50% within five years (Smith and Ingersoll, 2003).

Each of the facets of personnel development discussed above are relevant to ensuring all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Each is relevant to enhancing personnel effectiveness and work satisfaction. And, all this is essential to retaining a quality workforce (Guarino, et al., 2004).

In addition, considerations related to career ladders are important. Retention efforts can benefit from well-defined opportunities for career advancement and from programs that facilitate access to such opportunities. Also, widely discussed is the need for additional incentives to retain personnel in economically distressed urban and rural locales.

As part of a series of reports on retention of teachers, Quartz and colleagues (2003) summarize the following in describing “leavers.” They state:

“We know that math, science, and special education teachers leave at higher rates than those in other academic fields. We also know that those who leave teaching permanently tend to be men seeking increased opportunities in other fields (Murnane, 1996). Women have high attrition rates earlier in their careers due to family lifestyle issues related to marriage and child rearing. Age is also related to retention; younger teachers have a much higher turnover rate than their mid-career colleagues (Education Week, 2000). Several studies also find the majority of early leavers include individuals with higher IQs, GPAs and standardized test scores and those with academic majors or minors along with an

education degree (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; Murnane, 1991;1996; Sclan, 1993). Moreover, teachers who have earned advanced degrees within the prior two years leave at the highest rates (Boe, et al., 1997). In short, early career teachers considered to be ‘the best and the brightest’ are the ones most likely to leave.”

The above information probably can be generalized to student support staff who leave early, with the added reality that when budgets are tight they are among the first laid off.

Those who leave education point to a lack of planning time, heavy workloads, low salaries, and difficult students, among other undesirable workplace conditions.

National Center for Educational Statistics 2005

About a Focus on Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

In keeping with prevailing demands for higher standards and achievement, the focus of school improvement and personnel development is mainly on curriculum content and instruction and management concerns (e.g., governance, resource use). Analyses indicate that implicit in most of this is a presumption that lessons are being taught to students who are motivationally ready and able to absorb the content and carry out the processes. It *is* recognized that teachers may have to deal with some behavior and learning problems. But these matters tend to be treated as separate concerns to be dealt with through classroom management and individualized instruction. That is, the trend is not to view learning, behavior, and emotional problems as indicating that the presumption of student readiness often is wrong.

As a result, too little attention has been paid to what to do when students are not motivationally ready and able to respond appropriately to a lesson as taught. Even less attention has been paid to the problem of re-engaging students who have become chronically disengaged from classroom instruction.

These lapses are less a problem for schools where few students are doing poorly. In settings where large proportions of students are not doing well, however, and especially where many students are “acting out,” the need to address barriers to learning and teaching

can be overwhelming. In such settings, one of the overriding inservice concerns is to enhance whatever a teacher has previously been taught about “classroom management.” Typically, schools offer a few, relatively brief sessions on various social control techniques (e.g., eye contact, physical proximity, being alert and responding quickly before a behavior escalates, using rewards as a preventive strategy, assertive discipline, threats and other forms of punishment). All this, of course, skirts right by the matter of what is causing student misbehavior and ignores the reality that social control practices can be incompatible with enhancing student engagement with learning at school. Indeed, such practices can lead to greater disengagement.

There also is a great gap between what schools as a whole do and what they need to do school-wide to address factors interfering with learning and teaching (and, again, too little usually is done to fill the gap).

About Barriers

At some time or another, most students bring problems with them to school that affect their learning and perhaps interfere with the teacher's efforts to teach. In some geographic areas, many youngsters bring a wide range of problems stemming from restricted opportunities associated with poverty and low income, difficult and diverse family circumstances, high rates of mobility, lack of English language skills, violent neighborhoods, problems related to substance abuse, inadequate health care, and lack of enrichment opportunities. Such problems are exacerbated as youngsters internalize the frustrations of confronting barriers and the debilitating effects of performing poorly at school.

In some locales, the reality often is that over 50% of students manifest forms of behavior, learning, and emotional problems. And, in most schools in these locales, teachers are ill-prepared to address the problems in a potent manner. Thus, when a student is not doing well, the trend increasingly is to refer them directly for counseling or for assessment in hopes of referral for special help – perhaps even special education.

In general, then, there remains a major disconnect between what school staff need to learn and what they are taught about addressing student problems – and too little is being done about it. And, as long as this is the case, focusing mainly on curriculum and instructional concerns and classroom management techniques is unlikely to be sufficient in meaningfully raising achievement test score averages.

