



*Improving Schools,
Engaging Students*

A Policy and Practice Analysis Brief

**State Education Agencies & *Learning Supports*:
Enhancing School Improvement**

Spring, 2009

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Preface

As the focus on school improvement at a state education agency moves from mostly a compliance approach to playing a greater role in capacity building, the agency's leadership needs to rethink student and learning supports. That is the focus of this report.

Given that almost half of the chief state school officers have assumed their position in the last three years, major changes are underway across the country. We hope the content of this report can help focus agency leadership on the importance of fashioning systemic changes that recognize the primary and essential role a *system* of learning supports can play in school improvement policy and practice.

We begin with a look at how state education agencies currently conceive and organize efforts to guide and support district and school approaches to addressing external as well as internal barriers to learning. Specifically, we highlight what we have garnered from each SEA's website about its

- >*Policy priority* related to addressing barriers to learning
- >*Intervention framework* for conceptualizing a comprehensive and cohesive system for schools to address barriers to learning
- >*Operational infrastructure* for transforming student and learning supports into a coherent, integrated system of intervention for addressing barriers to learning and teaching

In addition, we look at how the need to develop a comprehensive and cohesive system for addressing barriers to learning at schools is or is not dealt with in school improvement *guidance*.

Then, we explore recommendations for state education agencies to expand school improvement policy, frame intervention, and rework operational infrastructure.

We conclude by delineating specific implications for revising school improvement guidance.

Throughout we apply what we have learned from our Center's previous analyses of school and district school improvement policies and practices (see reference list at end of this brief).

As always, we owe many folks for their contributions to this report, and as always, we take full responsibility for its contents and especially any misinterpretations and errors.

Finally, we want to acknowledge that portions of the work were done as part of a cooperative agreement funded by the Office of Adolescent Health, Maternal and Child Health Bureau (Title V, Social Security Act), Health Resources and Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services. At the same time, it should be noted that the report is an independent work.

Howard Adelman & Linda Taylor
Center Co-directors

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State Education Agencies & Learning Supports: Enhancing School Improvement

When a state education agency (SEA) undertakes to provide a statewide system of support for school improvement, it realizes that its organizational structure, resource streams, communication channels, and ways of interfacing with districts and schools fit like a straitjacket. ... While compliance monitoring requires precise definition, circumscription, certain boundaries, and standardization, school improvement demands agility, responsiveness, keen judgment, and differentiation.

Sam Redding

Any school where a significant number of students are not doing well academically must not only improve its instruction and curriculum, but also must focus on enabling learning through a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. In previous policy and practice briefs, we provided analyses of how districts and schools address such barriers. For this report, we use that lens to analyze how state education agencies frame and organize the student and learning support facets of school improvement.

Introduction

State education agencies (SEAs) differ in many ways, but in general, their role is to oversee public education throughout a state. They ensure laws and regulations pertaining to education are followed and that state and federal education money is appropriately allocated to local school systems. SEAs also provide education-related information to students, parents, teachers, educational staff, government officials, and the media. And, as SEAs have had to take extraordinary steps with respect to schools in need of improvement, some have moved from a compliance mentality to assuming a fundamental leadership role in building capacity.

In a 2009 report entitled *Coherence in Statewide Systems of Support*, Kerins, Perlman, & Redding present their analysis of the results of a survey completed by the school improvement leader in each state education agency, including Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. The survey was conducted as a joint venture of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the Center on Innovation & Improvement (CII). The report also is a vehicle for reiterating the framework for “an effective statewide system of support” that was included in the Center on Innovation & Improvement 2007 *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support*. That handbook and the new report are meant “to help states construct and operate systems to support school improvement and student learning.”

The analysis of efforts by state education agencies to enhance coherence pays particular attention to the problem of “silos” (separate funding streams), with an emphasis on compensatory education (e.g., Title I, Title III), special education, and technical assistance for school improvement. As the report notes at the outset:

“When children arrive at school, they are not pre-sorted by family income, disability, language, temperament, talent, or prior learning. They aren’t marked with the sign of a tier. Schools do the sorting. Or, better yet, good schools become adept at sorting their learning activities and support services and fitting them to each student’s needs so that the students themselves do not require sorting. The way a state department of education interfaces with its schools influences the school’s ability and inclination to adapt learning strategies rather than sort students. The way a state department is organized, coherently or in rigid silos, prefigures its manner of interface with its schools.”

The authors emphasize, however, that silos are not the only obstacles to a coherent approach to school improvement. They stress: “Politics blows the winds of change in sudden and contradictory gusts. With each change in leadership comes a fresh attempt to diverge from the past and put a personal stamp on the directions of the future. With each newly-identified national problem comes a wave of federal funding and regulation, often followed by a similar state response, and seldom with sufficient consideration for how the new is made coherent with the old.”

The report also recognizes that: “The rigidity of state education departments is not only due to the uniqueness of each silo’s purpose and source of funding, but also to the inertia inherent to any bureaucracy and the understandable identification of programs with the people who created and developed them.”

At the same time, the authors acknowledge that: “Categorical programs arise for a reason. Typically, federal (and many state) programs are spawned to assist a class of students otherwise underserved by the education system or to address social problems that are beyond the ability of localities to ameliorate. The regulations that accompany the money are necessary to ensure that the chosen class of students receives the benefits of the program, or that the targeted social problem is truly attacked.” So, a SEA always has responsibility for ensuring local compliance with state and federal regulation. Yet, school improvement calls for SEA staff to go beyond compliance concerns and broaden their thinking and areas of competence to help build capacity for school improvement.

With all this in mind, the CII framework centers on three components: *Incentives*, *Capacity*, and *Opportunity*, and rests these “on a foundation of continuous evaluation and improvement of the system itself.” To guide the work, CII offers a set of action principles for building local capacity for change (see Exhibit 1). CII also enumerates four categories for school improvement emphasis: (1) Leadership and Decision Making, (2) Curriculum and Instruction, (3) Human Capital (Personnel), and (4) Student Support.

By elevating student support to one of four categories for emphasis, CII moves school improvement guidance a step further in enhancing a significant focus on addressing barriers to learning and teaching. For example, under student support, they emphasize the following five intervention arenas:

- >English language learners—programs and services
- >Extended learning time (supplemental educational services, after-school programs, summer school, for example)
- >Parental involvement, communication, and options
- >Special education programs and procedures
- >Student support services (tutoring, counseling, placement, for example)

Does the state contribute to the sorting of students for orderly tracking of funding streams, or does it provide systems that enable the school to understand each of its students and differentiate its instruction and supports?

Sam Redding

Exhibit 1

Action Principles for Building Local Capacity for Change from the Center on Innovation & Improvement (CII)*

CII offers the following to guide SEA thinking in constructing and operating a coherent system to build local district and school capacity to effect change and improve learning opportunities.

1. Conceive of a system of support as a coherent and coordinated means for supporting people in performing their various roles in children's education.
2. Build a system of support first from what exists by coordinating components that are extant, adding missing pieces, and achieving coherence.
3. Move past a review of symptoms (poor test scores) to understand causes (district and school operations) in order to apply remedies.
4. Build the capacity of districts to assume greater responsibility for the continuous improvement of their schools.
5. Differentiate the necessary roles of personnel within the system of support, including those who audit/assess district or school operations, those who provide services (training, coaching, consulting), and those who oversee and manage the process (process managers).
6. Create and refine true "systems" of support rather than providing fragmented services.
7. Coordinate SEA personnel, field staff, intermediate centers, organizational partners, distinguished educators, support teams, and consultants in one coherent system of support.
8. Make the transition from compliance only to compliance plus support for improvement.
9. Provide a "big picture" view of a system of support that is coherent and systemic.
10. Bring special education, ELL, Title I, and career education (structurally separated by funding streams and departmental organization) within the tent of a unified system of support.
11. Restructure (redesign) the SEA (and regional centers) to provide for effective coordination and administration of the system of support.
12. Assess district/school operations in addition to examining test scores in order to differentiate and target system of support services.
13. Align the system of support Service Plan with the district or school Improvement Plan and with the results of careful assessment of performance and operational data.
14. Assess district/school operations with an approved set of indicators, procedures, and instruments.
15. Monitor both the implementation of the district or school Improvement Plan and the aligned system of support Service Plan.
16. Evaluate the effectiveness of the system of support's procedures and services.
17. Intentionally link systems from the state to the district to the school and classroom in order to affect variables that will spawn improvement.
18. Draw a straight line from every state policy, program, and service to the intended result for a student in a classroom.
19. Provide a single, integrated school or district improvement planning process rather than separate ones for each categorical program.

* Kerins, T., Perlman, C., & Redding, S. (2009). *Coherence in statewide systems of support*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement.

An Analysis of How State Education Agencies Frame and Organize the Student and Learning Support Facets of School Improvement

State education agencies have roles and functions associated with a wide range of federal and state funded programs designed to enable all students to have an equal opportunity for success at school. Therefore, a cohesiveness analysis should encompass a review of school improvement policy and practices for integrating *all* student and learning supports involved in addressing barriers to learning and teaching. With this in mind, we focus in this section of the report on how state education agencies (SEAs) conceive and organize efforts to guide and build district and school capacity for addressing external as well as internal barriers to learning.

Specifically, we highlight what we have garnered from each SEA's website about its

- >*Policy priority* related to addressing barriers to learning
- >*Intervention framework* for conceptualizing a comprehensive and cohesive system for schools to address barriers to learning
- >*Operational infrastructure* for transforming student and learning supports into a coherent, integrated system of intervention for addressing barriers to learning and teaching

In addition, we look at how the need to develop a comprehensive and cohesive system for addressing barriers to learning at schools is or is not dealt with in state school improvement *guidance*.

Summary of Findings

Exhibit 2 summarizes what we learned about how state education agencies frame and organize with respect to addressing barriers to learning and teaching. As can be seen, we find that:

- only a small minority of state education agencies have addressed *policy* that focuses comprehensively and cohesively on addressing barriers to learning and teaching
- only a few SEAs have adopted an *intervention framework* that helps conceptualize a comprehensive and cohesive system for schools to address such barriers.
- in most instances, the *operational infrastructure* at the SEA is not organized in a way designed to transform student and learning supports into a coherent, integrated system of intervention.
- prevailing state *school improvement guidance* does not adequately deal with the need to develop a comprehensive and cohesive system of student and learning supports.

Exhibit 2

How State Education Agencies Frame and Organize Work Relevant to Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

The information from 50 states plus the District of Columbia indicates that all 51 attend to key facets of addressing barriers to learning and teaching. And, a growing number of SEAs are adopting the term *Learning Supports* to group some of their programs and services. However, analyses with respect to the following four fundamental considerations indicate only a few SEAs have begun to transform their thinking about the need to coalesce the many fragmented pieces into a comprehensive system of learning supports.

(1) Is addressing barriers to learning and teaching at least a moderate *policy* priority for the SEA?

Eight SEAs have or have begun a process to enhance policy in this arena.

>**Iowa** has made a strong beginning toward institutionalizing a high level of policy commitment. In a 2008 presentation to the school administrators of Iowa, the department's Director stressed the following as the "Foundations of Improvement" in education across the state: (a) Teacher Quality Legislation, (b) Learning Supports, (c) Leadership Standards, (d) Instructional Decision-making, (e) Iowa's Professional Development Model, and (f) Collaborative Organizational Structures. By delineating learning supports as a major focus, the SEA is enhancing its direct efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching.

