Networks of Schools and Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

We are pleased to see the Gates Foundation come to appreciate the potential power of schools networking with each other (see story at
https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/billionaire-bill-gates-announces-a-17-billion-investment-in-us-schools/2017/10/19/9938f11c-b4eb-11e7-a908-a3470754bbb9_story.html?utm_term=.5da7cb363d7a). The news report states that "The Gates Foundation plans to issue a 'request for information' on Monday, asking schools and other education organizations to submit ideas for how they might spend the money. It will issue an official request for proposals next early next year."

Hopefully, what will emerge is not just another bunch of failed efforts to "collaborate." Networking must be more than a monthly meeting to share ideas and discuss problems. Networking for significant school improvement needs a transformative vision and agenda and an effective set of infrastructure mechanisms for moving the agenda forward.

As our Center stresses, such networking is a major facet of transforming student and learning supports (see *Key Leadership Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Student & Learning Supports* –
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf).

Here is an edited excerpt:

In some schools as much as 25 percent of the budget may be going to problem prevention and correction. Every school is expending resources to enable learning; few have a mechanism to ensure appropriate use of existing resources and to enhance current efforts related to student and learning supports by developing them into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system. Minimally, such a mechanism contributes to cost-efficacy by ensuring all such activity is planned, implemented, and evaluated in a coordinated and increasingly integrated manner. The prototype for such a mechanism [at a school]is a Learning Supports Leadership *Team.* Creation of such a mechanism is essential for braiding together existing school and community resources, and ensuring programs and services function in increasingly cohesive ways that also resolve related turf and operational problems. It provides a key infrastructure for establishing a network of schools.

One of the primary tasks a Learning Supports Leadership *Team* undertakes is that of enumerating school and community programs and services that are in place to support students, families, and staff. A comprehensive "gap" assessment is generated as resources are mapped and compared with surveys of the unmet needs of and desired outcomes for students, their families, and school staff. Analyses of what is available, effective, and needed provide a sound basis for formulating priorities and developing strategies to link with additional resources at other schools, district sites, and in the community in order to enhance resource use and develop a unified and comprehensive system of student and learning supports. This work is fundamental to improving impact and cost-effectiveness.

In a similar fashion, a Learning Supports Leadership *Council* for a network of schools (e.g., a complex or family of schools such as a high school and its feeder schools or a cluster of neighboring schools), as well as a

Learning Supports Leadership *workgroup* at the district level, provide mechanisms for analyses on a larger scale. This can lead to strategies for cross-school, community-wide, and district-wide cooperation and integration to enhance intervention effectiveness and garner economies of scale.

Networking clearly can yield major improvements, but without a transformative vision and an effective operational infrastructure, the effort can be little more than another set of frustrating meetings. As our Call to Action stresses, now is the time to move forward with transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students (see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsnew/call.htm). Such a move is essential to enhancing equity of opportunity for a great many students.

As places begin making systemic change, we encourage them to let us know so we can help.

Best Wishes,

Howard & Linda

For those who have been forwarded this and want to be included to receive resources the Center regularly shares, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

*Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor are Center Co-directors at UCLA. For information about the Center, see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/ or contact adelman@psych.ucla.edu or Ltaylor@ucla.edu .