



A Center Brief

Viable School Improvement Requires a Developmental Strategy that Moves Beyond the Skewed Wish List and Reworks Operational infrastructure

(May, 2011)

Abstract

Whatever is enacted legislatively, viable school improvement depends on how policy makers conceive and leaders plan to address the full range of factors affecting learning and teaching and how the operational infrastructure is reworked to enable strategic and effective development of essential interventions. This is especially so for schools that desperately need to improve equity of opportunity.

With these matters in mind, the focus of this brief is on (1) cautioning about the skewed and wish list nature of current school improvement proposals, (2) highlighting the expanded policy framework that should be guiding school improvement planning, and (3) suggesting prototypes for reworking existing operational infrastructure to strategically mobilize and help schools continuously improve.

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Viable School Improvement Requires a Developmental Strategy that Moves Beyond the Skewed Wish List and Reworks Operational Infrastructure

While it is self-evident that all children can learn, the problem confronting schools is that of *enabling* all children to learn.

Recommendations for improving schools are coming from the left, right, and center. President Obama and the U.S. Department of Education have their blueprint. Members in both houses of Congress, many governors and state legislators, and all school boards have positions on what needs to change in public education. Philanthropists such as Bill Gates and Eli Broad have their recipes for systemic changes. Education associations have called for a focus on the whole/total child. Coalitions of concerned professionals have stressed the need for enhancing school climate, developing more community schools, and a “broader, bolder approach.” Everyone has ideas for improving school and teacher accountability. The list is long and growing.

Whatever is enacted legislatively, viable school improvement depends on how policy makers conceive and leaders plan to address the full range of factors affecting learning and teaching and how the operational infrastructure is reworked to enable strategic and effective development of essential interventions over an appropriate period time. This is especially so for schools that desperately need to improve in order to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and beyond.

With these matters in mind, the focus of this brief is on:

- (1) cautioning about the skewed and wish list nature of current school improvement proposals,
- (2) highlighting the expanded policy framework that should be guiding school improvement planning, and
- (3) suggesting prototypes for reworking existing operational infrastructure to strategically mobilize and help schools continuously improve.

A Skewed List of Proposals

We have documented, synthesized, and analyzed the extensive list of major recommendations being widely advocated for school improvement (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2010a, b, c). For obvious political and economic reasons, it is clear that legislative action in the short-term will neither enact nor provide financial support for much of what is proposed. Thus, most of the recommendations are really a wish list for school improvement.

At the same time, our analyses indicate that proposals for enabling equity of opportunity are marginalized. This fundamentally skews the recommendations away from concerns about addressing barriers to learning, development, teaching, and parenting.

Analyses indicate that the skewing seen in the bulk of proposals for improving schools stems from the reality that school improvement policy has been dominated by a two component framework (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2010a, c). For example, at the federal level, the dominance of a two component framework is seen in school improvement guidelines, the school turnaround models, current priorities for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as outlined in the U. S. Department of Education’s *A Blueprint for Reform*, in *Race to the Top* applications, and in Congressional testimony. In all these, the essential thrust is on improving (1) instruction and (2) governance and management of resources; essential student and learning supports, while mentioned, are considered tangentially, viewed as auxiliary services, and formulated in piecemeal and fragmented ways. Thus, critical facets of enabling equity of opportunity are marginalized.

*A stated
commitment to
equity and
opportunity for
all students . . .*

The Obama administration’s Blueprint for Reform. This proposal underscores the marginalization of student and learning supports. It states that enabling equity of opportunity requires “moving toward comparability in resources between high- and low-poverty schools,” “rigorous and fair accountability for all levels,” and “meeting the needs of diverse learners ... by providing appropriate instruction and access to a challenging curriculum along with additional supports and attention where needed.” However, sparse attention is given to “additional supports and attention where needed.”

The commitment to equity and opportunity for all students is stated specifically as the third of five priorities. The closest the document comes to delineating supports to meet this priority are sections on

- “Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners and Other Diverse Learners” (i.e., students eligible for compensatory and special education)
- “Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students.”

In both instances, what the blueprint indicates amounts mostly to tinkering rather than system transformation. While there is language about a “new approach,” there is continuing neglect of extensive systemic deficits related to interventions targeting student diversity, disability, and differences.

