

30 years &  
counting



# Addressing Barriers to Learning

*New ways to think . . .*

*Better ways to link*



Vol. 22, #1

## SPECIAL PRE-SUMMIT EDITION

### **Every Student Succeeds Act: Planning is an Immediate Task, But . . . Addressing Barriers to Learning is the Pressing Imperative**

As you probably have heard by now, we will host a summit at UCLA in January for a select group of about 75 state and district superintendents and other key leaders for school improvement. The focus is on

*Every Student Succeeds Act and Learning Supports:  
Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching to Enhance Equity of Opportunity.*

Planning for the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) provides a renewed opportunity for innovation in revisiting school improvement policy and practice. And from the communications we have received, there is considerable interest in using the opportunity to move forward with unifying and then developing a comprehensive and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

This special edition of the Center's quarterly e-journal was prepared as a pre-summit reading and also is intended to be a resource for anyone concerned with improving how schools address barriers to teaching and learning. The topics covered are:

Part I. Concerns about ESSA Planning Related to Addressing Barriers to Learning

Part II. The Need to *Transform* Student and Learning Supports

Part III. Delineating the Nature and Scope of a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System of Learning Supports

Part IV. Personalization **and** Special Assistance: An Intervention Sequence and Hierarchy

**M**any indicators make it clear that major changes are underway for public education. The next six months will profoundly shape the field for years to come.

Currently, the focus is on planning related to the Every Student Succeeds Act. In accomplishing this transitional task, it is essential to use the opportunity to enhance equity of opportunity by fundamentally improving how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

Consider the continuing challenges confronting public education. They include

- enhancing graduate rates and successful transitions to post secondary opportunities
- narrowing the achievement gap
- reducing unnecessary referrals for special assistance and special education
- countering the school to prison pipeline
- reducing the number of low performing schools
- improving school climate
- reducing the loss of good teachers
- producing sustainable progress
- increasing equity of opportunity for every student to succeed

Consider what has to be done in order to effectively meet these challenges:

- improving attendance
- reducing disruptive behaviors (e.g., including bullying and sexual harassment)
- decreasing suspensions and dropouts
- improving supports for specific subgroups (e.g., English Learners, immigrant newcomers, lagging minorities, homeless students students with disabilities)
- increasing the number of disconnected students who re-engage in classroom learning
- responding effectively when schools experience crises events
- increasing family and community engagement with schools

As nonacademic accountability indicators are discussed, increasing attention is being paid to the need to directly address such interfering factors.

None of this comes as news to educational leaders. And in some schools, progress has been made on many of these concerns. At the same time, history cautions about plateauing and cyclical effects related to early indicators of progress.

For many districts, the difficulties inherent in making initial gains are ever present. For others, the problem of accelerating and sustaining recent progress lies ahead.

Of course, these are not just a school's concerns. Yet, as a Carnegie Task Force on Education stressed:

*While school systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students, when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge.*

With all this in mind, an overriding planning concern before states and districts is how to use the immediate press of ESSA planning to enhance the school's role in addressing barriers to learning and teaching as a key facet of enabling learning. In this respect, it is essential to understand some major concerns related to planning using ESSA guidelines.

**Why do you think we'll do better at school this year?**



**Because I heard that Congress passed a law that says every student will succeed!**

## Part I. Concerns about ESSA Planning Related to Addressing Barriers to Learning

Our ongoing analysis of ESSA state plans and other initiatives being developed around the country makes it clear that the following matters are of major and enduring concern:

(1) Note that *support for students continues to be fragmented and marginalized as states respond to sections of federal guidance*. References to student and learning supports are scattered throughout five sections and are combined with “well rounded education” in Section 5, *Supporting All Students* (i.e., Section 5.A. Well Rounded Education and Support for Students).

Also, short shrift is given to student and learning support personnel. Moreover, too little attention is being given to how to pull together parallel and redundant interventions and how to reduce the counterproductive competition for sparse resources for student and learning supports. All of this is a recipe for continuing the unsatisfactory status quo and poor outcomes related to enhancing equity of opportunity for success at school.

To ensure a deeper focus on student and learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students, we recommend introducing an emphasis on a three component framework for school improvement (see subsequent discussion) and splitting “Section 5.A. Well Rounded Education and Support for Students” as follows:

- 5.A.1 Well-Rounded Education
- 5.A.2 Support for Students

(2) Note that *the focus on the multitier student support (MTSS) model does not account for its severe limitations as a framework for student and learning supports*. The problems with MTSS include that

- it is an inadequate depiction of an intervention continuum (e.g., delineating levels of school interventions, rather than subsystems of school-community interventions)
- it does not clarify the contribution each level can make to reducing the number of students in need of special assistance (e.g., how the continuum applies the principle of using the least intervention necessary and the practice of response to intervention)
- it does not systematically organize the content of what schools do each day to address learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

(3) Note that *with respect to Title II, Part A’s focus on “Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-quality Teachers, Principals, or Other School Leaders,”* little or no attention is given to matters such as:

- broadening teacher collaboration to address barriers to learning and teaching and to re-engage disconnected students
- enhancing classroom-based student and learning supports
- improving essential school-wide student and learning supports
- developing major leadership roles for student/learning supports personnel
- rethinking the roles and functions of student/learning supports personnel

For more discussion of concerns related to ESSA’s focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching, see our analyses – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essaanalyses.pdf> .