We hasten to stress that, in highlighting this state of affairs, we do not mean to minimize the importance of thorough and ongoing training related to curriculum and instruction. Every teacher must have the ability and resources to bring a sound curriculum to life and apply strategies that make learning meaningful. At the same time, however, every teacher and all others responsible for student and learning supports must learn how to *enable* learning in the classroom by addressing barriers to learning and teaching – especially factors leading to low or negative motivation for schooling.

All students need instruction that is a good match for both their motivation and capabilities. Such teaching accounts for interests, strengths, weaknesses, and limitations; approaches that overcome avoidance motivation, structure that provides personalized support and guidance, and instruction designed to enhance and expand intrinsic motivation for learning and problem solving. Some students also require added support, guidance, and special accommodations. For practices such as *Response to Intervention* (RTI) to be effective, all professional personnel working to improve schools must be grounded in such matters.

As RTI stresses, when a teacher encounters difficulty in working with a youngster, the first step is to see whether there are ways to address the problem within the classroom and perhaps with added home involvement. To this end, it is essential to equip teachers and student support staff with practices for working together in responding to mild-to-moderate behavior, learning, and emotional problems. All education professional need to learn a range of ways to enable the learning of such students, and schools must develop school-wide approaches that can assist teachers in doing this fundamental work.

Remembering It's about All Personnel

In preparing personnel and supporting capacity building:

- *teachers* need to learn more about how to address interfering factors and to work with others in doing so
- *support staff* need to learn more about how to work with teachers and other staff (as feasible in classrooms) and with district and community resources to enhance practices for prevention and for responding quickly as common problems arise
- *administrators* need to learn more about leading the way by expanding policy, enhancing operational infrastructure, and redeploying resources to ensure development of a comprehensive system of learning supports for addressing barriers to learning, development, and teaching

Concluding Comments

It is easy to say that schools must ensure that *all* students succeed. If all students came ready and able to profit from “high standards” curricula, then there would be little problem. But *all* encompasses those who are experiencing *external* and *internal* barriers that interfere with benefitting from what the teacher is offering. Thus, providing all students an equal opportunity to succeed requires *more than* higher standards and greater accountability for instruction, better teaching, increased discipline, reduced school violence, and an end to social promotion. It also requires a comprehensive approach to countering factors that interfere with learning and teaching.

The Exhibit on the next page outlines some questions about each of the five facets of personnel development from the perspective of efforts to enhance the effectiveness of school personnel for improving how schools counter interfering factors.

At a time when public education is under concerted attack, the field must align demands for high expectations and high standards with a commitment to enhancing all facets of professional development. And, the need is to do so not only with respect to direct instructional concerns but also with respect to learning supports that enable students to benefit from good instruction.

To do less is to ensure that many students will continue to be left behind.

Exhibit

Some Questions About Enhancing the Effectiveness of Education Personnel for Improving How Schools Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching

Research indicates that prevailing approaches to school improvement do not effectively address barriers to learning and teaching. While institutions of higher education cannot alone change this state of affairs, they are critical players through their research, prototype development, and personnel development efforts. The following questions have implications for each of these matters. The questions are organized in terms five facets involved in developing a highly effective pool of education professionals at school, district, state, and federal levels: (1) recruitment, (2) preservice preparation, (3) site induction, (4) continuing education, and (5) retention.*

Recruitment

- How can education compete better with other career options in recruiting the “best and the brightest”?
- How can a higher proportion of personnel with the greatest promise and those with proven effectiveness be attracted to the challenge of working in economically distressed locales?

Preservice Preparation and Initial Socialization

- What knowledge, skills, and attitudes need to be taught to future education personnel in keeping with diversity and social justice (e.g., about human growth, development, and learning; interpersonal/group relationships, dynamics, and problem solving; cultural competence; group and individual differences; intervention theory; legal, ethical, and professional concerns, and applications of advanced technology)?
- What else needs to be taught to future education personnel about
 - >maintaining and enhancing engagement for classroom learning?
 - >re-engaging students who have become disengaged from school and classroom learning?
- What are the best ways to facilitate such preservice preparation?