A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education. This widely circulated proposal from a coalition of professionals recognizes the need to expand recommendations for school improvement. They note that factors working against equity begin before enrollment in formal schooling and that “there is no evidence that school improvement strategies *by themselves* can substantially, consistently, and sustainably” close achievement gaps. But they go on to stress that

“there is solid evidence that policies aimed directly at education-related social and economic disadvantages can improve school performance and student achievement. The persistent failure of policymakers to act on that evidence – in tandem with a school improvement agenda – is a major reason why the association between disadvantage and low student achievement remains so strong.”

To account for pre- and out-of-school supports, the proposal calls for “high-quality early childhood and pre-school programs, after-school and summer programs, and programs that develop parents’ capacity to support their children’s education;” it also emphasizes building “working relationships between schools and surrounding community institutions.” Moreover, the proposal states the need not only for “basic academic skills and cognitive growth narrowly defined, but to development of the whole person, including physical health, character, social development, and non-academic skills, from birth through the end of formal schooling.” Special value is assigned to “the new knowledge and skills that young people need to become effective participants in a global environment, including citizenship, creativity, and the ability to respect and work with persons from different backgrounds” (<http://www.boldapproach.org/main-bba-statement>)

Ironically, while broadening the scope of intervention and recognizing the need to “work with persons from different backgrounds,” this proposal limits the focus with respect to enabling learning.

... but continuing neglect of systemic deficits related to addressing barriers to learning & teaching

The limitations of the broader, bolder approach and the Obama blueprint for enabling equity of opportunity are underscored by analyzing how school improvement proposals and existing plans

- (1) directly address barriers to learning and teaching and
- (2) re-engage students who have become disconnected from classroom instruction.

Such an analysis finds that

- planning and implementation related to these matters often are done in an ad hoc and piecemeal manner
- the functions of different student and learning supports staff are delineated in relative isolation from each other
- a great deal of the work is oriented to discrete problems and with overreliance on specialized services for individuals and small groups (e.g., identified as at risk for specific problems such as grade retention, dropout, substance abuse, etc.) at the expense of supporting the many in need.

It also should be stressed that the tendency among reformers is to focus on the *fragmentation* that characterizes student and learning supports. As a result, most proposals emphasize strategies to improve coordination. Better coordination is a good idea. But it doesn't really address the core problem which is that school-owned student supports are marginalized in policy and practice.

And, it should be noted that, for the most part, community involvement at schools also remains a token and marginal concern. Moreover, the trend toward fragmentation is compounded by most school-linked services' initiatives. This happens because such initiatives focus to a great extent on bringing community *services* to schools using a co-location model, rather than integrating such services with the ongoing intervention efforts of school staff.

Wishing is Not Enough

Political and economic realities make it clear that many more significant school changes, albeit skewed in nature, will be forthcoming. However, it is also evident that legislative action in the short-term will neither enact nor provide financial support for much of what is proposed.

Thus, within the degrees of freedom left after meeting legislative mandates, guidelines, and accountability demands, those trying to improve schools are confronted with two problems

- (1) *selecting a viable subset of recommended improvements* (identifying from the wish list those that can make a significant difference, identifying what else is essential to viable school improvement, and choosing those improvements that can be implemented equitably given available sparse resources),
- (2) *reworking the operational infrastructure* in ways that can mobilize and help a district's schools develop the chosen improvements over a period of years.

Using a Three Component Policy Framework for School Improvement

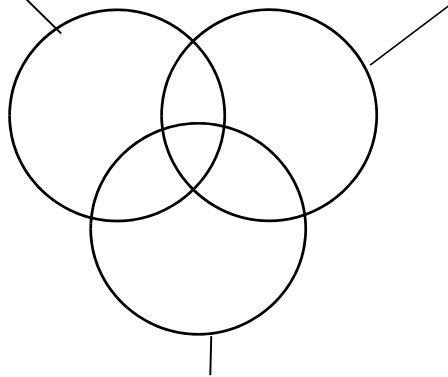
In selecting recommendations, viable school improvement requires countering the skewed nature of school improvement policy and practice. This involves shifting from the prevailing two- to a three-component policy framework for improving schools (see Exhibit 1). As illustrated, the three components are: (1) facilitating learning and development, (2) addressing barriers to learning and teaching in ways that enable learning and development, and (3) governing and managing. Such a three component framework has been adopted by pioneering states and districts across the U.S. (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011a).

Exhibit 1

Three Component Framework for School Improvement Planning

Direct Facilitation of Learning & Development
(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)

Clearly, the many recommendations for school improvement touch upon major concerns related to all three components (see Appendix A). However, as our analyses have indicated the recommendations made by the Obama administration and other leaders and stakeholder organizations mainly stress changes in (1) management/governance and (2) instruction/curriculum. And, it is noteworthy that the considerable emphasis on improving leadership focuses overwhelmingly on principal leadership as related to these two components.