>**Hawaii's** policy for a *Comprehensive Student Support System* (CSSS) continues to be featured, but current indicators suggest system development has plateaued. CSSS has been emphasized across the state for over a decade. For much of that time, the policy was operationalized in terms of a comprehensive intervention framework. While still elevating CSSS to the level of a major goal, the latest SEA documents show a trend away from *developing a comprehensive and cohesive system*.

>**Ohio's** State Board of Education in 2008 approved the *Comprehensive System of Learning Supports Guidelines* to provide assistance to local district and building leadership teams in creating policies to ensure that every Ohio student has access to programs and services that meet his or her individual academic needs. The guidelines allow districts flexibility in designing educational services that will meet the unique needs of their students.

>**Vermont** Statutes (Title 16) require, within each school district's comprehensive system of educational services, that each public school to develop and maintain an educational support system (ESS) for children who require additional assistance in order to succeed in the general education environment. Support includes prevention, intervention, and pre-school services, including a range of support and remedial services and instructional and behavioral interventions and accommodations.

>**Kansas** has a conceptual base and readiness-building effort is underway with a high level of policy commitment

>**Colorado** and **Delaware** have made moderate commitments to an elevated policy focus but the work underway is not extensive.

>**Louisiana** has reached out to our Center with a view to elevating its policy priority related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

(cont.)

(2) Does the SEA have an *intervention framework* for conceptualizing a comprehensive and cohesive system for schools to address such barriers?

Five states have moved in this direction. *Two* have a framework that conceptualizes both a continuum of intervention and content arenas. *Three* others have adopted the three tier continuum emphasized by special education and Positive Behavior Support Initiatives.

>*Hawaii* has adopted (through legislation) what is designated as a *Comprehensive System of Student Supports* (CSSS). The framework is based on the UCLA work. Currently, it is referenced and described in detail as an organizer for the range of relevant activity and resource allocation.

>*Iowa's* department of education has established a System of Learning Supports. The framework is an adaptation of the UCLA work. Currently, it is being pursued with the Area Education Agencies across the state. The framework is laid out in the Learning Support Initiative's design document entitled: "Developing Our Youth: Fulfilling a Promise, Investing in Iowa's Future – Enhancing Iowa's Systems of Supports For Development And Learning." (Online – see references at end of this report for URL.)

>*Kansas* has adopted the multi-tier pyramid continuum emphasized by special education and Positive Behavior Support Initiatives as part of effort to move toward a more cohesive system of supports. However, the need to frame how intervention content is organized is not addressed.

>*Kentucky and Ohio* have adopted the three tier pyramid continuum emphasized by special education and Positive Behavior Support Initiatives. Kentucky describes this as part of efforts to "assist schools and districts in incorporating state and federal programs to provide a seamless system of intervention for improving student achievement." Ohio stresses that the "Comprehensive Systems of Learning Supports model ... demonstrates that schools cannot provide all of the services and programs that are available in the community to support students' development. This system relies on involvement of parents and strategic community partnerships." In both states, however, the need to frame how intervention content is organized is not addressed.

(3) Does the SEA have an *operational infrastructure* that is capable of transforming student and learning supports into a coherent, integrated system of intervention?

Four SEAs have or are beginning to reorganize the operational infrastructure to enhance capability for transforming student and learning supports into a coherent, integrated system of intervention:

>*Hawaii* has a CSSS Implementation Office

>*Iowa* has established a department team related to the Learning Supports Initiative and is working through its Area Education Agencies

>*Kentucky* emphasizes use of collaborative teams for prevention and intervention. However, the focus is on case-oriented functions rather than system development.

>*Vermont's* Title 16 requirement for a comprehensive system of educational services includes a requirement for an educational support team (EST). The statute also requires each school board to assign responsibility for developing and maintaining the ESS to the superintendent or principal and requires each superintendent to annually report on the status of the ESS in their schools including how funds, such as Medicaid, are used to support the ESS.

(cont.)

(4) Does the prevailing *school improvement guidance* adequately deal with the need to develop a comprehensive and cohesive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching at schools?

While SEAs provide documents and/or links for school improvement guidance, no SEA delineates guidance for developing a comprehensive system of student and learning supports. Most states outline the *process* for developing a school improvement plan and in some cases, emphasize some specific content, standards and rubrics relevant to student and learning supports. Because the federal government has issued a non-regulatory guidance for Title I school improvement planning, some SEAs have simply drawn on that document.

Six states offer more than sparse guidance for key facets of addressing barriers to learning that provide some basis for moving toward a comprehensive and cohesive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching at schools. These are *Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kansas, Kentucky, and Vermont*.

Kansas, for example, emphasizes that “Districts establish a multi-tiered system of support to identify instructional/behavioral needs of all students and match instruction and support with those needs. Districts provide technical assistance and professional development support to all staff as they design and implement a multi-tiered system of support in classrooms and schools.”

Hawaii’s strategic plan for July 2008 through June 2011 provides another example. It emphasizes, as goal 2 of four major goals, the intent to “*Provide Comprehensive Support For All Students.*” However, this is delineated narrowly as follows:

- “2.1 Provide a focused and responsive system of supports to strengthen the social, emotional, and physical well-being of all students.
 - 2.1.1. Address student safety, health, and well-being through the effective delivery of comprehensive support services.
 - 2.1.2. Support all students with learning opportunities and assistance personalized to each student’s needs.
 - 2.1.3. Develop and implement research-based early childhood policies and practices.
- 2.2 Provide students with expanded learning opportunities that support standards-based education through partnerships with families and the community.
 - 2.2.1. Ensure that schools and School Community Councils actively involve parents and community members in school planning and decision-making.
 - 2.2.2. Implement evidence-based parent participation activities.
 - 2.2.3. Recruit and employ community partnerships for specific school improvement and/or operational activities designed to enhance student achievement.”

Typical of what is found in school improvement guidance is ad hoc and piecemeal attention to concerns about safe and supportive learning environments and parent and community involvement. Sometimes there is reference to matters such as guidance and counseling, enhancing relationships, or promoting social and emotional learning. When it comes to professional development, the focus is on training for “instructional staff, including teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals,” with no mention of student and learning support staff (e.g., pupil services professionals such as school counselors, psychologists, nurses, and social workers).

In what follows, we offer a few comments to clarify why these findings are a matter for concern for SEAs. Then, we make recommendations for specific systemic changes

The Policy Problem and SEAs

The CII report notes that limited intervention efficacy is related to the widespread tendency for programs to operate in isolation. This has been a common finding over the years. Such findings have led policy makers to focus on initiatives to increase coordination and cohesion. For example, federal and state government have offered various forms of support to promote collaboration and integration. And, to facilitate coordinated planning and organizational change, local, state, and federal intra- and interagency councils have been established.

Policies designed to enhance support for teachers, students, and families are marginalized

The underlying policy problem, however, is that the whole enterprise of addressing barriers is treated as supplementary in policy and practice, and this *marginalization* leads to piecemeal approaches and maintains fragmentation. As long as this is the case, not only is coordination hampered, so are efforts to develop a comprehensive and cohesive system of student and learning supports. Too often what is identified as *comprehensive* is not comprehensive enough, and generally the approach described is not about developing a *system* of supports but only a strategy to enhance coordination of fragmented efforts.

Increased awareness of the policy problem has stimulated analyses that indicate current policy is dominated by a two-component model of school improvement. That is, the primary policy focus is on improving instruction and school management (see the top part of Exhibit 3). While these two facets obviously are necessary, our analyses emphasize that a third component – one designed to directly *enable* students to learn and teachers to teach – is essentially missing in policy.

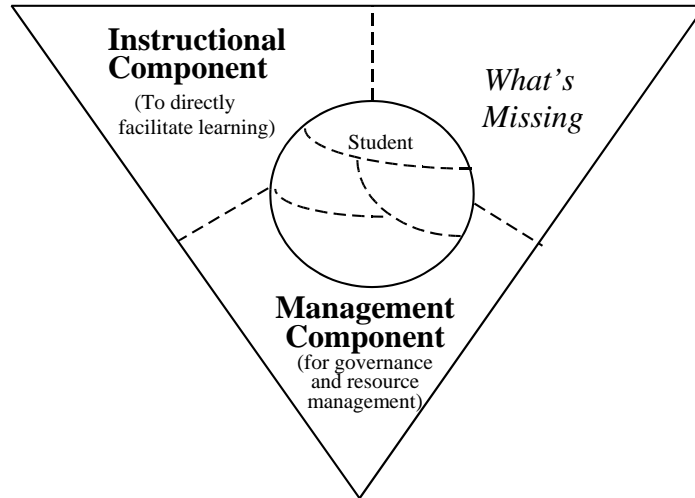
Used as a proxy for the missing component are all the marginalized and fragmented activity that goes on as school-after-school struggles to address the many factors interfering with student learning and performance (see the bottom section of Exhibit 3). A few SEAs are moving in the direction of pulling these disparate resources together into a primary and essential third component for *school improvement*. Their intent, over time, is to build the capacity of schools to play a major role in establishing a full continuum of school-community interventions.

Available evidence suggests that it is unlikely that an agenda to enhance academic achievement can succeed in the absence of concerted attention to ending the marginalized status of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching (see reference list).

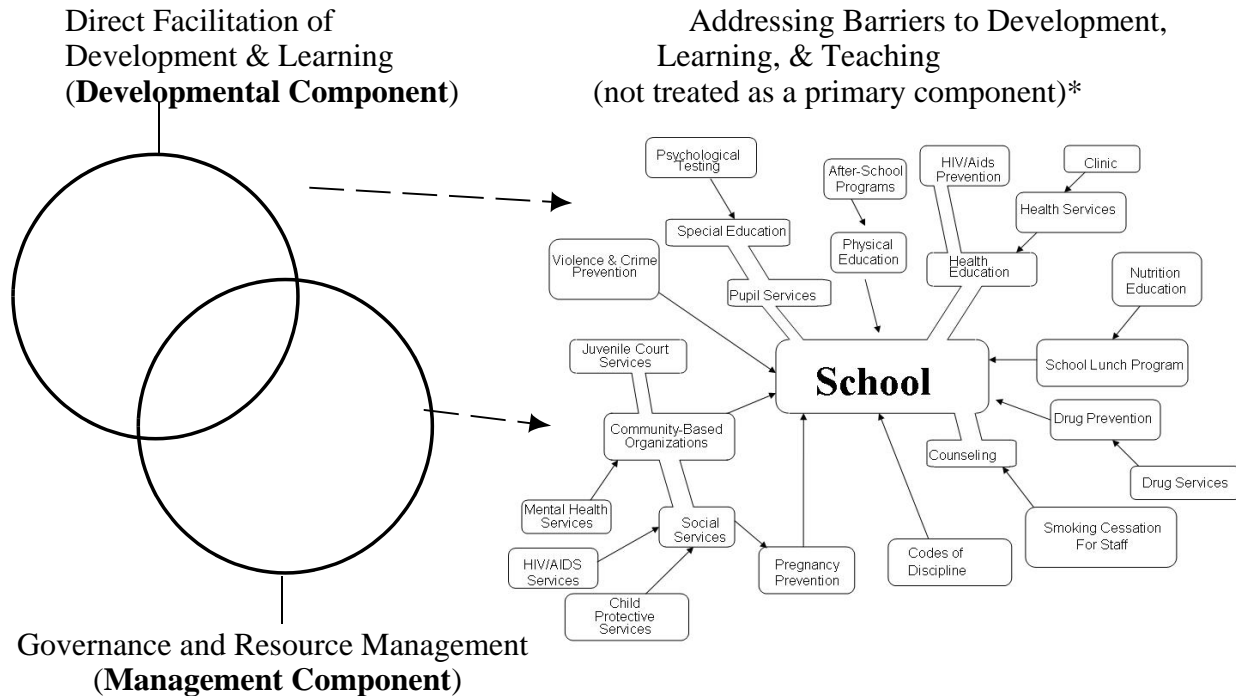
Exhibit 3

Current Two Component Model for Reform and Restructuring

(a) *What's missing?*



(b) *Not really missing, but marginalized and fragmented in policy and practice.*



*While not treated as a primary and essential component, every school offers a relatively small amount of school-owned student "support" services – some of which links with community-owned resources. Schools, in particular, have been reaching out to community agencies to add a few more services. All of this, however, remains marginalized and fragmented in policy and practice.

