

Policy Alert

What are States Doing to Help Schools Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching?

Education Dive, is tracking education laws, bills and proposals from every state. Their initial analysis concludes that, in 2019, education policy is a priority with state lawmakers.

<https://www.educationdive.com/news/tracker-50-states-of-education-policy/545655/>

Of course, the key concern is how much this priority results in fundamental school improvement.

At this time, there continues to be a focus on improving *financing* (some proposed legislation and considerable *discussion* about increasing funding for schools, especially teachers' salaries; assessing fiscal impact of charters on public schools; some notice of the problem of special education funding). Proposals mostly are made for (1) *improving instruction* (e.g., increasing the number of instructional days; language immersion; expanding broadband access to rural area schools; better teacher recruitment, diversity, and professional development) and (2) *modifying district governance and management of resources*.

What about helping schools address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students?

Our analyses find that the policy making focus continues to be ***ad hoc, piecemeal, and scattered***.

Perhaps the most pervasive, fundamental, and broadly focused proposals to enhance the likelihood that every student succeeds involve doing more to

- >reduce the inequities arising from poverty and between rural and urban settings.

- >provide early-childhood education (e.g., universal pre-K, full day kindergarten)

- >enhance vocational and technical education.

However, mostly we find that discrete problems are addressed in ways unlikely to help the many students who are not doing well at school and the many schools that are in trouble. The most frequent policies focusing on factors interfering with student and school success specify discrete interventions seen as enhancing school safety by countering school violence and bullying (e.g., more school resource officers, school safety training; bullying prevention). Mental health concerns tend to be emphasized in this context (e.g., adding more mental health counselors), although there also are proposals for suicide prevention. There are acts to deal with dyslexia, accommodate transgender students, enhance after-school programs, and address other discrete concerns seen as interfering with learning and teaching.

This type of ad hoc and piecemeal policy making for schools not only fragments efforts, it continues to marginalize them in the school improvement agenda and breeds redundancy and counterproductive competition for sparse resources.

It is time for state legislatures, boards of education, superintendents, and all stakeholders to rethink their approach to policy and guidelines intended to help schools develop a cohesive, comprehensive, and equitable system for providing essential student/learning supports. To do less, perpetuates an extremely unsatisfactory status quo that ensures many students and schools will continue to suffer.

As you may have noted, we are contacting legislators (mainly Education Committee members) in every state about moving school improvement policy from a two to a three component framework to end the ineffective way schools address barriers to learning and teaching. The message and resources we are sending are reproduced in the boxed material online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>