Thus, while there are recommendations relevant to the third component, there is no systemic focus on developing the type of comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approaches necessary to address the many overlapping barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. For example, there is sparse attention to the need for (a) rethinking and restructuring the work of student and learning support professionals, (b) redeploying existing resources used for student and learning supports, and (c) weaving school and community resources together. As a result, there is little recognition of the role such improvements can play both in helping teachers enhance engagement and re-engagement in classroom learning and in establishing the type of caring climate in classrooms and school-wide that promotes progress and well-being.

Why a Third Component?

Effective instruction is, of course, fundamental to a school's mission. None of us want to send our children to a school where teachers do not have high standards, expectations, and competence. At the same time, the reality is that many factors can interfere with learning and teaching. Teachers in low performing schools point to how few students appear motivationally ready and able to learn what the daily lesson plan prescribes. Teachers in the upper grades report that a significant percentage of their students have become actively disengaged and alienated from classroom learning. And, "acting out" behavior, especially bullying and disrespect for others, is rampant. (So is passivity, but this attracts less attention.) One result of all this is seen in the increasing number of students misdiagnosed as having learning disabilities (LD) and attention deficit-hyperactivity disorders (ADHD). Another result is the number of dropouts and pushouts (students and teachers).

Teachers need and want considerable help in addressing barriers to student and school success. Unfortunately, the sparse help they currently receive is grossly inadequate. This unfortunate state of affairs cries out for development of a comprehensive system of student and learning supports to enable all students to learn and all teachers to teach effectively.

As Judy Jeffrey, then chief state school officer for Iowa, stressed in introducing the design for Iowa's *Systems of Supports for Development and Learning* (2004):

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 [design] 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.

And as Paul Pastorek, the Louisiana chief state school officer, has stressed:

If we really want to eliminate the achievement gap, we must also ask schools to develop comprehensive plans to address the [many] needs of our students. ... Most of our schools have resources in place, but we need to reorganize those resources to proactively meet the needs of the entire student body....

Overall, to date, too many of the recommendations for improving schools amount to tinkering with the system rather than focusing on essential systemic transformation to meet the challenge of enabling all students to have an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Ending the marginalization of the third component in school legislation can help correct fundamental *systemic* deficits in how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and intervene to re-engage disconnected students. Even without legislation, districts can adopt a three component framework for school improvement and develop an enabling or learning supports component.

Some Implications of the Third Component

From the perspective of the third component, transformation means fully integrating into school improvement a focus on how to:

- reframe the fragmented and piecemeal set of student support programs and services into a design for a *comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system* to enable learning
- ensure the design encompasses both in-classroom and school-wide approaches – including interventions to enhance teachers’ ability to respond to common learning and behavior problems, support transitions, increase home and community connections, and respond to and prevent crises
- use the resources already allocated for student and learning supports to develop the system over a period of time (i.e., redeploying what has been budgeted from general funds, compensatory and special education, special projects and initiatives)
- revamp district, school, and school-community operational infrastructures to weave local resources together strategically with the aim of enhancing and evolving a student and learning supports system
- pursue school improvement and systemic change with a high degree of policy commitment to developing and sustaining the component that comprehensively addresses barriers to learning and teaching and re-engages students in classroom learning

Some Caveats

In the context of the third component for school improvement, it should be noted that what is identified as a *comprehensive* approach often is not comprehensive enough. And most proposals do not focus on developing a *system* of supports. More often than not the main emphasis is on coordination of fragmented efforts and/or linking with community health and social services. In some instances, the focus expands to include a variety of piecemeal programs for safe and drug free schools, family assistance, after-school and summer programs, and so forth. All these programs and services are relevant. But, most proposals to improve supports still fail to escape old ways of thinking about what schools need both in terms of content and process in order to effectively address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

Development of a comprehensive system of student and learning supports involves much more than linking with health and human services on and off school campuses, more than coordinating services, and more than applying the three tier intervention pyramid that has been popularized (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011a). And such a system should not be confused with CDC's Coordinated School Health Program or the full services community schools movement. The necessary systemic transformation encompasses such efforts but goes much further. The need is not for additional piecemeal and ad hoc initiatives; the need is for fundamental transformation of how schools provide equity of opportunity and how schools and communities weave resources to achieve this result (see Appendix B). It is from such transformative efforts that one can expect an enhanced school climate to emerge.