Site Induction, Initial Support, and Continuing Socialization

- What structural mechanisms and programs are needed at work sites to appropriately
 - >welcome new staff? (students? families? others?)
 - >provide *professional* support and guidance to enable new staff to function effectively?
 - >provide *personal* support and guidance to enable new staff to function effectively?
 - >ensure that socialization of education personnel includes participation in decision making and doesn't undermine idealism and new ideas and practices that can advance the field?

Continuing Professional Education and Ongoing Socialization

- What structural mechanisms and programs are needed at work sites to enhance job-related knowledge, skills, *and* attitudes
 - >in a systematic manner?
 - >in a personalized manner (e.g., so that personnel perceive the content as relevant and experience the process as maximizing feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness to significant others and as minimizing threats to such feelings)?

Retention

All of the above are relevant to retaining education personnel. In addition questions arise about

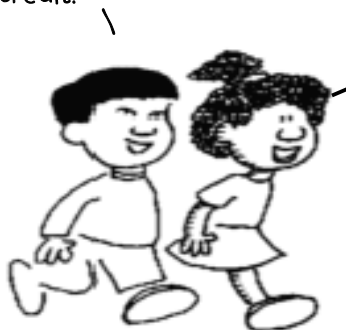
- What can be done to ensure and facilitate opportunities for career advancement?
- What else needs to be done to retain good personnel in general and especially those working in economically distressed urban and rural locales?

*It seems rather poignant to explore matters such as recruitment and retention at a time when school budgets are dwindling. The reality at such times is that many positions are cutback and recent recruits are laid off and various personnel are pushed toward positions that are a poor fit for their interests and training. This seriously undermines recruitment and makes a mockery of discussions about retention.

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Education personnel deserve more credit.



Sure, but they wouldn't need it if we paid them more!

Center Resources



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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 Toll Free Ph: (866) 846-4843
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), 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 list of **Center Resources and Publications** is at
><http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/selection.html><. Below are a few major works relevant to enhancing school improvement and personnel development from the perspective of addressing barriers to learning.

>**Toolkit for Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

Contains guides, materials, tools and other resources.

>**New Directions for Student Support: Current State of the Art**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/policyissues/Current%20State%20of%20the%20Art.pdf>

This report summarizes previous findings and presents initial data from 300 respondents to our research on efforts being made to move toward developing comprehensive systemic approaches for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. It concludes with a concise set of recommendations and a list of relevant resources.

>**Framing New Directions for School Counselors, Psychologists, & Social Workers**

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

Highlights the need to address barriers to student learning and implications for reframing student support staff roles and functions. With new roles and functions in mind, explores the need for revamping preservice preparation, certification, and continuing professional development; includes frameworks to rethink these matters.

>**Toward Next Steps in School Improvement: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching**

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

Frames intervention in terms of a comprehensive system of learning supports.

>**Frameworks for Systemic Transformation of Student and Learning Supports**

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

A resource for the systemic transformation of student and learning supports. In addition to the intervention framework for a comprehensive system of learning supports, the work outlines frameworks for expanding policy, reworking operational infrastructure, and rethinking the problem of systemic change.

Also see the two books by the Center co-directors published by Corwin Press in 2006 which provide an overview of the Center's work:

>*The school leader's guide to student learning supports: New directions for addressing barriers to learning.*

>*The implementation guide to student learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide: New directions for addressing barriers to learning.*

And, finally, see a couple of recent chapters by the Center co-directors:

>Reorganizing student supports to enhance equity In E. Lopez, G. Esquivel, & S. Nahari (Eds.) (2006). *Handbook of multicultural school psychology*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

>School improvement: A systemic view of what's missing and what to do about it. In B. Despres (Ed.) (2008). *Systems thinkers in action: A field guide for effective change leadership in education*. Rowman & Littlefield Education.

The real difficulty in changing the course of any enterprise lies not in developing new ideas but in escaping old ones.
John M. Keynes

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School Improvement & Personnel Development: Fully Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching Is Essential

What the best and wisest parent wants for his [or her] own child,
that must the community want for all of its children.

Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely;
acted upon, it destroys our democracy.

John Dewey in *The School and Society* (1907)

Like many of you, we are flooded each week with new reports analyzing public education and what needs to be done. Most contain good ideas that are worth pursuing. But, too often, the list of recommendations pays too little attention to the many well-known external and internal barriers to learning and teaching that stem from various societal, neighborhood, familial, school, and personal conditions. Such factors clearly interfere with school success – contributing to active disengagement from classroom learning and leading to major achievement gaps and high dropout rates.