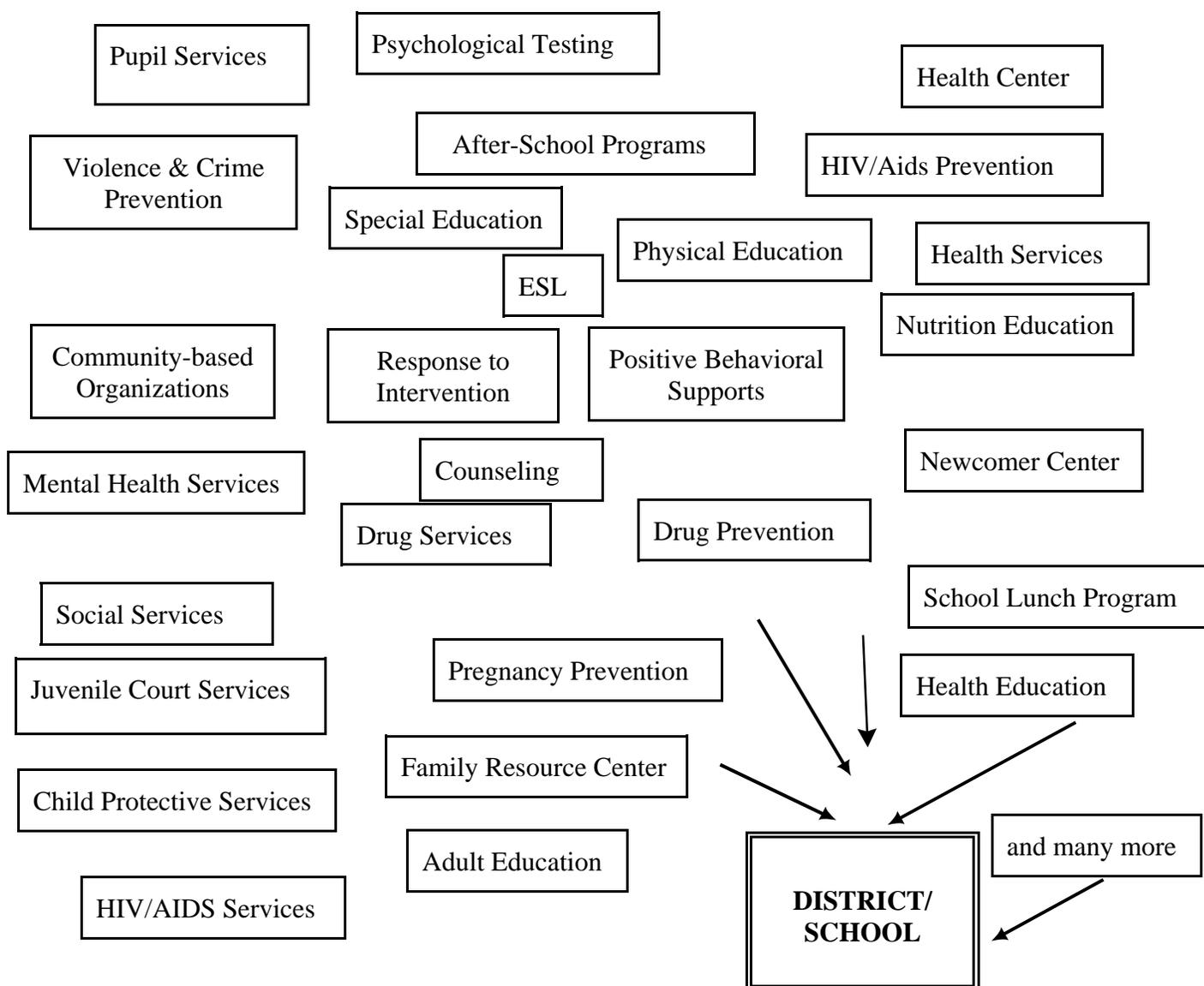
In general, if ESSA planning and all efforts to improve schools are to effectively enhance how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students, the above and related concerns must be pursued with a high level policy commitment. And we suggest that the emphasis should be on beginning a process to *transform* student and learning supports as an essential facet of increasing equity of opportunity for success in school and beyond.

## Part II. The Need to *Transform* Student and Learning Supports

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, schools districts, regional units, and state departments allocate considerable resources to assisting students experiencing barriers to learning and teaching. Unfortunately, the supports are developed in an ad hoc and piecemeal manner.

Currently the majority of the resources are allocated for interventions that address discrete, categorical problems, often with specialized services for a relatively small number of students. The result, as illustrated below, is that existing student and learning supports are highly fragmented. And the whole enterprise remains marginalized in policy and practice.

### Exhibit 1. A great deal of possible activity, but interventions are fragmented!



The marginalization and fragmentation of student and learning supports has resulted in poor cost-effectiveness. For example, in some schools, principals have reported that up to 25% of a school budget is used to address barriers to learning and teaching, and analyses indicate that the resources are used in too limited and often redundant ways. And, sparse budgets contribute to the long-standing counterproductive competition among support staff and with community-based professionals who link with schools. Each new initiative compounds matters. All this is preventing schools from playing a significant role in stemming the tide with respect to low achievement, delinquent behavior, student and teacher dropouts, and a host of other serious problems.

The realities are that the problems are complex and overlap, and the complexity requires a comprehensive approach. Student supports as they currently operate can't meet the needs of the many whose problems are affecting student learning and performance at school. So, in planning, school policy makers and administrators must respond by making supports for learning an essential component in enabling *all* students to have an equal opportunity to learn at school.