The intent of the third component is to transform school improvement efforts to ensure development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system for addressing factors that interfere with learning, development, and teaching. Our Center has produced policy and practice analyses and prototype frameworks that can be helpful in articulating the need and guides for such systemic change (see references in Appendix B). This body of work represents a new ingredient in addressing long-standing problems that have been marginalized in education policy at all levels. It has particular relevance for moving forward in closing the achievement gap, reducing school violence, addressing psychosocial and mental and physical health concerns, stemming the tide of dropouts, shutting down the pipeline from schools to prison, and promoting well being and social justice.

Reworking Operational Infrastructure at All Levels

Given that the functional arenas are defined in terms of three components and that the decisions and choices encompass all three arenas as primary and essential, the problem becomes one of reworking existing operational infrastructures to mobilize and help schools develop chosen improvements over a period of years. 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 major functions and related tasks to be accomplished in an increasingly cohesive, cost-efficient, and equitable way.

What follows are operational infrastructure prototypes our center has developed emphasizing the third component. They are conceived from the school on up to the state education agency. In pursuing the three components, the design of the prototypes stresses mechanisms that ensure a broad base of *systemic* leadership, planning, implementation, evaluation, and accountability.

A well-designed operational infrastructure enables leaders to steer together and to empower and work productively with staff on major tasks related to policy and practice. Example of tasks are: designing and directing activity, planning and implementing specific 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.

Developing and institutionalizing a three component framework for improving schools requires infrastructure mechanisms that are integrated with each other and are fully integrated into school improvement policy and practice.

**Infrastructure
should be
designed from the
school outward**

Because the intent is to improve schools, infrastructure should be designed from the school outward. That is, conceptually, the emphasis is first on what an integrated infrastructure should look like at the *school level*. Then, the focus expands to include the mechanisms needed to connect a *family or complex of schools*(e.g., a feeder pattern) and establish collaborations with surrounding community resources. Ultimately, central district units need to be restructured in ways that best support the work at the school and school complex levels. Indeed, a key guideline in designing district infrastructure is that it must provide leadership and build capacity for maximizing development and integration of each component at every school and for establishing a mechanism for connecting a family of schools.

**At School and
District Levels**

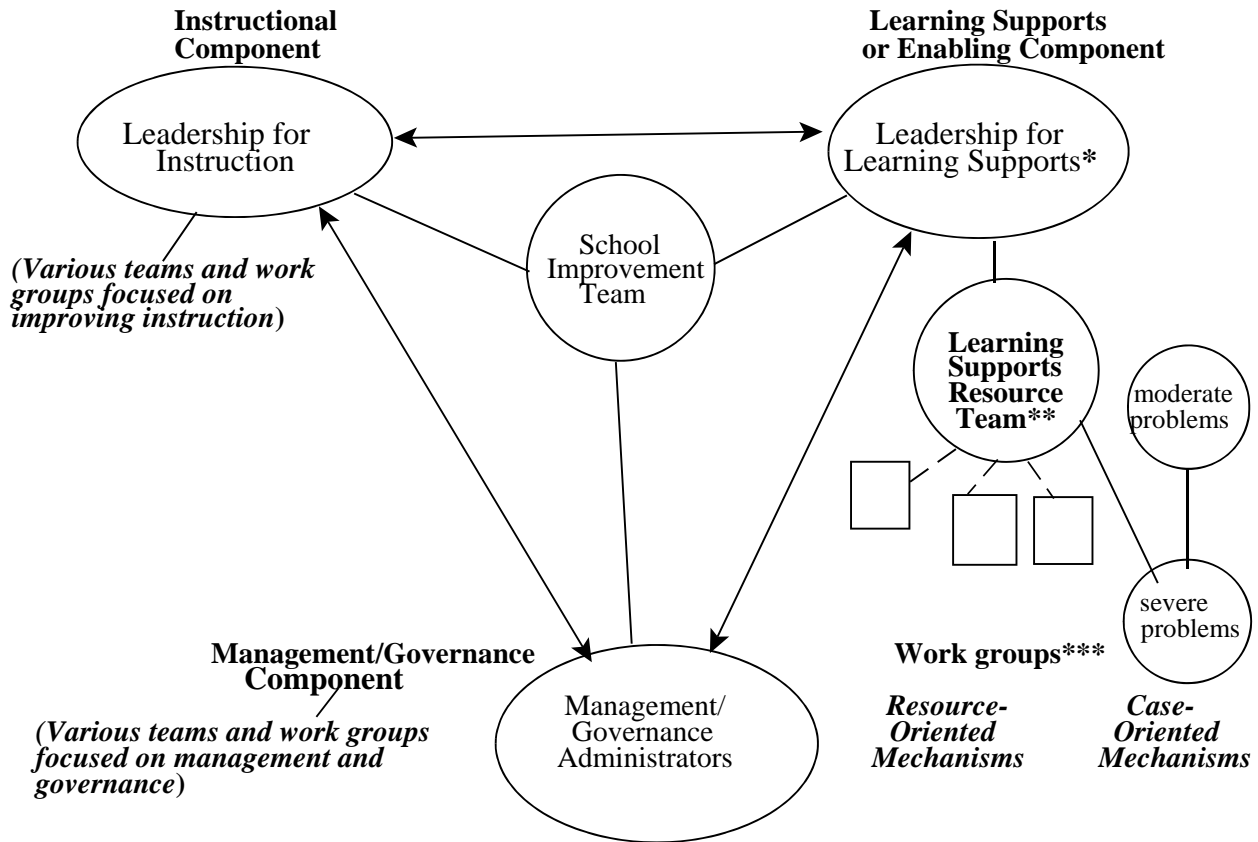
At both the school and district, it is crucial to establish leadership for the third component at a high enough level to ensure the administrator is always an active participant at key planning and decision-making tables. Others will play leadership roles related to work groups.