How is Intervention Framed

Rather than grouping student and learning support interventions with respect to a comprehensive intervention framework, most SEAs group them under specific institutional organizational units that have been created to facilitate the agency's management/compliance functions. For example, programs and services directly relevant to addressing barriers to learning and teaching commonly are grouped into units designated as student supports services, federal programs, and special education.

Rather than a conceptual framework, there is a laundry list of programs

Some states are replacing the term student support services with *learning supports*. Examples of program and service areas grouped within such units include: school safety (safe and drug free schools); discipline, attendance, dropouts; bilingual and English language acquisition; homeless, migratory, and Indian education; Title I school improvement; counseling and guidance services; 21st Century Community Learning Centers; Response to Intervention; alternative learning environment. Other relevant program and service areas are found in units that focus on early childhood, parent involvement, adult education and literacy, child nutrition, health services, Coordinated School Health Program, service learning, character education, career and technical education, and distance learning.

In addition, some SEAs feature special intervention initiatives. For example, Alabama in 2008 announced three specially funded state initiatives (i.e., State At-Risk, Children First, and Governor's High Hopes) would be consolidated into the Alabama Student Assistance Plan (ASAP). All three emphasize "providing assistance for students at risk, keeping students in school, and preventing non-completion of school. ... Their primary focus is to provide academic and behavioral services and opportunities for students who persistently perform below average.")

Clearly, as so many reports document, the way SEAs frame programs and service are poorly conceptualized. And, this is particularly evident from the perspective of guiding schools to develop a comprehensive and cohesive approach to school improvement. The lack of a well-conceived intervention framework for addressing barriers to learning and teaching perpetuates not only the obvious fragmentation and piecemeal and ad hoc planing, it contributes to the ongoing marginalization of student and learning supports.

Operational Infrastructure at SEAs

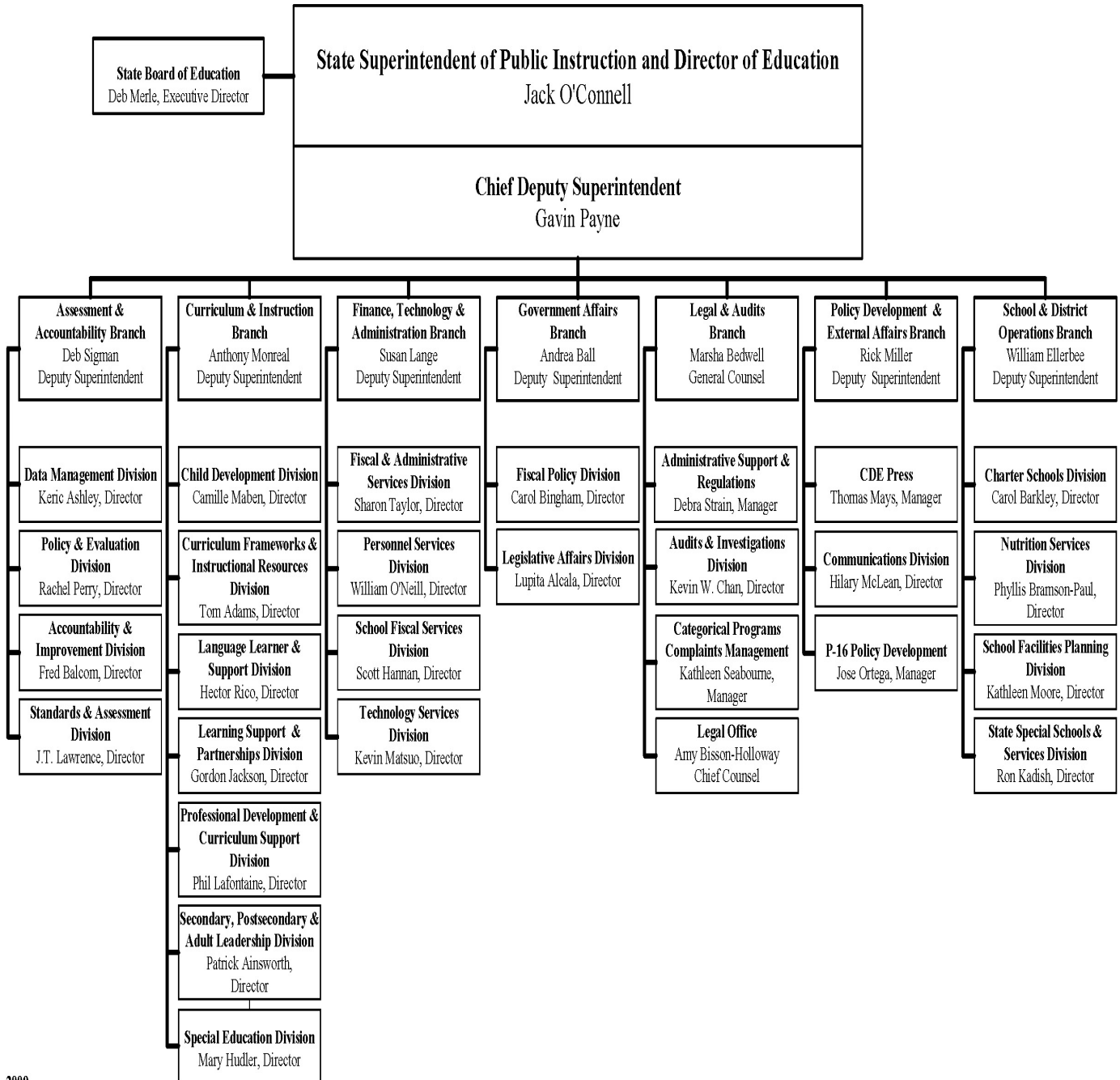
While there is considerable variability in the way units and subunits (e.g., divisions, bureaus, branches, offices) are labeled and placed in SEA organizational charts, there are major commonalities with respect to the pieces. This is graphically illustrated in Exhibit 4 which reproduces the SEA organizational charts from California, Montana, and Kentucky. These three were chosen as somewhat typical of SEAs operational organization and also because they differ from each other in significant ways.

In general, the range of activity for most SEAs is comparable; however, some present their organization in a more streamlined fashion than the three presented in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4