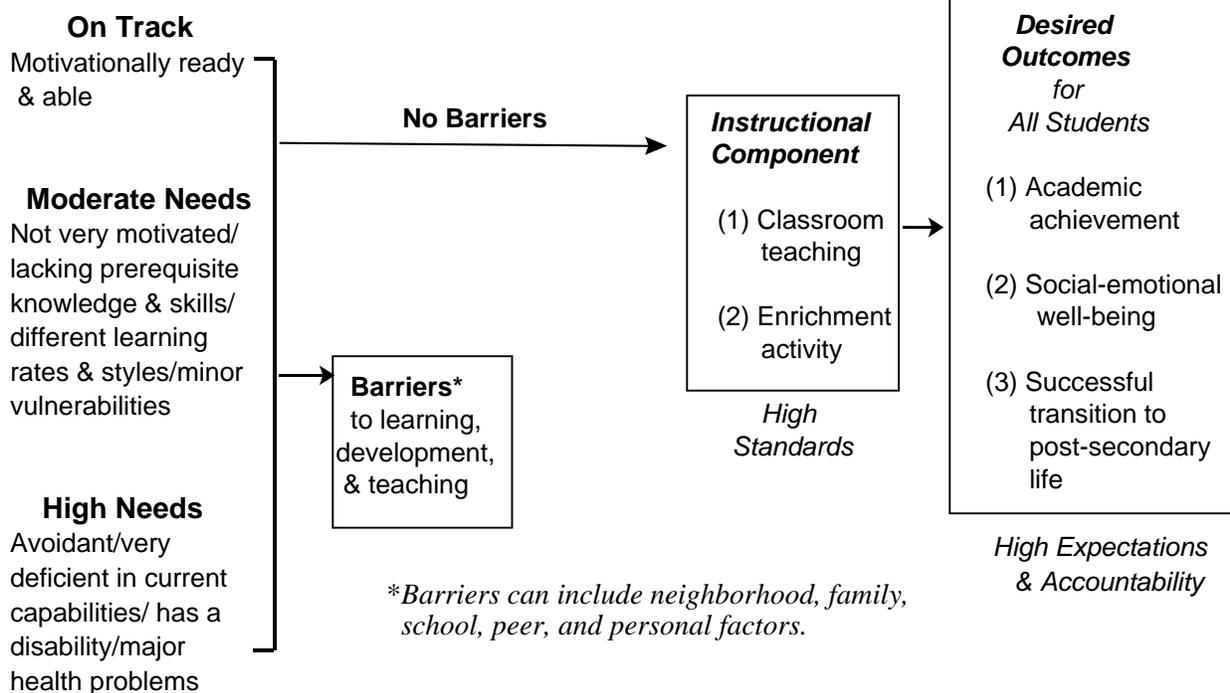
School improvement and capacity building efforts (including pre- and in-service staff development) have yet to deal effectively with these matters. Most school improvement plans do not effectively focus on enhancing student outcomes by *comprehensively* addressing barriers to learning and teaching. For 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.

Exhibit 2 underscores that many students are encountering external and internal barriers that interfere with their benefitting from instruction (despite all the efforts to improve instruction).

## Exhibit 2. Many Students Experience Barriers to Learning

### Range of Learners

(based on their response to academic instruction at any given point in time)



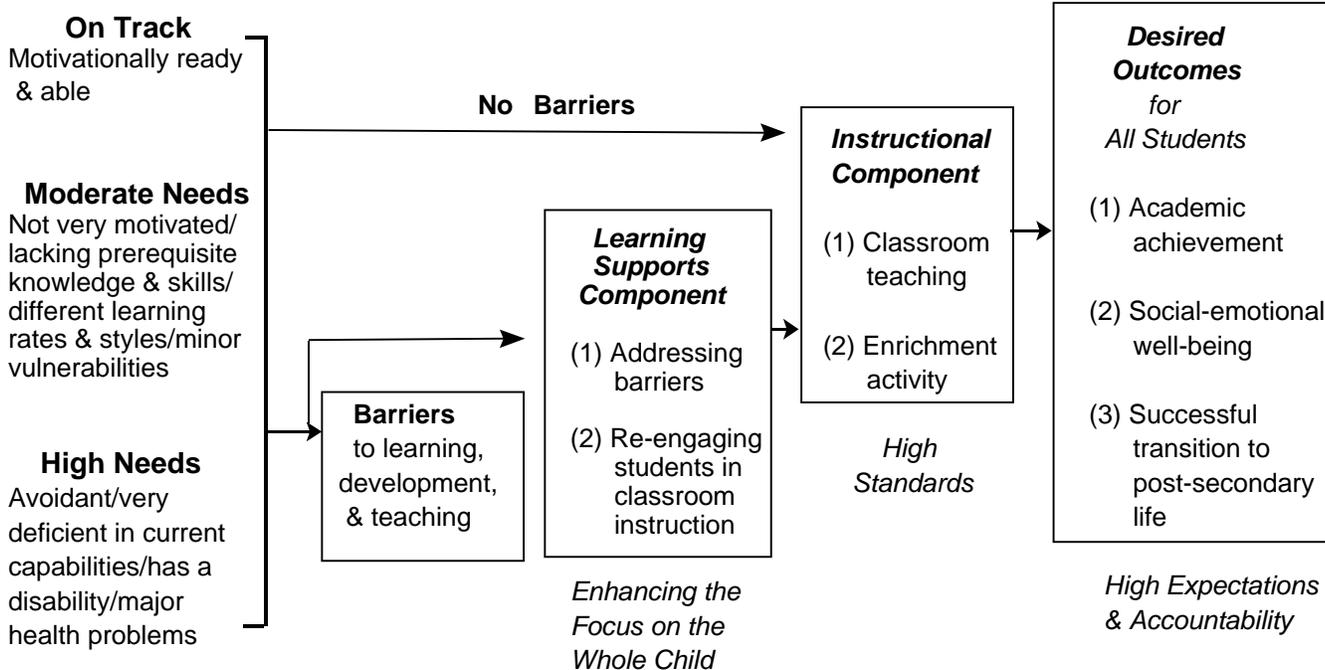
## What Transformation Involves

Exhibit 3 graphically emphasizes that ensuring all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school necessitates more than just good instruction. It requires a component dedicated directly to both (1) addressing barriers to learning and teaching and (2) re-engaging disconnected students. The reality is that interventions that only focus on factors interfering with learning and do not ensure students are engaged meaningfully in classroom learning generally are insufficient in sustaining, over time, student involvement, good behavior, and effective learning at school.