As the operational infrastructure is redesigned, the work of personnel must be reframed, new collaborative arrangements established, and authority (power) redistributed. Given the degree of change involved, those assigned to do the restructuring must have appropriate incentives, safeguards, and adequate resources and support for making major systemic changes.

Exhibit 2 illustrates a school infrastructure prototype emphasizing learning supports mechanisms. As Exhibit 2 illustrates, the administrator for the third component heads up a set of mechanisms for accomplishing the component's work. Most of the mechanisms should be comparable to those established for the instructional component. Obviously, a small school has less staff than most larger schools. Nevertheless, the three major functional components necessary for school improvement are the same in all schools. The challenge in any school is to pursue all three facets in an integrated and effective manner.

Exhibit 2

Prototype Example of an Integrated Three Component Infrastructure at the School Level



*Learning Supports or Enabling Component Leadership consists of an administrator and other advocates/champions with responsibility and accountability for ensuring the vision for the component is not lost. The administrator meets with and provides regular input to the Learning Supports Resource Team.

**A Learning Supports Resource Team ensures component cohesion, integrated implementation, and ongoing development. It meets weekly to guide and monitor daily implementation and development of all programs, services, initiatives, and systems at a school that are concerned with providing learning supports and specialized assistance.

***Ad hoc and standing work groups – Initially, these are the various “teams” that already exist related to various initiatives and programs (e.g., a crisis team) and for processing “cases” (e.g., a student assistance team, an IEP team). Where redundancy exists, work groups can be combined. Others are formed as needed by the Learning Supports Resource Team to address specific concerns. These groups are essential for accomplishing the many tasks associated with such a team’s functions.

For more on this, see

- ><http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/infrastructure/anotherinitiative-exec.pdf>
- ><http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentsupport/toolkit/aidk.pdf>

***Representation at
decision making
tables is essential***

School work groups can focus on specific aspects of developing a comprehensive system of learning supports. Organizing in this way moves student and learning supports away from the marginalization, fragmentation, unnecessary redundancy, and counterproductive competition that has resulted from organizing around specific programs, services, and/or in terms of specific disciplines. This, of course, requires cross-content and cross-disciplinary training so that all personnel are prepared to pursue new directions.

A formal infrastructure link also is needed to ensure the third component is fully integrated with school improvement efforts (e.g., in the classroom and school-wide). This means the leader and some of work group members must be included at school improvement planning and decision making tables with their counterparts working on improving instruction and management/governance.