Three Representative Examples of SEA Organizational Charts

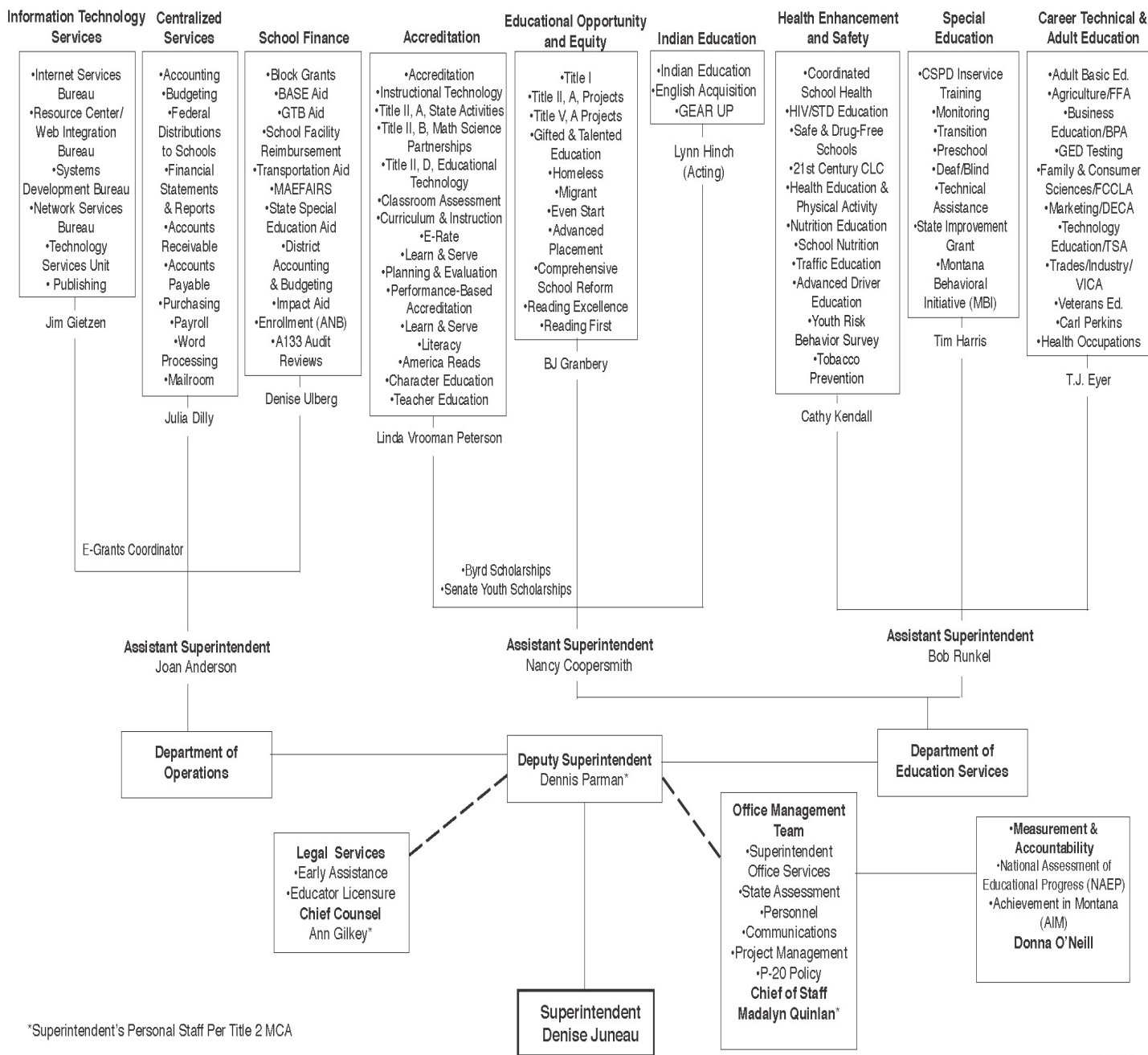
California Department of Education





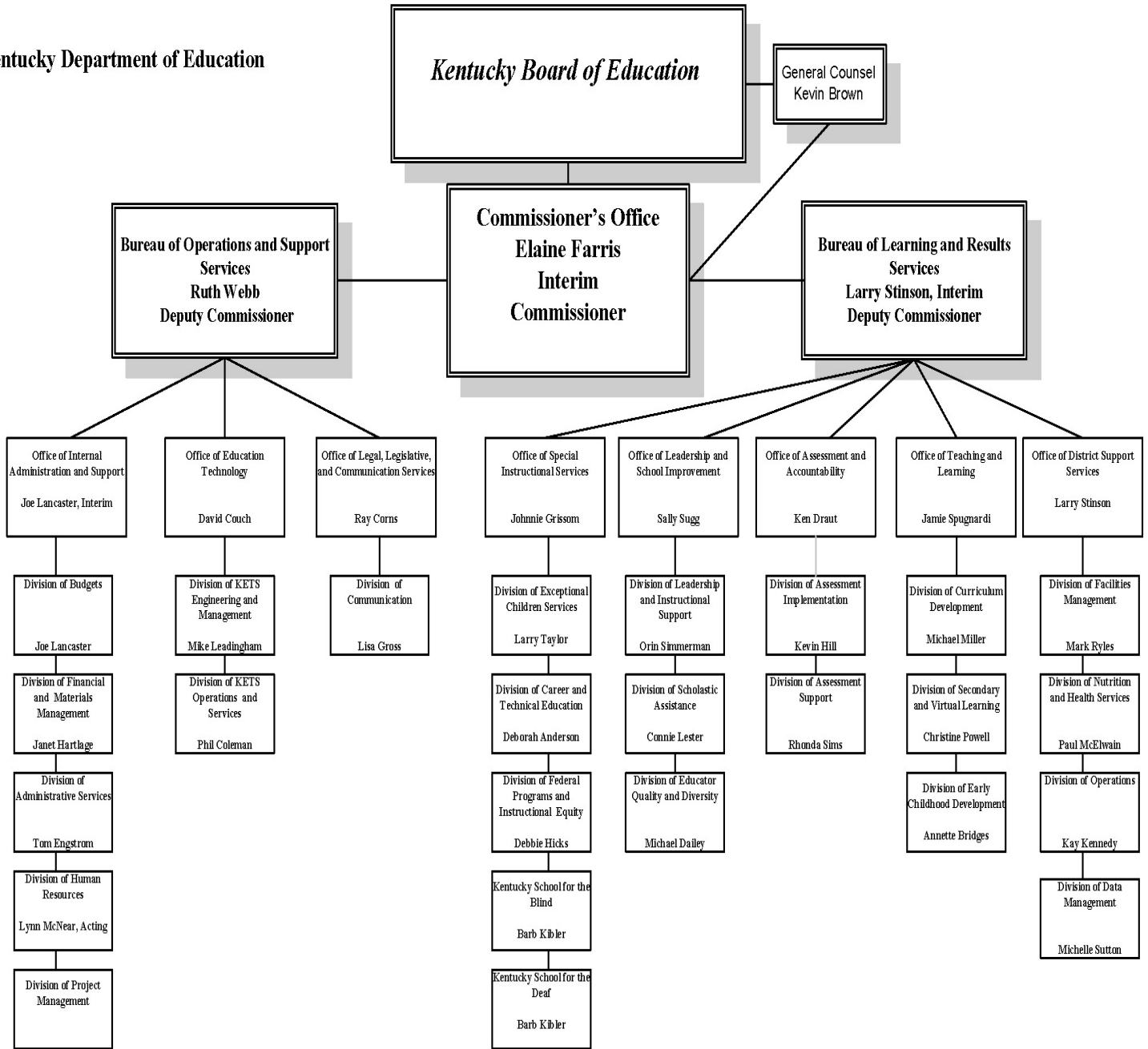
Denise Juneau, Superintendent
 Montana Office of Public Instruction
 www.opi.mt.gov

MONTANA OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



*Superintendent's Personal Staff Per Title 2 MCA

Kentucky Department of Education



May 2009

In general, the tendency is for SEAs to organize around:

- (a) *traditional arenas of activity, funding streams, and categorical programs* (e.g., curriculum and instruction; assessment; professional development; special education; specific types of compensatory education such as Title I and English language learners; gifted and talented; safe and drug free schools; homeless education; alternative schools; dropout prevention; adult education; technology; after school programs; student supports; and so forth),
- (b) *operational concerns* (e.g., finances and business services, human resources, grants and special programs, legal considerations).

All have administrators, managers, and staff who have roles related to various concerns about addressing barriers to learning and teaching. However, the programs, services, and initiatives often are divided among several deputy, associate or assistant superintendents, their middle managers (e.g., directors), and a variety of line staff.

The point for emphasis here is that the many programs and services directly relevant to addressing barriers to learning and teaching commonly are dispersed across major units and across subunits within a given unit. In effect, then, any call for coherence is a call for rethinking the operational infrastructure at the SEA, as well as at regional, district, and school levels.

How SEAs Guide School Improvement

As we did previously with district school improvement guides, we reviewed the school improvement guidance designated by SEAs. In those instances where an SEA went beyond spelling out the planning *process*, we found little emphasis on the nature and scope of what schools must do to develop a comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

In part, this reflects the narrow focus of prevailing accountability mandates stemming from the No Child Left Behind Act. That is, rather than building the type of comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach that can produce improved academic performance, prevailing accountability measures pressure education agencies to maintain a narrow focus on strategies whose face validity suggests a direct route to improving instruction. The implicit underlying assumption of most of these curriculum and instruction strategies is that students are motivationally ready and able each day to benefit from the teacher's instructional efforts. The reality, of course, is that in too many schools the *majority* of youngsters are not motivationally ready and able and thus are not benefitting from school improvements. For many, the fact remains that there are a host of external interfering factors. The failure of school improvement planning guides to address such factors comprehensively and systemically means that the guidance is much too limited.

Our review of SEA school improvement guidance supports the conclusions of our previous analyses of district school improvement guides. As the Center reported in a brief entitled *School Improvement Planning: What's Missing?*:

School transformation is unlikely without fundamental changes in school improvement guidance

Guides for planning attend most carefully to what is mandated and measured. The planning guides we reviewed stressed meeting the demand for standard-based and result-oriented school improvement mainly by elaborating on prevalent thinking about school practices, rather than considering fundamental systemic change. In doing so, they reflect adherence to the failed assumption that intensifying and narrowing the focus of school improvement to matters directly related to instruction and behavioral discipline are sufficient to the task of continuously raising test scores *over the long-run*. This assumption ignores the need for fundamentally restructuring school and community resources in ways that enable learning. It also maintains the *marginalization* of efforts to address major barriers to learning and teaching.

As a result, prevailing approaches to school improvement do not encompass comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approaches for enabling learning through addressing barriers. This is especially unfortunate in schools where large proportions of students are not doing well. Thus, one of the poignant ironies of continuing to proceed in this way is that the aim of providing equity of opportunity for many students is undermined.

The report concludes that:

The marginalized status and the associated fragmentation of efforts to address student problems are long-standing and ongoing. The situation is likely to go unchanged as long as school improvement plans continue to ignore the need to restructure the work of student support professionals. Currently, most school improvement plans do not focus on using such staff to develop the type of comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approaches necessary to address the many overlapping barriers to learning and development. At best, most reformers have offered the notions of *Family Resource Centers* and *Full Service Schools* to link community resources to schools (e.g., school-linked services) and enhance coordination of services. Much more fundamental changes are needed.

Recommendations for State Education Agencies: Expanding Policy, Framing Intervention, and Reworking Operational Infrastructure

It is not enough to say that all children can learn or that no child will be left behind; the work involves . . . achieving the vision of an American education system that enables all children to succeed in school, work, and life.

Council for Chief State School Officers' mission statement

In operationalizing the CCSSO vision, state education agencies can model for districts and schools

- a unifying umbrella concept for addressing barriers to learning and teaching
- a comprehensive systemic intervention framework
- an operational infrastructure for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports and ensuring that the system is fully integrated in school improvement planning and decision making

These three matters have major relevance for improving how schools address barriers to student learning and teaching. And, dealt with effectively, they can help establish that student and learning supports are imperative for *enabling* all students to have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

Expanding Policy: Using Addressing Barriers to Learning as a Unifying Concept

As noted, many policy makers have failed to come to grips with the underlying *marginalization* that leads to piecemeal approaches and maintains fragmentation of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching. The result is that too little attention is given to integrating a comprehensive system of student and learning supports and integrating it fully and cohesively into school improvement planning.

The limited impact of current policy points to the need for SEAs to rethink school reform and improvement. Our analyses indicate that the two component model upon which current reforms are based is inadequate for significantly improving the role of schools in helping prevent and correct learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

Prevailing approaches to school improvement do not address the factors leading to and maintaining students' problems, especially in schools where large proportions of students are not doing well. Despite this, in their rush to raise test scores, school leaders pursue instruction as if this was sufficient to ensure all students succeed. That is, the emphasis is mostly on intensifying and narrowing the school improvement agenda to discussions of curriculum, instruction, and classroom discipline. (See almost any school improvement planning guide.) This ignores the need for fundamental restructuring of school and community resources for *enabling learning* and continues to marginalize such efforts.

While improved instruction is necessary, for too many youngsters it is not sufficient. Students who arrive at school lacking motivational readiness and/or certain abilities need something more. That “something more” is best conceived as a major component to address barriers to learning. Addressing barriers to learning and teaching must be made an essential and high level focus in every school improvement planning guide. To do less is to ensure too many children are left behind academically, socially, and emotionally.

Part of the current problem is the term *student support*. It doesn't seem to convey to policy makers that the total enterprise is essential and must be a primary component of school improvement. The problem is compounded because the term often is interpreted as denoting the work of “specialists” who mainly provide “services” to a few of the many students who are not doing well at school.

Needed:
A unifying
concept

We propose that major inroads would result from adoption of a unifying umbrella concept that better conveys the *primary* role learning supports can play in school improvement. A unifying concept conveys a big picture understanding of the supports and why they are necessary. It provides an unambiguous answer to the question: *What is the overall direct and immediate function of learning supports?*

A unifying umbrella concept helps convey the primary role learning supports can play in school improvement so that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Adoption of a three component framework based on the umbrella concept of addressing barriers learning and teaching elevates this area of concern to the level of a fundamental and primary facet of school improvement (see Exhibit 5).

As illustrated in Exhibit 5, the unifying concept

- coalesces all learning supports under a rubric such as *addressing barriers to student learning*
- configures the work into a *primary and essential component* of school improvement.

In our work, such a component is defined as a comprehensive system of learning supports designed to enable learning by addressing barriers.

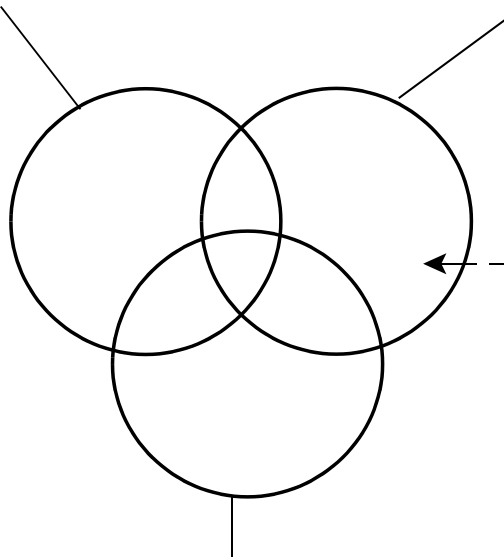
Moreover, the component is framed in policy and practice as fully integrated with the instructional and management components at a school and district-wide. The intent of all this is to move school improvement policy from its overemphasis on two components to adoption of a three component model. (For more on this, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/assuringnochild.pdf> .)