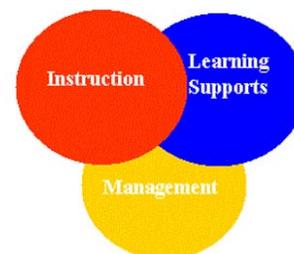
### Exhibit 3. A Learning Supports Component to Address Barriers and Re-engage Students in Classroom Instruction

#### Range of Learners

(based on their response to academic instruction at any given point in time)



Current school improvement planning is guided primarily by a two component school improvement framework; that is, the focus primarily is on (1) instruction and (2) governance/management. The result: all interventions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students are given secondary consideration at best. This *marginalization* is an underlying and fundamental cause of the widely observed fragmentation and disorganization of student and learning supports. And it is reflected in the way ESSA and related federal guidance are reducing support for such essential supports. Transformation requires adopting a three component framework. The third component establishes efforts to directly address barriers as a primary component (e.g., a learning supports component). This elevates the status of the work in school improvement planning.



### Part III. Delineating the Nature and Scope of a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System of Learning Supports

In addition to expanding the policy framework, moving forward requires

- reframing traditional student and learning supports and redeploying resources
- reworking the organizational and operational infrastructure to enable the development, implementation, and sustainability of the new system.

#### About Reframing Student and Learning Supports

The aim is to help districts and their schools unify all efforts to prevent and minimize the impact of problems interfering with learning and teaching. This includes programs, services, initiatives, and projects that promote and maintain safety, physical and mental health, school readiness and early school-adjustment services, social and academic supports, and compensatory and special assistance interventions. The point is to move away from discrete efforts to prevent and ameliorate specific learning, behavior, and emotional problems. As noted, the reality is that students have complex and overlapping problems, and schools require a *unified and comprehensive system* to address the complexity.

Strategically, given limited resources, developing a comprehensive system involves deploying, redeploying, and weaving together all existing resources used for student and learning supports. That is why the first consideration is unifying and weaving together all *school* resources currently expended for such assistance. *And then*, the focus is on rationally *braiding together all available school and community resources* to strengthen interventions and fill critical gaps. In this way, rather than responding to every pressing concern with another discrete program, districts and their schools will have a system in place where they can readily embed such concerns.

In reframing student and learning supports, a major emphasis is placed on developing a system to address all students and as full a range of barriers to learning and teaching as is feasible. Minimally, student and learning supports must address barriers that are interfering with the learning of a majority of students. And as we have stressed, while addressing barriers is essential, it is not a sufficient approach to enhancing equity of opportunity and enabling learning at school. Also essential is a potent approach for *re-engaging students in classroom instruction*. All conceptualizations of a learning supports component must encompass both these concerns.

Research and development has produced an intervention prototype for a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system to address barriers and re-engage students. The prototype has two facets:

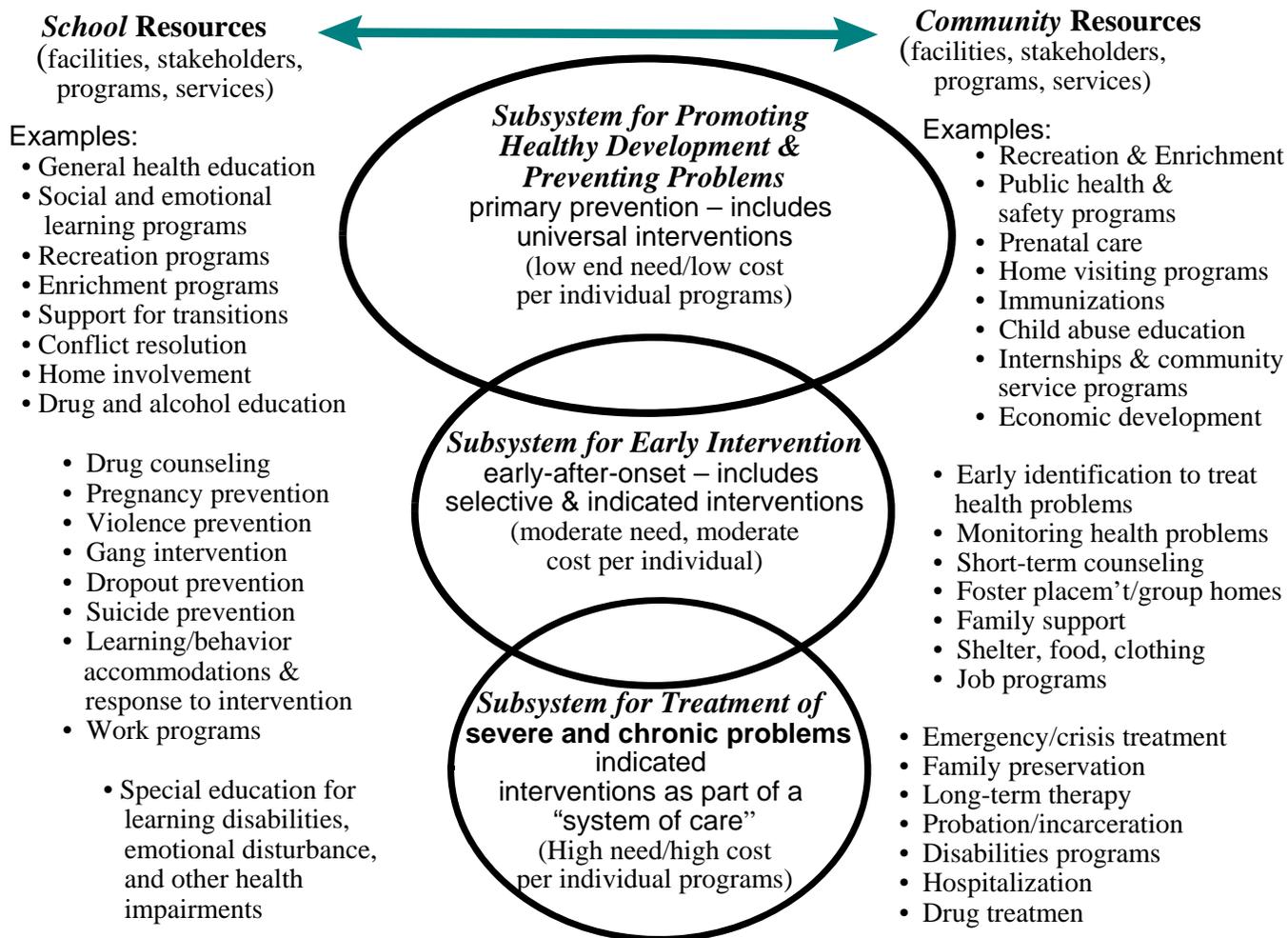
- one conceives levels of intervention as a full continuum of integrated intervention subsystems that interweave school-community-home resources.
- the second organizes programs, services, and specific activities into a circumscribed set of content arenas.