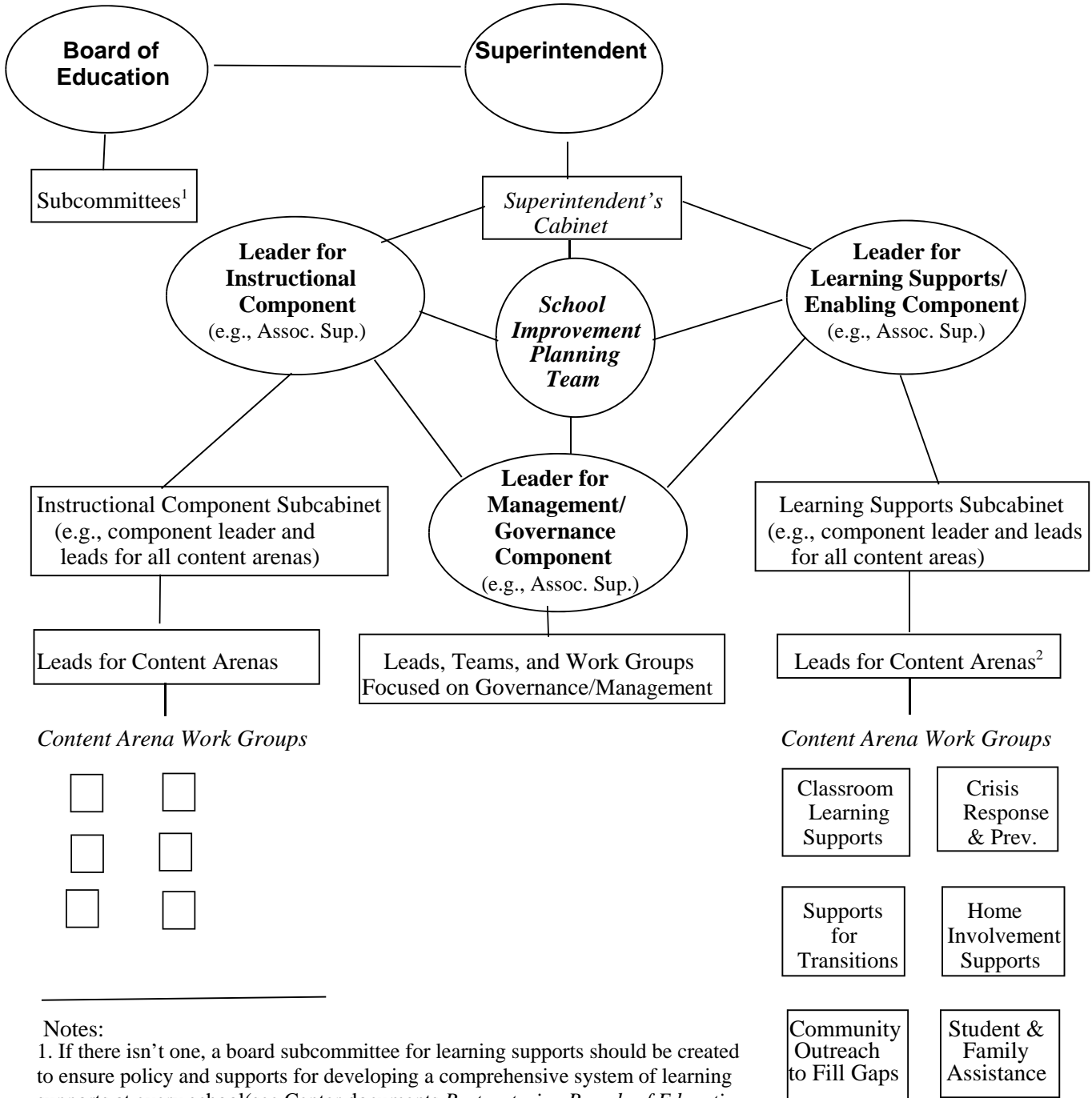
Exhibit 3 outlines a framework to consider in reworking district infrastructure in ways that promote development of a comprehensive system of learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching. As indicated, each component should have a “cabinet” level administrative leader (e.g., an associate superintendent, a chief officer) who is responsible and accountable for all resources related to a component and who establishes mechanisms for accomplishing the component’s work. The mechanisms should be comparable to those mechanisms established for accomplishing content and process tasks related to the instructional component.

As illustrated, we specifically suggest establishing a "subcabinet" for the third component consisting of leaders for six major content arenas. The intent is for personnel to have accountability for advancing a specific arena *and* for ensuring a systemic and integrated approach to addressing all barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Again, this is key to moving away from the marginalization, fragmentation, redundancy, and counterproductive competition that has resulted from traditional organization.

A formal infrastructure link also is needed to ensure the third component is fully integrated with the district’s school improvement efforts. This means including the leader and some of the subcabinet for the component at district planning and decision making tables. (In Exhibit 3, we designate the district mechanism for this as the “School Improvement *Planning* Team;” most such teams, of course, also establish guidelines, monitor progress, and so forth.)