Exhibit 5

Proposed Policy Framework for Establishing an Umbrella for School Improvement Planning Related to Addressing Barriers to Learning and Promoting Healthy Development

Direct Facilitation of Learning
(Instructional Component)

Addressing Barriers to Learning/Teaching
(Enabling or Learning Supports Component –
an umbrella for ending marginalization by
unifying the many fragmented efforts and
evolving a comprehensive approach)



Governance and Resource Management
(Management Component)

Examples of Initiatives, programs and services

- >positive behavioral supports
- >programs for safe and drug free schools
- >full service community schools & Family Resource Centers
- >Safe Schools/Healthy Students
- >School Based Health Center movement
- >Coordinated School Health Program
- >bi-lingual, cultural, and other diversity programs
- >re-engaging disengaged students
- >compensatory education programs
- >special education programs
- >mandates stemming from the No Child Left Behind Act
- >And many more activities by student support staff

Intervention Framework

The complexity of factors interfering with learning and teaching underscore the need to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system to address behavior, learning, and emotional problems. To underscore the importance of a component to address barriers to learning, we call it an *Enabling Component* (i.e., a component to enable learning by addressing the barriers). Various states and localities moving to pursue school improvement in terms of three primary and essential components have adopted other designations for their enabling component. For example, the state education agencies in California and Iowa and various districts across the country have adopted the term *Learning Supports*. The Hawai'i Department of Education uses the term *Comprehensive Student Support System* (CSSS). Building on this, proposed legislation in California referred to a *Comprehensive Pupil Learning Supports System*.

Learning supports generally are defined as the resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports intended to enable all pupils to have an equal opportunity for success at school by addressing barriers to and promoting engagement in learning and teaching. Just as efforts to enhance instruction emphasize well delineated and integrated curriculum content, efforts to address external and internal factors that interfere with students engaging effectively with that curriculum must delineate the nature and scope of essential student and learning supports. To ensure equity of opportunity, schools must first coalesce existing learning supports and overtime develop them into comprehensive system (an enabling component) that is fully integrated with instructional efforts.

Whatever the component is called, the important points are that (a) it is seen as necessary, complementary, and as overlapping the instructional and management components, and (b) it is elevated to a level of importance commensurate with the other components.

Because the range of barriers to student learning is multifaceted and complex and the number of students affected is quite large, a comprehensive and systemic approach to intervention is necessary. The question is: *How should such an approach be depicted?*

One trend has been to formulate and *focus mainly* on three “tiers.” For example, a widely used way of framing a continuum of interventions presents a pyramid that, starting at its base stresses universal interventions (for all); in the middle, references selected group, targeted interventions (for those designated with “at risk behavior”); and at the peak calls for individually indicated, intensive, specialized interventions (for a few who are designated as at high risk). Another approach organizes around primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Other approaches amount to little more than itemizations of specific interventions and listings of various disciplines providing support.

SEAs must move from a “laundry list” of interventions to a comprehensive and cohesive framework for student and learning supports

If the marginalization of student supports is to end, a framework that presents a coherent picture of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive set of interventions must be formulated and operationalized. Minimally, such a framework must delineate the fundamental *scope* and *content* of the enterprise.

Scope

Scope = a continuum of integrated systems of school-community interventions. Over time, schools can move from fragmented and marginalized student and learning support activities into fully *integrated continuum of intervention systems*. As illustrated in Exhibit 6, we conceive the *scope* of activity as a school-community continuum of interconnected intervention systems consisting of a

- *system for promotion of healthy development and prevention of problems*
- *system for intervening early to address problems as soon after onset as is feasible*
- *system for assisting those with chronic and severe problems.*

In keeping with public education and public health perspectives, such a continuum encompasses one aspect of efforts to enable academic, social, emotional, and physical development and address behavior, learning, and emotional problems at every school.

Needed:
A continuum of
interconnected
systems

Most education agencies have some programs and services that fit along the entire continuum. However, as stressed, the interventions are not coalesced into integrated systems. Moreover, the tendency to focus mostly on the most severe problems has skewed the process so that too little is done to prevent and intervene early after the onset of a problem. As a result, public education has been characterized as a system that “waits for failure.”

As noted earlier, the continuum spans the full spectrum of prevention efforts and incorporates a holistic and developmental emphasis that envelops individuals, families, and community contexts. The continuum also provides a framework for adhering to the principle of using the least restrictive and nonintrusive forms of intervention needed to appropriately respond to problems and accommodate diversity.

Moreover, given the likelihood that many problems are not discrete, the continuum can be designed to address root causes, thereby minimizing tendencies to develop separate programs for each observed problem. In turn, this enables increased coordination and integration of resources which can increase impact and cost-effectiveness.

As graphically illustrated by the tapering of the three levels of intervention in Exhibit 6, development of a fully integrated set of systems is meant to reduce the number of individuals who require specialized supports. That is, the aim in developing such a comprehensive approach is to prevent the majority of problems, deal

Exhibit 6

Interconnected Systems for Meeting the Needs of All Children*

- >Providing a Continuum of School-community Programs & Services
- >Ensuring use of the Least Intervention Needed

School Resources

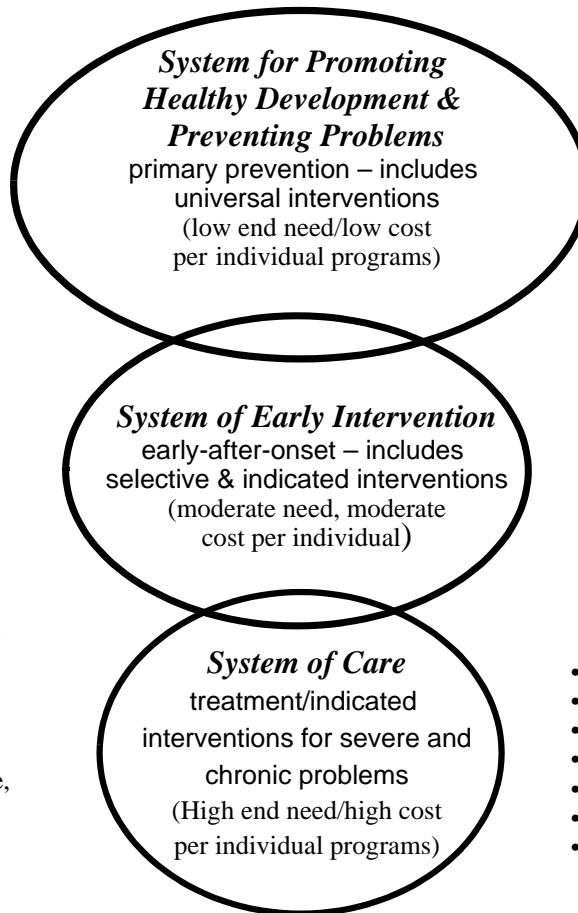
(facilities, stakeholders, programs, services)

Examples:

- General health education
- Social and emotional learning programs
- Recreation programs
- Enrichment programs
- Support for transitions
- Conflict resolution
- Home involvement
- Drug and alcohol education

- Drug counseling
- Pregnancy prevention
- Violence prevention
- Gang intervention
- Dropout prevention
- Suicide prevention
- Learning/behavior accommodations & response to intervention
- Work programs

- Special education for learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, and other health impairments



Community Resources

(facilities, stakeholders, programs, services)

Examples:

- Recreation & Enrichment
- Public health & safety programs
- Prenatal care
- Home visiting programs
- Immunizations
- Child abuse education
- Internships & community service programs
- Economic development

- Early identification to treat health problems
- Monitoring health problems
- Short-term counseling
- Foster placement/group homes
- Family support
- Shelter, food, clothing
- Job programs

- Emergency/crisis treatment
- Family preservation
- Long-term therapy
- Probation/incarceration
- Disabilities programs
- Hospitalization
- Drug treatment

*Systemic collaboration is essential to establish interprogram connections on a daily basis and over time to ensure seamless intervention within each system and among *systems for promoting healthy development and preventing problems, systems of early intervention, and systems of care.*

Such collaboration involves horizontal and vertical restructuring of programs and services
(a) within jurisdictions, school districts, and community agencies (e.g., among departments, divisions, units, schools, clusters of schools)
(b) between jurisdictions, school and community agencies, public and private sectors; among schools; among community agencies

*Various venues, concepts, and initiatives permeate this continuum of intervention *systems*. For example, venues such as day care and preschools, concepts such as social and emotional learning and development, and initiatives such as positive behavior support, response to intervention, and coordinated school health. Also, a considerable variety of staff are involved. Finally, *note that this illustration of an essential continuum of intervention systems differs in significant ways from the three tier pyramid that is widely referred to in discussing universal, selective, and indicated interventions.*

deal with another significant segment as soon after problem onset as is feasible, and end up with relatively few needing specialized assistance and other intensive and costly interventions. For individual youngsters, this means preventing and minimizing as many problems as feasible and doing so in ways that maximize engagement in productive learning. For the school and community as a whole, the intent is to produce a safe, healthy, nurturing environment/culture characterized by respect for differences, trust, caring, support, and high expectations.

Content

Content = a multifaceted and cohesive set of content intervention arenas. For any school and community, the above continuum encompasses many programs and services. In operationalizing the continuum as part of the unifying concept of an Enabling or Learning Supports Component, the focus turns to coalescing and categorizing the lengthy list of specific activities.

Pioneering efforts have grouped the many interventions at each level of the continuum into intervention arenas that serve as a defined *content* or "curriculum" blueprint. In doing so, these trailblazers have moved from a "laundry-list" to a defined set of general categories that captures the multifaceted work schools need to pursue in comprehensively addressing barriers to learning.