Given the data on how many students are not doing well, it is imperative and urgent for schools to place a high priority on *directly* addressing as many barriers to learning and teaching as feasible. And, relatedly, it is essential to enhance all facets of personnel development for education.

Why aren't current approaches sufficient?

Most school improvement and personnel development efforts *primarily* focus on enhancing instruction and management/governance. Because of concerns for school safety and greater family and community involvement, schools also embed a few scattered programs and services to address these matters.

No one argues against the necessity of good instruction and system/school management. The problem is that improved instruction alone does not address many barriers to learning and teaching. And, analyses indicate that the student “support” programs and services schools and districts offer to address such barriers are too limited, fragmented, and marginalized. It is commonplace for those staffing such interventions to be organized and function in relative isolation of each other and other stakeholders. Furthermore, a great proportion of existing student support is oriented to discrete problems and over-relies on specialized services for individuals and small groups. All this not only is expensive in terms of direct costs, it produces inappropriate redundancy and counter-productive competition and works against developing cohesive approaches to maximize results. Continued limited efficacy and cost effectiveness seem inevitable in the absence of significant systemic change.

Addressing barriers to learning and teaching is an imperative and urgent agenda item

School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students.
But when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.
Carnegie Task Force on Education

Student supports as they currently operate can't meet the needs of the many whose problems are affecting their learning at school. The realities are the problems are complex and complex problems require comprehensive solutions. Most school improvement plans do not effectively focus on enhancing student outcomes by *comprehensively* addressing barriers to learning and teaching. For many students, such a focus is essential to (re)engaging them in classroom instruction and enabling classroom learning. And, the straight forward psychometric reality is that in schools where a large proportion of students encounter major barriers to learning, test score averages are unlikely to increase adequately until barriers are effectively addressed. So, school policy makers, administrators, and personnel development programs must respond to the imperative for rebuilding supports for learning as an essential component in enabling *all* students to have an equal opportunity to learn at school.

School improvement and capacity building efforts (including pre and inservice professional development) have yet to deal effectively with these matters. The time is long overdue for escaping old ways of thinking about student supports. Leaders at all levels need to move school improvement and

personnel development efforts in substantively new directions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., see *Frameworks for Systemic Transformation of Student and Learning Supports* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/frameworksforsystemictransformation.pdf>).

Ultimately, all school interventions to address barriers to learning and teaching are about supporting learning. As defined for policy purposes, *learning supports* are the resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports intended to address barriers to learning and teaching in ways that enable all pupils to have an equal opportunity for success at school. To be most effective, learning supports should be woven into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system of classroom and school-wide interventions and should be fully integrated with instructional efforts.

How does this fit with current efforts to improve schools?

Most policy makers and administrators know that good instruction delivered by highly qualified teachers alone cannot ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. As a result, most schools already are concerned about improving how a variety of barriers to learning and teaching are addressed.

Now is the time for schools to plan and develop more effective and comprehensive systems for directly dealing with factors that keep too many students from doing well at school. Such efforts can draw on pioneering work from across the country that is moving learning supports to a prominent place in improving schools and student outcomes. Personnel development programs need to address all this.

What's the specific focus in moving in new directions to enhance learning supports?

Moving in new directions means fully integrating into school improvement and personnel development a systematic focus on how to:

- reframe current student support programs and services and redeploy the resources to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive component to enable learning
- develop both in-classroom and school-wide approaches – including interventions to support transitions, increase home and community connections, enhance teachers' ability to respond to common learning and behavior problems, and respond to and prevent crises
- revamp district, school, and school-community infrastructures to weave resources together to enhance and evolve the learning supports system
- pursue school improvement and systemic change from the perspective of learning supports and the need to engage and re-engage students in classroom learning

The next decade must mark a turning point for how schools and communities address the problems of children and youth. Needed in particular are initiatives to reform and restructure how schools work to prevent and ameliorate the many learning, behavior, and emotional problems experienced by students. The end product must be schools where everyone – staff, students, families, and community stakeholders – feels supported. This will require reshaping the functions of all school personnel who have a role to play in addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development. And, it requires fully integrating all this into school improvement planning.

Note: These matters are incorporated into recommendations for consideration by Congress as they discuss reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (e.g., No Child Left Behind)

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

>see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/congress%20letter.pdf>

See also the legislation that was proposed in California

>[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/sb288\(2-15-07\).pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/sb288(2-15-07).pdf)