Exhibit 3

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



Notes:

1. If there isn't one, a board subcommittee for learning supports should be created to ensure policy and supports for developing a comprehensive system of learning supports at every school (see Center documents *Restructuring Boards of Education to Enhance Schools' Effectiveness in Addressing Barriers to Student Learning* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/boardrep.pdf> and *Example of a Formal Proposal for Moving in New Directions for Student Support* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newdirections/exampleproposal.pdf>)

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.

**Connecting
Families
of Schools**

At this point, it is important to stress the value of linking a family of schools to maximize use of limited resources and achieve economies of scale. Schools in the same geographic or catchment area have a number of shared concerns. Furthermore, some programs and personnel already are or can be shared by several neighboring schools, thereby minimizing redundancy, reducing costs, and enhancing equity.

A multi-site team can provide a mechanism to help ensure cohesive and equitable deployment of resources and also can enhance the pooling of resources across schools and with the community to reduce costs. Such a mechanism can be particularly useful for integrating the efforts of high schools and their feeder middle and elementary schools. This clearly is important in addressing barriers with those families who have youngsters attending more than one level of schooling in the same feeder pattern. It is neither cost-effective nor good intervention for each school to contact a family separately in instances where several children from a family are in need of special attention. With respect to linking with community resources, multi-school teams are especially attractive to community agencies who often don't have the time or personnel to make independent arrangements with every school.

A well-designed infrastructure for a family of schools helps minimize redundancy, reduce costs, achieve economies of scale, and enhance equity

In general, a group of schools can benefit from a multi-site mechanism designed to provide leadership, facilitate communication and connection, and ensure quality improvement across sites. For example, a multi-site council might consist of a high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools. Meeting once a month, it can bring together one-two representatives from each school to help (a) coordinate and integrate programs serving multiple schools, (b) identify and meet common needs with respect to guidelines and staff development, and (c) create linkages and collaborations among schools and with community agencies. In this last regard, it can play a special role in community outreach both to create formal working relationships and ensure that all participating schools have access to such resources.

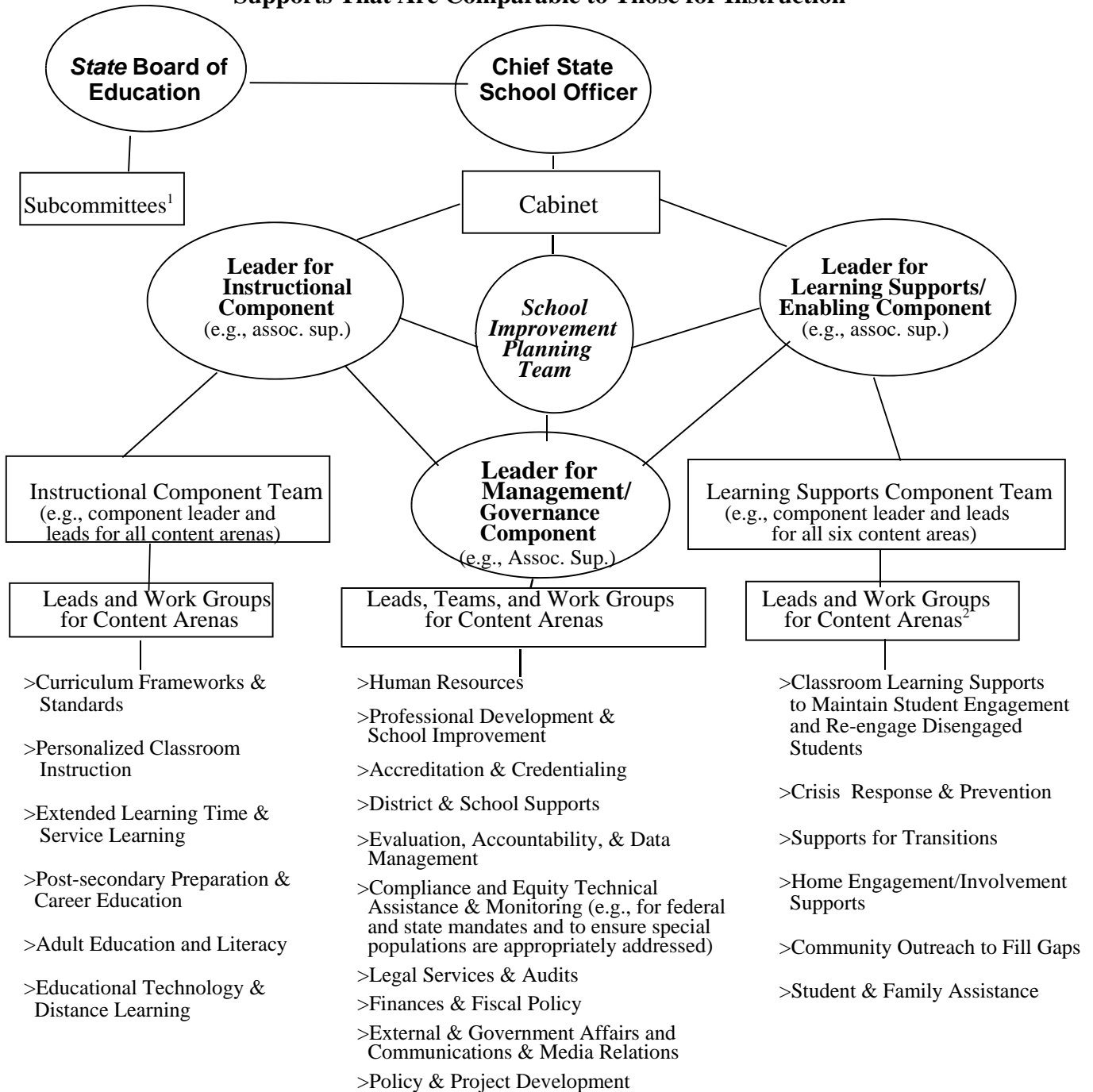
More generally, the Council provides a useful mechanism for leadership, communication, maintenance, quality improvement, and ongoing development of a comprehensive continuum of programs and services. Natural starting points for councils are the sharing of needs assessments, resource maps, analyses, and recommendations for reform and restructuring. Specific areas of initial focus would be on local, high priority concerns, such as addressing violence and developing prevention programs and safe school and neighborhood plans.

