
NEWS ALERT

NASP Calls for Action Related to Our Center's New Directions Policy Framework – 29 national and state organizations sign on

Just published: *"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>

Here's the first few paragraphs:

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"Sometimes in the world of public policy, people read something that resonates with them in a new and unexpected way and results in a change in the way we do business. Some call this a paradigm shift, while others say they've had an epiphany. Whatever the assessment, when we start to be able to see the forest through the trees, it helps us successfully navigate our path to our destination.

After reading a policy analysis issued by the UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools: Program and Policy Analysis this year, it became clear to several of NASP's public policy leaders and staff, including myself, that we needed to reframe our work from the viewpoint of the forest versus the trees. The document that stimulated this change was called Synthesis and Analysis of Recommendations to Congress for ESEA Reauthorization From the Perspective of Addressing Barriers to Learning & Teaching (2010). It reviewed recommendations for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; also known as No Child Left behind; NCLB) offered by witnesses at hearings on Capitol Hill and written recommendations submitted by a variety of national organizations, NASP included. The policy analysis determined that current recommendations were generally insufficient and would amount to mere "tinkering" with our educational system. The report asserted that real meaningful policy reforms were not likely to be achieved based upon current proposals because their primary focus was almost exclusively on two components: instructional (e.g., standards, high quality instruction, teacher quality, etc.) and organizational (e.g., accountability, budgets, governance, resource and facility management, etc.). While these two components of schooling are critical, the researchers' analysis determined that this focus alone is insufficient to achieve the true policy and practice reforms necessary to ensure that all students learn. In short, a child who is struggling to overcome barriers to learning (e.g., poverty and homelessness, school climate and safety, student engagement, and individual learning and mental health challenges) will not be fully available for instruction, even with strong curricula, highly qualified teachers, and a rigorous accountability system. A new approach is needed.

The UCLA researchers propose that a three component framework for ESEA reauthorization be advanced that balances instruction, management, and a third component learning supports for students. Learning supports are defined as "the resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school by directly addressing barriers to learning and teaching and by reengaging disconnected students." Federal policy that almost exclusively addresses issues related to only two components essential to school reform is the equivalent of trying to successfully sit upon a two legged stool. Much attention has been given to instructional and organizational issues over the past decade, yet our schools have not attained the goal of high achievement and school completion for all students. The only essential

component of education that has not been fully integrated into policy, and hence practices, is that which encompasses learning supports. Without equal attention to this critical third leg, schools will continue to fall short of their mission for every student to learn and succeed in school. Further, programs and initiatives within this third component, such as school wide positive behavior supports, response to intervention, school community partnerships, social emotional learning, and other learning support types of programs will compete for the remaining resources resulting in fragmentation and marginalization of services and supports. Despite the wonderful work represented by all of these programs, no single learning support program can meet every student need. "Comprehensive and coordinated" learning supports that reflect a full continuum of learning support services and personnel are essential to school improvement and in order for these to be effective, the importance of learning supports must become integral to every school improvement discussion and dialogue."

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As the article also notes: "NASP presented the summary of this work at a variety of coalition meetings including such groups as the National Alliance for Pupil Services Organizations, Success for All, Communities in Schools, and the National Coordinating Committee for School Health and Safety. NASP and the UCLA Center then disseminated organizational sign on letters addressed to the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate Education and Labor committees and the U.S. Secretary of Education to request that they refocus their attention in the reauthorization process on building policies and promoting practices that support a "3 component model." These letters were sent in November with 29 national and state organizations signing on in support of this effort."

See the brief four page document that we worked on with NASP in order to highlight the message for policy makers: online at

[Http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enhancingtheblueprint.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enhancingtheblueprint.pdf)

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Note that efforts to expand mental health in schools and all other narrow agenda for student and learning supports are embedded into the broader concept of Learning Supports as an essential step in countering the continuing marginalization of such efforts. That idea is at the core of our new directions work. As the NASP article underscores, 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.

This is a matter we have stressed for many years, and we will reemphasize in coming weeks because there continues to be counterproductive competing agenda that work against understanding that a comprehensive concept such as learning supports is 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.

Public education and public health will only come together when all involved escape old ways of thinking and create noncompetitive policy agenda. The current unsatisfactory state of both enterprises demands no less.

If you have any comments to share about all this, send them to us, and we will collate and post what we receive.
Send to smhp@ucla.edu

Howard Adelman, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology & Co-director

Linda Taylor, Ph.D.
Co-director

Perry Nelson, Ed.D.
Coordinator