***Conceptualizing a Continuum of Intervention as an Integrated System.*** The Every Student Succeeds Act mainly emphasizes use of a schoolwide tiered model (e.g., a *multitier* system of supports) as a framework for preventing and addressing behavior problems. The tiered model is defined as “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making.”

Few will argue against conceiving a continuum of intervention as a *starting point* for framing the nature and scope of student and learning supports. However, the multitier student support (MTSS) model is not the best way to depict such a continuum, and it is an insufficient organizing framework for developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

An example of another way to conceive the levels is in terms of what they aim to do and as an interrelated and overlapping continuum of braided school and community subsystems. The subsystems focus on promoting effective schooling and whole child development, preventing problems experienced by teachers and students, addressing such problems as soon as feasible after they arise, and providing for students who have severe and chronic problems (see Exhibit 4).

**Exhibit 4. Reframing MTSS' Levels into a School-Community Intervention Continuum of Interconnected Subsystems**



As illustrated in Exhibit 4, we operationalize these as three subsystems. Each subsystem is seen as weaving together a wide range of school and community resources. The interrelated and overlapping subsystems are illustrated as tapering from top to bottom to indicate the view that if the top is well designed and implemented, the numbers needing early intervention are reduced and then, as more are helped through early-after-onset assistance, fewer students will need “deep-end” interventions.

Note: Efforts to enhance positive development and improve instruction clearly can improve readiness to learn. However, it is frequently the case that preventing problems also requires direct action to remove or at least minimize the impact of barriers, such as hostile environments and intrinsic problems. Without effective direct intervention, such barriers can continue to get in the way of development and learning.

**Content Arenas of Activity.** A system of student and learning supports requires more than conceiving a continuum of intervention. For example, “mapping” done with respect to the MTSS framework does not escape the trend just to generate laundry lists of programs and services at each level. Thus, in addition to the continuum, it is necessary to organize interventions cohesively into a circumscribed set of well-designed and delimited arenas that reflect the *content purpose* of the activity.

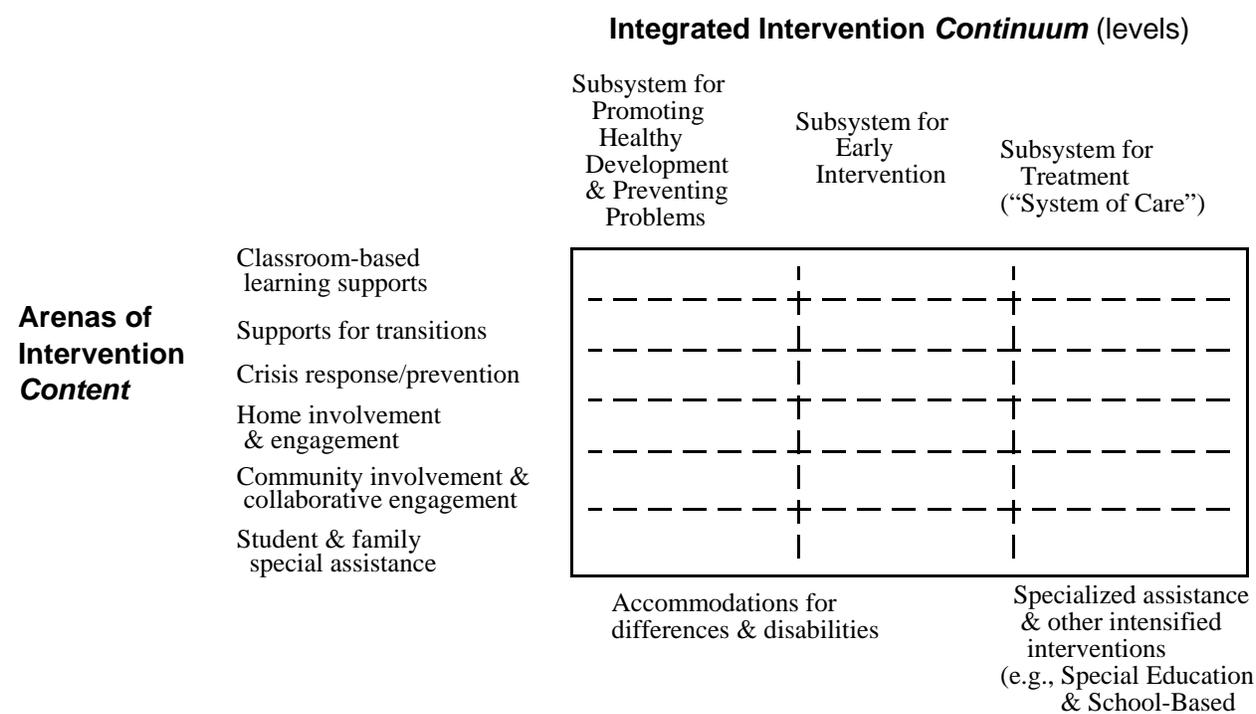
Our research and development efforts have categorized programs and services into six arenas reflecting basic concerns that schools actually are confronted with each day. In organizing the activity, it becomes clearer what supports are needed in and out of the classroom so that teachers can enable the learning of students who are not doing well. The six arenas encompass:

- *Enhancing regular classroom strategies to enable learning* (e.g., improving instruction for students who have become disengaged from learning at school and for those with mild-moderate learning and behavior problems; includes a focus on prevention, early intervening, and use of strategies such as response to intervention)
- *Supporting transitions* (i.e., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes and many other transitions)
- *Increasing home and school connections and engagement*
- *Responding to, and where feasible, preventing crises*
- *Increasing community involvement and support* (outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
- *Facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance* as needed

Some version of the six basic arenas has held-up over the last decade as they have been introduced in a variety of venues across the country (see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/nind7.htm>).

**Continuum + Content.** Combining the continuum and arenas of content activity moves MTSS thinking forward. It provides an intervention framework that can guide development of a total system designed to unify the resources a school devotes to student and learning supports, as well as braiding in community resources to fill critical gaps and strengthen the system (see Exhibit 5).

**Exhibit 5. Prototype Intervention Framework for the Third Component**



Note: The matrix illustrated in Exhibit 5 not only provides a guide for organizing and evaluating a system of student and learning supports, it is a tool for mapping existing interventions, clarifying which are evidence-based, identifying critical intervention gaps, and analyzing resource use with a view to redeploying resources to strengthen the system. The framework can guide effort to embed supports for compensatory and special education, English learners, psychosocial and mental health problems, use of specialized instructional support personnel, adoption of evidence-based interventions, integration of funding sources, and braiding in of community resources.

The framework encompasses what is essential to a school's ability to accomplish its instructional mission; it is not an added agenda to that mission. Moreover, the emphasis on classroom, school, home, and neighborhood helps create a school-wide culture of caring and nurturing. In turn, this helps students, families, staff, and the community-at-large feel a school is a welcoming, supportive place that accommodates diversity, prevents problems, enhances youngsters' strengths, and is committed to assuring equal opportunity for all students to succeed at school.

In sum, the intent is to unify and develop a comprehensive and equitable intervention system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Establishing such a system requires coalescing ad hoc and piecemeal policies and practices. Doing so will help end the fragmentation of student and learning supports and related system disorganization and will provide a foundation for weaving together whatever a school has with whatever a community is doing to confront barriers to equity of opportunity. This implementation of learning supports as a primary school improvement component is essential to the focus on whole child, whole school, and whole community (including fostering safe schools and the emergence of a positive school climate).

### ***What are learning supports?***

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 support physical, social, emotional and intellectual development and well-being to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school.

To enable effective use of learning supports, school and community resources are unified in a learning supports component and fully enmeshed with instructional efforts and interventions and professional development.

Learning Supports are deployed in classrooms and schoolwide as a comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

The aim of state and district policy for student and learning supports is to ensure a unified approach and an operational infrastructure for developing a comprehensive and equitable system is in place at the school level and at all schools in a district.

***School improvement plans mean little if they do not play out effectively at schools throughout a district.***

For more details on the intervention framework and its research base, see  
 > *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/bookrev.pdf>  
 > *Addressing Barriers to Student Learning & Promoting Healthy Development: A Usable Research-Base* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/BarriersBrief.pdf>  
 > *What's the Research-base for Moving Toward a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports?* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/WhatstheEvidenceBase.pdf>

## About Reworking the Organizational and Operational Infrastructure

We know that none of what is presented above is easy. No one who understands the complexity of enhancing equity of opportunity expects to accomplish essential systemic changes easily. Michael Fullan stresses that effective systemic change requires leadership that “motivates people to take on the complexities and anxieties of difficult change.” We would add that such leadership also must develop a refined understanding of how to *facilitate* and *sustain* difficult systemic change. That is, successful systemic transformation of established institutions requires organized and effective facilitation, especially when change is to take place at multiple sites and at several levels.

Because student and learning supports are so-marginalized, it is not surprising that the current operational infrastructure at schools reflects this status. A unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports clearly requires reworking the existing operational infrastructure at all levels. A learning supports component must have an administrative leader. The leader needs the support of a system development leadership team and workgroups. Together they ensure the component is (1) fully developed and integrated as a primary and essential facet of school improvement, (2) working with a family of schools, and (3) outreaching to the community to fill critical system gaps.