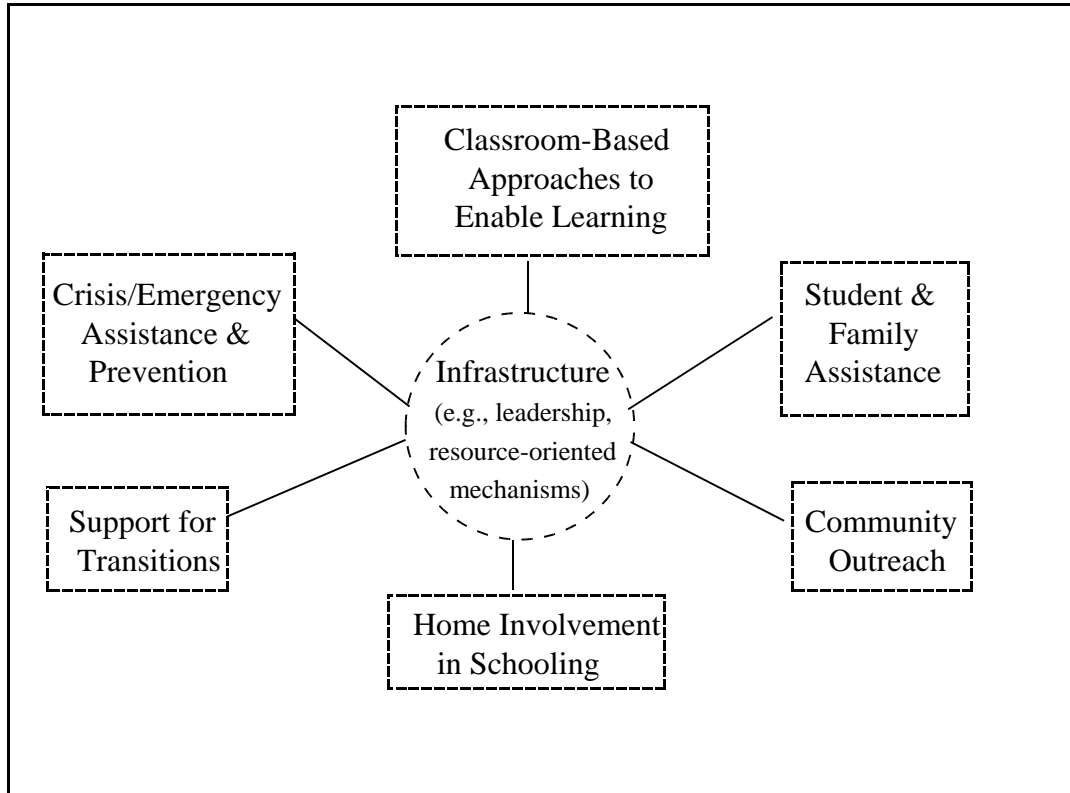
Research has established that six arenas capture the essence of the multifaceted ways the entire school must strive to enable *all* students to learn and *all* teachers to teach effectively. As illustrated in Exhibit 7, and highlighted in Exhibit 8, the categories are:

Six arenas of intervention

- *Classroom-focused enabling* – enhancing regular classroom strategies to enable learning (e.g., improving instruction for students with mild-moderate learning and behavior problems and re-engaging those who have become disengaged from learning at school)
- *Support for transitions* (e.g., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes, daily transitions)
- *Home involvement with school* – strengthening families and home and school connections
- *Crisis response and prevention* – responding to, and where feasible, preventing school and personal crises
- *Community involvement and support* (e.g., outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
- *Student and family assistance* – facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed.

Exhibit 7

Categories of *Basic Content Arenas* for Learning Supports Intervention*



*Notes:

An enhanced school climate (culture/sense of community) is an emergent quality resulting from a well-designed and implemented learning supports component.

All categorical programs can be integrated into these six content arenas. Examples of initiatives, programs, and services that can be unified into a system of learning supports include positive behavioral supports, programs for safe and drug free schools, programs for social and emotional development and learning, full service community schools and family resource and school based health centers, Safe Schools/Healthy Students projects, CDC's Coordinated School Health Program, bi-lingual, cultural, and other diversity programs, compensatory education programs, special education programs, mandates stemming from the No Child Left Behind Act, and many more. School-wide approaches are especially important where large numbers of students are affected and at any school that is not yet paying adequate attention to equity and diversity concerns.

Exhibit 8

Major Examples of Activity in Each Content Arena

(1) Classroom-Based Approaches

- Opening the classroom door to bring available supports in (e.g., peer tutors, volunteers, aids trained to work with students-in-need; resource teachers and student support staff work in the classroom as part of the teaching team)
- Redesigning classroom approaches to enhance teacher capability to prevent and handle problems and reduce need for out of class referrals (e.g. personalized instruction; special assistance as necessary; developing small group and independent learning options; reducing negative interactions and over-reliance on social control; expanding the range of curricular and instructional options and choices; systematic use of prereferral interventions)
- Enhancing and personalizing professional development (e.g., creating a Learning Community for teachers; ensuring opportunities to learn through co-teaching, team teaching, and mentoring; teaching intrinsic motivation concepts and their application to schooling)
- Curricular enrichment and adjunct programs (e.g., varied enrichment activities that are not tied to reinforcement schedules; visiting scholars from the community)
- Classroom and school-wide approaches used to create and maintain a caring and supportive climate

(2) Support for Transitions

- Welcoming & social support programs for newcomers (e.g., welcoming signs, materials, and initial receptions; peer buddy programs for students, families, staff, volunteers)
- Daily transition programs for (e.g., before school, breaks, lunch, afterschool)
- Articulation programs (e.g., grade to grade – new classrooms, new teachers; elementary to middle school; middle to high school; in and out of special education programs)
- Summer or intersession programs (e.g., catch-up, recreation, and enrichment programs)
- School-to-career/higher education (e.g., counseling, pathway, and mentor programs; Broad involvement of stakeholders in planning for transitions; students, staff, home, police, faith groups, recreation, business, higher education)
- Broad involvement of stakeholders in planning for transitions (e.g., students, staff, home, police, faith groups, recreation, business, higher education)

(3) Home Involvement/Engagement in Schooling

- Addressing specific support and learning needs of family (e.g., support services for those in the home to assist in addressing basic survival needs and obligations to the children; adult education classes to enhance literacy, job skills, English-as-a-second language, citizenship preparation)
- Improving mechanisms for communication and connecting school and home (e.g., opportunities at school for family networking and mutual support, learning, recreation, enrichment, and for family members to receive special assistance and to volunteer to help; phone calls and/or e-mail from teacher and other staff with good news; frequent and balanced conferences – student-led when feasible; outreach to attract hard-to-reach families – including student dropouts)
- Involving homes in student decision making (e.g., families prepared for involvement in program planning and problem-solving)
- Enhancing home support for learning and development (e.g., family literacy; family homework projects; family field trips)
- Recruiting families to strengthen school and community (e.g., volunteers to welcome and support new families and help in various capacities; families prepared for involvement in school governance)

(cont.)

(4) Community Outreach to Engage Collaborative Support

- Planning and Implementing Outreach to Recruit a Wide Range of Community Resources (e.g., public and private agencies; colleges and universities; local residents; artists and cultural institutions, businesses and professional organizations; service, volunteer, and faith-based organizations; community policy and decision makers)
- Systems to Recruit, Screen, Prepare, and Maintain Community Resource Involvement (e.g., mechanisms to orient and welcome, enhance the volunteer pool, maintain current involvements, enhance a sense of community)
- Reaching out to Students and Families Who Don't Come to School Regularly – Including Truants and Dropouts
- Connecting School and Community Efforts to Promote Child and Youth Development and a Sense of Community

(5) Crisis Assistance and Prevention

- Ensuring immediate assistance in emergencies so students can resume learning
- Providing Follow up care as necessary (e.g., brief and longer-term monitoring)
- Forming a school-focused Crisis Team to formulate a response plan and take leadership for developing prevention programs
- Mobilizing staff, students, and families to anticipate response plans and recovery efforts
- Creating a caring and safe learning environment (e.g., developing systems to promote healthy development and prevent problems; bullying and harassment abatement programs)
- Working with neighborhood schools and community to integrate planning for response and prevention

(6) Student and Family Assistance

- Providing extra support as soon as a need is recognized and doing so in the least disruptive ways (e.g., prereferral interventions in classrooms; problem solving conferences with parents; open access to school, district, and community support programs)
- Timely referral interventions for students & families with problems based on response to extra support (e.g., identification/screening processes, assessment, referrals, and follow-up – school-based, school-linked)
- Enhancing access to direct interventions for health, mental health, and economic assistance (e.g., school-based, school-linked, and community-based programs and services)
- Care monitoring, management, information sharing, and follow-up assessment to coordinate individual interventions and check whether referrals and services are adequate and effective
- Mechanisms for *resource* coordination and integration to avoid duplication, fill gaps, garner economies of scale, and enhance effectiveness (e.g., braiding resources from school-based and linked interveners, feeder pattern/family of schools, community-based programs; linking with community providers to fill gaps)
- Enhancing stakeholder awareness of programs and services

*In each arena, there is broad involvement of stakeholders in planning the system and building capacity. Emphasis at all times in the classroom and school-wide is on enhancing feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to others at school and reducing threats to such feelings as essential facets of engagement and re-engagement and creating and maintaining a caring and supportive climate.

Framework for a comprehensive enabling or learning supports component

Combining the six content arenas with the continuum of interventions provides a unifying intervention framework for a comprehensive component to enable learning by addressing barriers and re-engaging students in classroom instruction (i.e., an Enabling or a Learning Supports Component). The resultant matrix is shown in Exhibit 9.

The matrix framework helps convey a big picture of a comprehensive, systemic approach. It currently is being used as a unifying intervention framework and as an analytic tool for mapping and analyzing what schools are and are not doing. This, then, provides a well-founded basis for setting priorities to guide and unify school improvement planning for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports.

Given sparse resources, such a plan must reframe existing support activity and redeploy and, over time, braid school, community, and home resources. Toward these ends, the framework facilitates mapping and analyzing the current scope and content of how a school, a family of schools (e.g., a feeder pattern of schools) a district, and the community at each level addresses barriers to learning and teaching and how it intervenes to re-engage students in classroom instruction.

In applying the framework, the focus is on classroom-based and school-wide approaches. This requires

- addressing barriers and re-engagement through a broader view of "basics" and through effective accommodation of individual differences and disabilities
- enhancing the focus on motivational considerations with a special emphasis on intrinsic motivation as it relates to individual readiness and ongoing involvement with the intent of fostering intrinsic motivation as a basic outcome
- adding remediation, treatment, and rehabilitation as necessary, but only as necessary.

In accomplishing all this, the focus is on reframing support programs and melding school, community, and home resources.

School improvement requires addressing complex barriers to learning and teaching. Addressing such barriers requires a comprehensive and cohesive system of intervention. Designing such a system requires a well-conceived intervention framework.

Exhibit 9

**Combined Continuum and Content Arenas
Provides the Framework for a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports
(an Enabling Component)***

Levels of Intervention

		Systems for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems	Systems for Early Intervention (Early after problem onset)	Systems of Care
Intervention Content Arenas	Classroom- Focused Enabling			
	Crisis/ Emergency Assistance & Prevention			
	Support for transitions			
	Home Involvement in Schooling			
	Community Outreach/ Volunteers			
	Student and Family Assistance			
		Accommodations for differences & disabilities	Specialized assistance & other intensified interventions (e.g., Special Education & School-Based Behavioral Health)	

*The matrix creates a unifying guide for rethinking and restructuring the daily work of all staff at a school who focus on providing student/learning supports. It can be used to map the current scope and content of how a school, a family of schools, and a school district address behavior, learning, and behavior problems. This information then can be used to generate a gap analysis as a basis for school improvement planning and evaluation. A range of tools for mapping and analyzing the scope and content of efforts to address barriers is available online in a *Rebuilding Kit* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

Note also that various venues, concepts, and initiatives will fit into several cells of the matrix. Examples include venues such as day care centers, preschools, family centers, and school-based health centers, concepts such as social and emotional learning and development, and initiatives such as positive behavior support, response to interventions, and the coordinated school health program. Most of the work of the considerable variety of personnel who provide student supports also fits into one or more cells.

Finally, note in Exhibit 10 that addressing barriers to learning and teaching involves two major processes: (1) helping students around barriers *and* (2) engaging/re-engaging them in classroom instruction. It should be evident that interventions that do not accomplish the second consideration generally are insufficient in sustaining, over time, student involvement, good behavior, and effective learning at school.

The intent is to prevent and minimize as many problems as feasible and to do so in ways that maximize engagement in productive learning.