Thus, as the state and districts develop innovative plans to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students, the strategic plans will focus on

- *reworking operational infrastructures* to ensure effective daily implementation, ongoing development and sustainability of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., see our discussion of administrative and team leadership and workgroups whose primary role and functions are dedicated to this – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infrastructure/anotherinitiative-exec.pdf> <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentssupport/toolkit/aidk.pdf> <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkitb4.htm> )
- *enhancing mechanisms and strategic approaches for systemic change and replication to scale* (e.g., coaches, mentors, collaborators for personalized personnel development, consultation, technical assistance; provision of guides and aids; use of technology to enhance needs assessments, communication, transparency, visibility, formative evaluation and problem solving, capacity building -- see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/coaching.pdf>)
- *developing standards and expanding the accountability framework* to account for the third component and to do so in ways that encompass both formative and summative evaluation (see – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/commcore.pdf> <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/account.pdf> )

As noted, Title II will play a key role by facilitating personnel development as a key facet of building capacity for unifying and then developing a comprehensive and equitable system of student and learning supports and taking it systemwide.

Note: All this has implications for enhancing in-classroom student and learning supports by retooling what ESSA labels as specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., student and learning support personnel – psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses, Title I staff, dropout/graduation support staff, special educators, etc.). The jobs of these personnel need redefining to include working collaboratively with teachers *in classrooms* for part of each day. Improving student and learning supports in classrooms requires such collaboration, and such collaboration is essential to ending the myths and expectations that teachers can do it all and can do it alone.

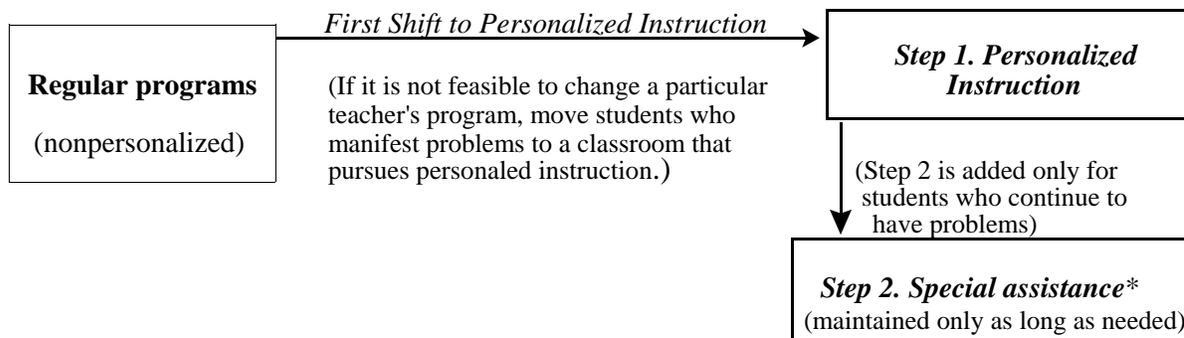
*Good ideas and missionary zeal are sometimes enough to change the thinking of individuals; they are rarely, if ever, effective in changing complicated organizations (like the school) with traditions, dynamics, and goals of their own.*  
Seymour Sarason

### Part IV. Personalization and Special Assistance: An Intervention Sequence and Hierarchy

Properly implemented, a unified, comprehensive and equitable system of learning supports can prevent problems, support inclusionary policies, and reduce the need for specialized *services* and referrals for special education.

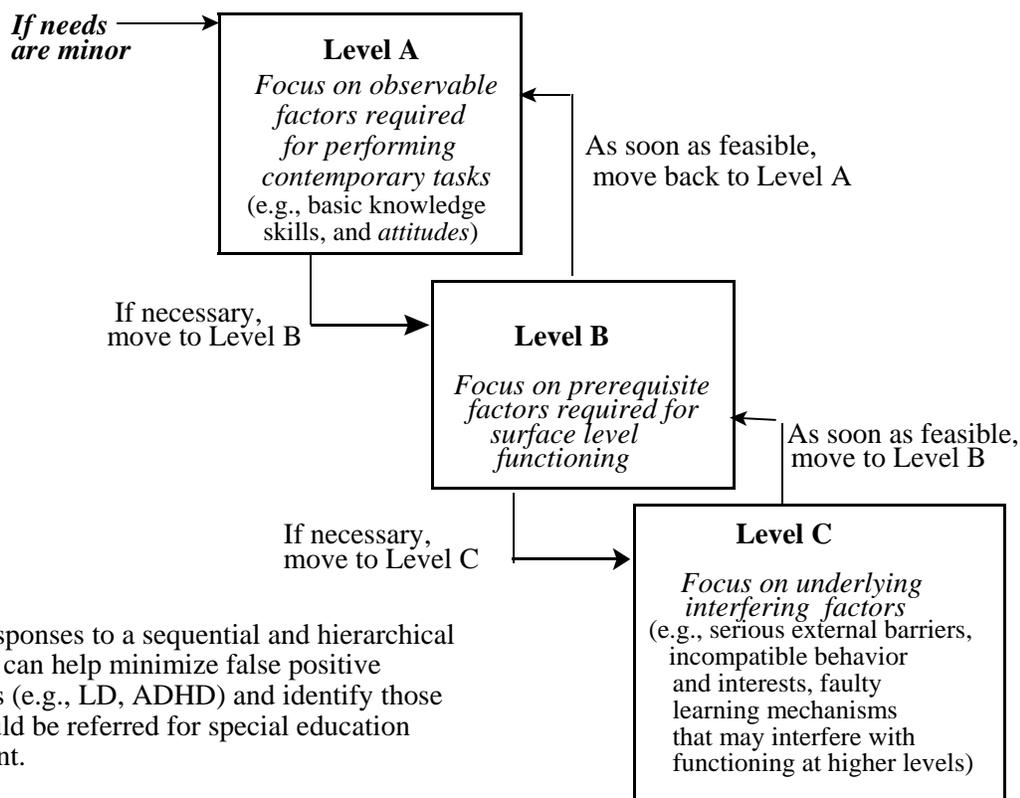
Exhibit 6 illustrates the sequence and hierarchy for implementing interventions. The frameworks reflect research indicating that “meeting students where they are” often is defined too narrowly.