**Reworking
Operational
Infrastructure
at an SEA**

The fundamental principle in developing an organizational and operational infrastructure is that *structure follows function*. That is, the focus should be on establishing an infrastructure that enables accomplishment of major functions and related tasks – hopefully in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

That said, the problem is how to delineate functions in ways that ensure an organization is able to achieve its visionary goals. It is critical to outline essential functions in ways that maintain the “big picture” and enable effective results.

Structure
follows
function

For SEAs, the vision of leaving no child behind encompasses ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. In discussing the reworking operational infrastructure in ways that builds capacity for school improvement, we suggest that pursuing such a vision requires effectively operationalizing three fundamental functions: (1) facilitating learning and development, (2) addressing barriers to learning and teaching in ways that enable learning and development, and (3) governing and managing the district. In pursuing each of these, the major processes involve *systemic* planning, implementation, and evaluation and accountability.

The infrastructure need, then, is to establish an interconnected set of mechanisms to steer and carry out these fundamental functions and processes on a regular basis in keeping with the vision for public education. Such an infrastructure enables leaders to steer together and to empower and work productively with staff on major tasks related to policy and practice (e.g., designing and directing activity, planning and implementing specific organizational and program objectives, allocating and monitoring resources with a clear content and outcome focus, facilitating coordination and integration to ensure cohesive implementation, managing communication and information, providing support for capacity building and quality improvement, ensuring accountability, and promoting self-renewal).

Exhibit 10

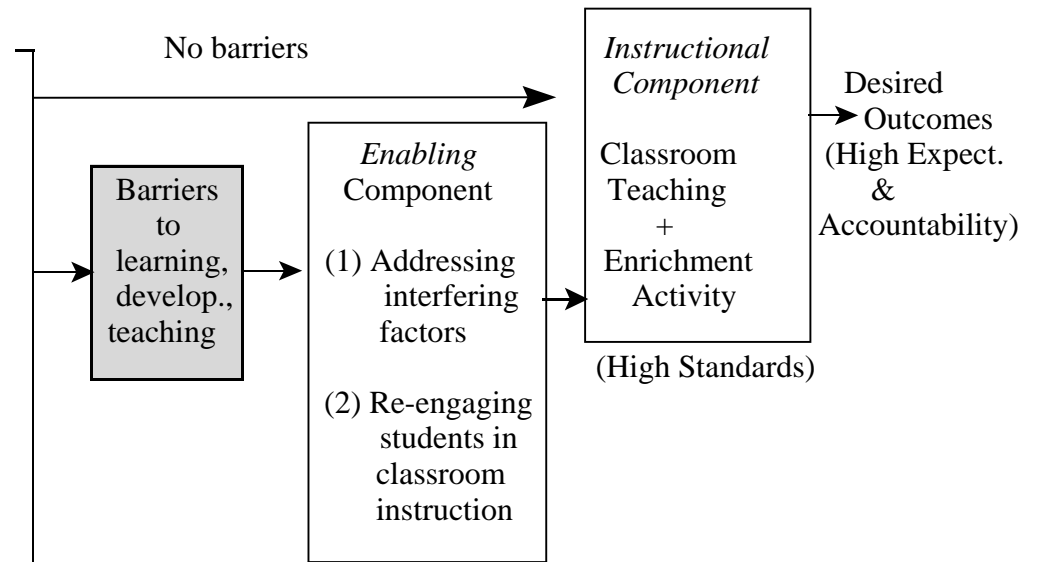
An Enabling Component to Address Barriers and Re-engage Students in Classroom Instruction*

Range of Learners
(categorized in terms of their response to academic instruction at any given point in time)

I = Motivationally ready & able

Not very motivated/
lacking prerequisite knowledge & skills/
different learning rates & styles/
minor vulnerabilities

III = Avoidant/
very deficient in current capabilities/
has a disability/
major health problems



*In some places, an Enabling Component is called a Learning Supports Component. Whatever it is called, the component is to be developed as a comprehensive system of learning supports at the school site.

***Examples of Risk-Producing Conditions that Can be Barriers to Learning**

Environmental Conditions**

Person Factors**

Neighborhood

Family

School and Peers

Individual

- >extreme economic deprivation
- >community disorganization, including high levels of mobility
- >violence, drugs, etc.
- >minority and/or immigrant status

- >chronic poverty
- >conflict/disruptions/violence
- >substance abuse
- >models problem behavior
- >abusive caretaking
- >inadequate provision for quality child care

- >poor quality school
- >negative encounters with teachers
- >negative encounters with peers &/or inappropriate peer models

- >medical problems
- >low birth weight/ neurodevelopmental delay
- >psychophysiological problems
- >difficult temperament & adjustment problems
- >inadequate nutrition

**A reciprocal determinist view of behavior recognizes the interplay of environment and person variables.

A key guideline in reworking SEA infrastructure is that it must provide leadership and build capacity for districts to establish and maintain (a) an effective operational infrastructure at every school, (b) a mechanism for connecting a family or complex (e.g., feeder pattern) of schools, and (c) a mechanism for schools to collaborate with surrounding community resources. Well-designed, compatible, and interconnected operational infrastructures at schools, for school complexes, and at the district level are essential for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching. Each level plays a key role in weaving together existing school and community resources and developing a full continuum of interventions over time. Moreover, content and resource-oriented infrastructure mechanisms enable programs and services to function in an increasingly cohesive, cost-efficient, and equitable way.

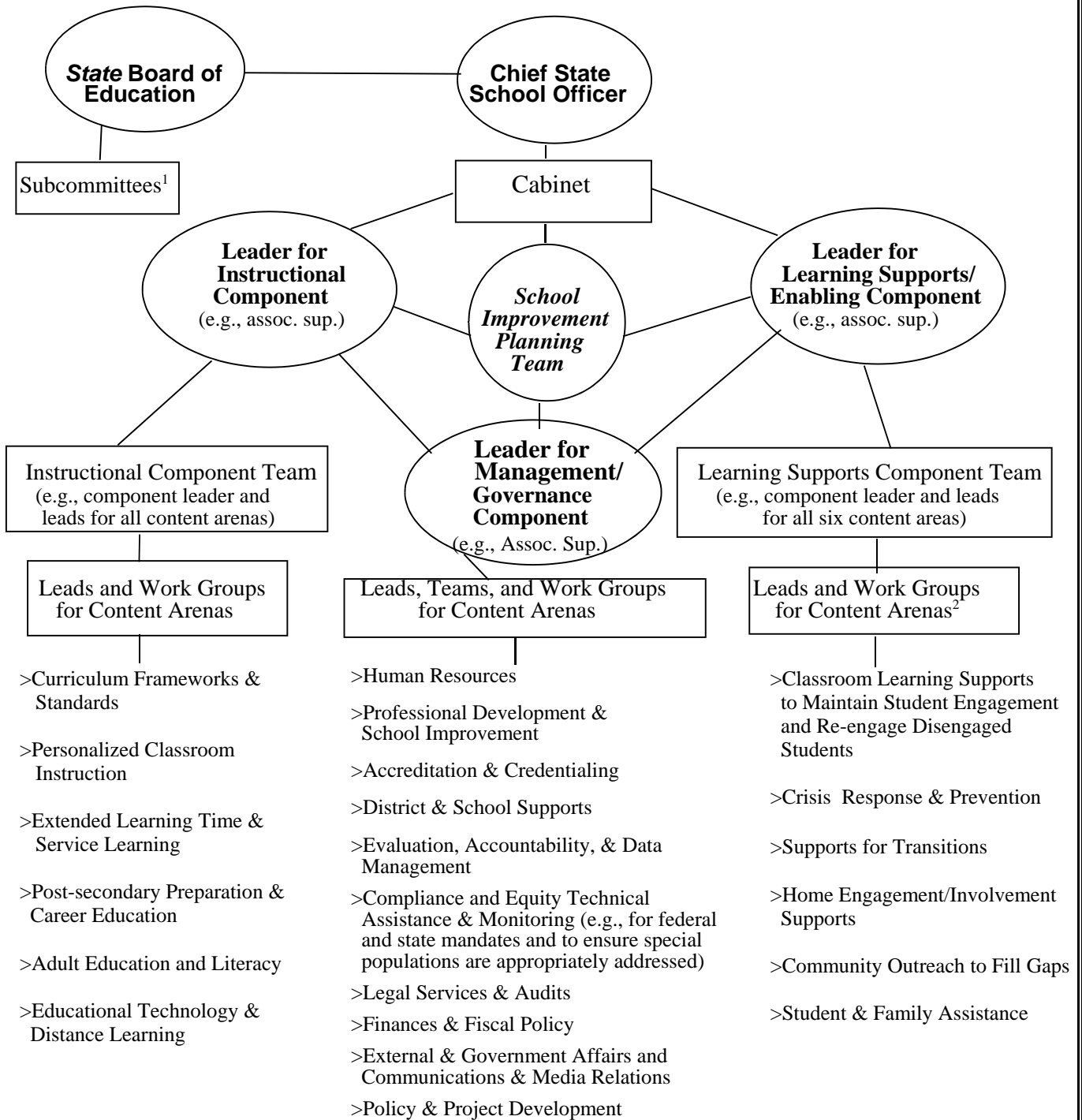
All this calls for reframing the organizational and operational infrastructure at the SEA. Indeed, for SEAs to play a more potent role in providing capacity building support for school improvement and transformation, the agency's operational infrastructure must be fundamentally reworked. Exhibit 11 lays out a framework to consider in reworking SEA infrastructure in ways that promote development and full integration of a comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching. As indicated, it is essential to have a cabinet level administrative leader (e.g., an associate superintendent) who is responsible and accountable for all resources related to addressing barriers to learning.

As the figure in Exhibit 11 illustrates, once a learning supports' administrator is appointed, that leader should establish mechanisms for accomplishing the unit's work. These should be comparable to content and process mechanisms established for the instructional component. Specifically, we suggest establishing a team for learning supports consisting of leaders for major content arenas. (Exhibit 11 delineates the six arenas cited.) Organizing in this way moves student/learning supports away from the marginalization, fragmentation, unnecessary redundancy, and counterproductive competition that has resulted from organizing around traditional programs and/or in terms of specific disciplines. The intent is for personnel to have accountability for advancing a specific arena *and* for ensuring a systemic and integrated approach to all learning supports. This, of course, requires cross-content and cross-disciplinary training so that all personnel are prepared to pursue new directions (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2001).

A formal infrastructure link also is needed to ensure the learning supports system is fully integrated with school improvement efforts (e.g., in the classroom and school-wide). This means the leader and some of the learning supports team must be included at SEA planning and decision making tables with their counterparts concerned with improving instruction and management/governance.

SEAs need to dedicate and integrate operational mechanisms in ways that model a cohesive, comprehensive, and fully integrated system of learning supports

Prototype for an Integrated Infrastructure at the SEA Level with Mechanisms for Learning Supports That Are Comparable to Those for Instruction



1. If there isn't one, a board subcommittee for learning supports should be created to ensure policy and supports directly related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

2. All resources related to addressing barriers to learning and teaching (e.g., student support personnel, compensatory and special education staff and interventions, special initiatives, grants, and programs) are integrated into a refined set of major content arenas such as those indicated here. Leads are assigned for each arena and work groups are established. If the department has used a 3 tier intervention framework, this would be enhanced by developing each of the six content arenas into a comprehensive system of learning supports along an intervention continuum conceived as encompassing systems for promoting development and preventing problems, responding as early after onset as feasible, and providing treatment for students with chronic, severe, and pervasive problems.

A Paradigm Shift

In recent years, state education agencies have flirted with facets of what has been designated as new directions for improving student supports. Some have proceeded in fits and starts; others are moving forward in promising ways.

All these initial efforts have benefitted from lessons learned from initiatives that have pursued strategies for enhancing student supports. These include endeavors for co-locating community health, social, and recreational services on school campuses, efforts to develop full-service community schools, and proposals for developing new roles and functions for school-employed student support staff (see reference list).

We view what has transpired up until now as the early stage of a paradigm shift for how schools address barriers to learning, development, and teaching. The shift is from a *marginalized and fragmented* set of student support services to development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system of learning supports. Such a system weaves together what schools already are doing and enhances this with home and community resources, especially to fill high priority systemic gaps.

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A few prominent indicators of the shift are seen in:

- Iowa's statewide design for a system of learning supports (see description on the next page)
- the move by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to focus on *Systems of Support for Student Learning* and to work with our Center in conjunction with the *National Initiative: New Directions for Student Support* and our collaboration with Scholastic Inc.
- establishment of a public-private collaboration between the Community Affairs Unit of Scholastic Inc. and our Center at UCLA focused specifically on enhancing leadership for school policy and practice to promote development of a comprehensive system of learning supports; this is a key facet of Scholastic's *Rebuilding for Learning* initiative – see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/rebuilding.htm>
- the ongoing work of the *National Initiative: New Directions for Student Support*; in 2008, the initiative has directed increasing attention to engaging superintendents and departments and schools of education – see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/ndannouncement.htm>
- various Congressional bills introduced over the last couple of years that have highlighted the growing need for rethinking student and learning supports (some of which have been enacted, albeit in an ad hoc manner).

Another indicator is the adoption of the term *learning supports* by divisions, departments, and units at state and district levels. Of course, name changes commonly are adopted as terms gain in popularity. Fad-like use of terminology without adequate, substantive change in practices is always a concern.

Iowa Initiative to Develop a Enhance a System of Learning Supports Statewide

Judy Jeffrey, chief state school officer for Iowa has stressed:

"Through our collective efforts, we must meet the learning needs of all students. Not every student comes to school motivationally ready and able to learn. Some experience barriers that interfere with their ability to profit from classroom instruction. Supports are needed to remove, or at least to alleviate, the effects of these barriers. Each student is entitled to receive the supports needed to ensure that he or she has an equal opportunity to learn and to succeed in school. This paper provides guidance for a new direction for student support that brings together the efforts of schools, families, and communities.

If every student in every school and community in Iowa is to achieve at high levels, we must rethink how student supports are organized and delivered to address barriers to learning. This will require that schools and school districts, in collaboration with their community partners, develop a comprehensive, cohesive approach to delivery of learning supports that is an integral part of their school improvement efforts."

In Iowa, the Department of Education is working with the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development to enhance outcomes for all youngsters. In 2003, the Department established a design team, engaged national consultants and a national advisory panel, and created a stakeholder group and several workgroups to develop guiding frameworks for a *system* of learning supports. The design is intended to guide policy makers and leaders at state, regional, and local levels within and outside the education system who have a compelling interest in the achievement of all students and are seeking effective ways to improve student learning. It introduces a set of new concepts for systems of supports that students need if they are to achieve at high levels. The document calls for rethinking the directions for student supports in order to reduce fragmentation in the system and increase the effectiveness and efficiency by which it operates. The guiding intervention and infrastructure frameworks are to ensure such a system is fully integrated with efforts to improve instruction. To these ends, the intent is to embed such a system into the Iowa school improvement process.

The design uses a three-component organizational model that expands and can guide future school improvement efforts. The three components are: (1) *Academic Instruction*, (2) *Learning Supports*, and (3) *Leadership* (encompassing those people and functions responsible for the governance and management of human, material, and financial resources). The design stresses that providing all students with an equal opportunity to succeed in schools requires not only improving teaching, but also necessitates developing better ways for schools, families, and communities to facilitate learning by alleviating *barriers*, both external and internal, that can interfere with learning and teaching. The call is for a cohesive *system of learning supports* that wraps around the teacher and classroom and focuses on results for student success. (See *Developing Our Youth: Fulfilling a Promise, Investing in Iowa's Future – Enhancing Iowa's Systems of Supports for Learning and Development* – URL cited in the reference list at the end of this brief).

Implications for School Improvement Guidance

The *overall implications* for school improvement guides are that they need to be reorganized around two basic, interacting dimensions:

One encompasses three primary and essential components of an integrated systems approach to schooling. The three components are those encompassing comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive efforts to (a) facilitate instruction, (b) address barriers to learning, and (c) govern, lead, and manage schools.

The other stresses five key areas of concern for systemic improvement related to each component. The key areas of concern are (a) framing and delineating intervention functions, (b) reworking infrastructure, (c) enhancing resource use, (d) continuous capacity building, and (e) continuous evaluation and appropriate accountability based on delineated standards and quality indicators. (Because school improvement planning across the country is "standards-based" and accountability driven, establishing standards and expanding the current focus of accountability are important facets of ensuring high levels of attention and support for development of comprehensive, multifaceted approaches to address barriers to learning. We have addressed this in a previous report devoted to delineating standards and outlining an expanded framework for school accountability for a component to address barriers. Standards are organized in terms of the five key areas of concern.)

With specific respect to addressing barriers to learning and teaching, schools need to be guided toward

- reframing current student support programs and services and redeploying the resources to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive component to enable learning
 - developing both in-classroom and school-wide approaches – including interventions to support transitions, increase home and community connections, enhance teacher’s ability to respond to common learning and behavior problems, and respond to and prevent crises
- C including strategic approaches for enabling effective *systemic change and scale up*.

To these ends:

- (1) SEAs must revisit school improvement planning guides to ensure they focus on development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and do so in ways that are fully integrated with plans for improving instruction at the school. This encompasses developing guidelines for (a) operationalizing comprehensiveness in terms of a framework that encompasses a full continuum of interventions and a well conceptualized set of content arenas and (b) delineating standards and accountability indicators for each content arena.
- (2) SEAs must designate a dedicated position for leadership of efforts to develop and implement such a comprehensive system and redesign infrastructure to ensure interventions for addressing barriers to learning and

teaching are attended to as a primary and necessary component of school improvement and in ways that promote economies of scale.

- (3) Guidelines for school improvement planning should include an emphasis on redefining and reframing roles and functions for school-site leadership related to development and implementation of such a system.
- (4) Guidelines for school improvement planning should specify ways to weave school and community resources into a cohesive and integrated continuum of interventions over time.

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 are at a turning point in how schools and communities address the problems of children and youth. The need for cohesion is clear. But, transformation of public schools across the country requires cohesion *plus*.

Addressing barriers to learning and teaching must be made an essential and high level focus in every school improvement planning guide. Current initiatives for program evaluation and research projects should be redesigned to include a focus on amassing and expanding the research-base for building and evaluating a comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching, with a long-range emphasis on demonstrating the long-term impact of such a system on academic achievement. To do less is to ensure too many children are left behind.

Every school improvement plan must meet this challenge by ensuring it focuses on development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach to addressing barriers to learning, development, and teaching. Development of such an approach requires shifts in prevailing policy and new frameworks for practice. In addition, for significant systemic change to occur, policy and program commitments must be demonstrated through effective allocation and redeployment of resources. That is, finances, personnel, time, space, equipment, and other essential resources must be made available, organized, and used in ways that adequately operationalize policy and promising practices. This includes ensuring sufficient resources to develop an effective structural foundation for systemic changes, sustainability, and ongoing capacity building.

The implications for SEAs are many. The concern is whether education agencies can escape old ways of thinking and reorganize in ways that more effectively support district and school capacity building.

References

From the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA:

School improvement planning: What's missing? <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsmissing.htm>

Another initiative? Where does it fit? A unifying framework and an integrated infrastructure for schools to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infrastructure/anotherinitiative-exec.pdf>

Designing schoolwide programs in Title I schools: Using the non-regulatory guidance in ways that address barriers to learning and teaching.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefs/DOEGuidance.pdf>

Legislation in need of improvement: Reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act to better address barriers to learning
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/nclbra.pdf>

Addressing what's missing in school improvement planning: Expanding standards and accountability to encompass an enabling or learning supports component
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enabling/standards.pdf>

Toward a school district infrastructure that more effectively addresses barriers to learning and teaching.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs//briefs/toward a school district infrastructure.pdf>

Infrastructure for learning support at district, regional, and state offices.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentssupport/toolkit/aidk.pdf>

Resource oriented teams: Key infrastructure mechanisms for enhancing education supports.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Report/resource_oriented_teams.pdf

Developing resource-oriented mechanisms to enhance learning supports - a continuing education packet.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/contedu/developing_resource_orientedmechanisms.pdf

About infrastructure mechanisms for a comprehensive learning support component.
http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infrastructure/infra_mechanisms.pdf

Frameworks for systemic transformation of student and learning supports.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/frameworksforsystemictransformation.pdf>).

Community schools: Working toward institutional transformation.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/csinstitutionaltrans.pdf>

Also see “Toolkit” for *Rebuilding Student Supports into a Comprehensive System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

Other relevant resources:

- Iowa State Department of Education working with the Iowa Collaborative for Youth Development (2005). *Fulfilling a Promise, Investing in Iowa's Future: Enhancing Iowa's Systems of Supports for Learning and Development*
http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=2588
>Brief Summary online at: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/iowabriefsummaryofdesign.pdf>
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- Adelman, H. S. & Taylor, L. (2008). School-wide approaches to addressing barriers to learning and teaching. In B. Doll & J. Cummings (Eds.) *Transforming school mental health services: Population-based approaches to promoting the competency and wellness of children*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

RESPONSE FORM

**State Education Agencies:
Toward Developing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports**

If you know of any efforts in SEAs that are focusing on addressing barriers to learning and teaching in a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated way, please let us know so that we can contact them and let others know about them.

Interested in Networking/Sharing/Learning More About the Matters Covered?

Check off any of the following that are a good match with your interests:

- receiving regular information about the matters discussed in the report
- convening a leadership institute focused on these matters
- having a further in-depth interchange with our Center about these or other matters of mutual interest and concern.

Finally, if you take any strategic action related to these matters, please share it with us so we can share it with others as a catalyst for change.

Note: We have established a public-private collaboration with the Community Affairs Unit of Scholastic Inc. The focus is on enhancing leadership for school policy and practice to promote development of a comprehensive system of learning supports. As part of this work, Scholastic has developed a plan with CCSSO for us to work with SEAs on a *Rebuilding for Learning* Initiative. The initiative is designed to provide leaders with professional development and technical assistance resources to help them substantively rethink and comprehensively restructure how they address barriers to learning and teaching.

Want to learn more about this? See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/rebuilding.htm> or contact:

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Linda Taylor or Howard Adelman, Co-directors of the Center at UCLA
Ltaylor@ucla.edu adelman@psych.ucla.edu 310/825-3634

Your Name _____ Title _____
Organization _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone (____) _____ Fax (____) _____ E-Mail _____

Thanks for completing this form. Return by FAX to (310) 206-8716.

The Center for Mental Health in Schools is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project in the Dept. of Psychology, UCLA.

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