#### Exhibit 6. A Sequential and Hierarchical Approach to Enabling Learning\*



\*Overall the aim is create a good “match” or “fit” with the learner’s capabilities *and* motivation and provide supports to enable learning.

*Step 2* is introduced as necessary using best practices for special assistance (remediation, rehabilitation, treatment). These are applied differentially for minor and severe problems.



Note: Responses to a sequential and hierarchical approach can help minimize false positive diagnoses (e.g., LD, ADHD) and identify those who should be referred for special education assessment.

### **What's the First Step? *Personalized Instruction***

In the 1960s, at UCLA we initiated a focus on a personalized approach to learning as fundamental to effective teaching and to preventing and correcting learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Since then, we have continued to develop and apply the approach.

Based on a reciprocal determinist understanding of learning and behavior, we view personalized *learning* as nonlinear; that is, it is seen as an ongoing, dynamic, transactional, and spiraling process. Similarly, personalized *instruction* is conceived as a dynamic, transactional, and spiraling process that strives to meet learners where they are. That is, the aim is to create a good "match" or "fit" with the learner and, in the process, enhance equity of opportunity for success at school for all students.

As essential as it is to attend to differences in capability, motivational differences often are of primary concern in creating a good fit, especially for students manifesting problems. We all know individuals who have learned much more than we anticipated because they were highly motivated; and we certainly know others who learn and perform poorly when they are not invested in the work.

So, our definition of personalization emphasizes that it is the process of accounting for individual differences in *both capability and motivation*. Furthermore, from a psychological perspective, we stress that it is a learner's perception that determines whether the instructional "fit" or "match" is good or bad. Given this, personalizing instruction means ensuring conditions for learning are perceived by the learner as good ways to attain goals s/he wants to reach. Thus, a basic intervention concern is that of eliciting learners' perceptions of how well what is offered matches both their interests and abilities. This has fundamental implications for all efforts to assess students and manage behavior.

Personalized instruction is intended to enhance learning and to prevent many learning and behavior problems. And, it provides an essential foundation for ameliorating learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Indeed, just providing a student with a personalized program may be sufficient to reverse some problems. Other problems, of course, need something more. As highlighted in Exhibit 6 and discussed below, "something more" is Step 2 *special assistance*.

### **What's the Second Step? *Special Assistance in the Classroom (as needed)***

When students require more than personalized instruction, it is essential to address the problem immediately. As illustrated, Step 2 involves three levels of intervention. In most instances, such assistance is provided in the classroom.

Special assistance is built on the foundation of personalized instruction. Based on a student's responses to personalized instruction, it is determined if *special assistance* (step 2) also is needed.

In keeping with the principle of using the least intervention necessary (e.g., doing what is needed in ways that are least intrusive, restrictive, disruptive), step 2 stresses use of different *levels* of *special* intervention. With respect to sequence:

- students with minor problems maintain a direct focus on readily observable problems interfering with classroom learning and performance (Level A);
- students who continue to have problems often require a focus on necessary prerequisites (e.g., readiness attitudes, knowledge, and skills) they haven't acquired (Level B);
- when interventions at Levels A and B don't ameliorate the problem, the focus shifts to possible underlying factors.

Students with severe and chronic problems require attention at all three levels.

Note: While policy makers have embraced the concept of personalized learning, the discussions often fail to place personalized learning within the context of other conditions that must be improved in classrooms and schoolwide to address factors interfering with student learning and performance. Sometimes such discussions leave the impression that the process is mainly about incorporating technological innovations. And personnel preparation for most school personnel has not included an in-depth focus on personalizing learning.

(See – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/personalizeI.pdf> )

## Concluding Comments

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

John Maynard Keynes

We all want better student outcomes. To this end, considerable attention is focused on strategies intended to improve teaching. Prominent among these are approaches such as increasing curriculum standards, making teachers more accountable, and improving teacher and principal preparation and licensing. Such improvements all have merit; but the strategies are insufficient for addressing many everyday barriers to learning and teaching. Thus, efforts to improve schools must go well beyond the prevailing agenda for improving teaching.

Most policy makers and administrators know that good instruction delivered by highly qualified teachers cannot ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. *Even the best teacher can't do the job alone.* Teachers need a system of supports in the classroom and school-wide to help when students are not responding effectively to instruction. Our analyses indicate that school improvement policy and practice must add a focus on unifying student and learning supports and developing them into a comprehensive and equitable system that enables teachers to teach and students to learn.

Public education is at a crossroads. Its future depends on moving in new directions. The status quo is not an option. Just tweaking and tinkering with old ideas will continue to produce more of the same. Decisions made in coming months need to be innovative.

Now is the time to fundamentally transform how schools address 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.

And while transformation is never easy, it is feasible through redeploying existing funds allocated for addressing barriers to learning and weaving these together with the invaluable resources that can be garnered by collaboration with other agencies and with community stakeholders, family members, and students themselves. The first step is to escape old ideas in order to move forward with new ones. The second step is to incorporate a new vision for student and learning supports into for school improvementstrategic planning. The third step is to stop thinking about miracle and develop a strategic plan for systemic change, scale-up, and sustainability.



***Watch for the report from the Summit and other follow-ups.***