**Reorganization
at Regional
and State
Education
Agencies**

For regional units and SEAs to play a more potent role in providing capacity building support for school improvement and transformation, the agency's operational infrastructure also must be fundamentally reworked. Exhibit 4 lays out a prototype for the state agency.

Exhibit 4

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.

Concluding Comments

Everyone wants better schools. And clearly there is no shortage of recommendations for improving schools. But making recommendations, showcasing admirable schools, headlining superstar principals, and spotlighting good teachers is not much of a strategy for addressing the scale of need.

While the need calls for moving forward as quickly as possible, fundamental transformation of so many schools requires a substantial, strategic, and relentless investment of time, talent, and capacity building. In this brief, we have emphasized that viable school improvement for every school requires a framework that addresses the full range of factors affecting learning and teaching and an operational infrastructure that enables schools to phase in major systemic changes. Some schools will be able to accomplish a great deal quickly; others will progress at a slower pace. Every school needs to start by (a) identifying a viable set of improvements that can address that school's fundamental concerns and (b) establishing a developmental process that allows the school to make continuous progress.

The U.S. has over 90,000 schools and about 15,000 schools districts. Growing awareness of how many of these schools could be identified as schools needing to be turned around is underscoring realization that current systemic change approaches have not been well-conceived. It is easy to specify and demand desired results; the hard problem is framing and establishing effective and appropriate mechanisms for getting from here to there. School improvement policy and practice must do more to help districts deal with the complexities of making fundamental systemic changes and taking them to scale.

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Appendix A

Examples of Prevalent Recommendations for Improving Schools Categorized in Terms of the Three Component Framework

A 2010 Center report synthesizes the gist of recommendations submitted and given in hearing testimony for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).^{*} The many proposed items were categorized using the three component framework, with specific recommendations clustered under common reform concerns. Appendices in that report list the full set grouped under the organizations and individuals submitting them.

To illustrate the wish list nature of prevailing proposals, below are the three basic categories, related major subcategories, and some specific examples of recommendations. Note the limited nature and scope of recommendations in Category II.

I. Instructional Component

- A. *Improving General Instruction and Curriculum* (e.g., recommendations stress high expectations, individualized instruction, project learning, service-learning, tutoring, mentoring, teachers' shared responsibility for all students, class size reduction with a concentrated formula for funding high poverty schools, enhanced curriculum, including STEM, health education, and social emotional learning, personalized inservice development)
- B. *Teaching Special Populations* (e.g., recommendations stress enhanced preservice and inservice for teachers related to special populations, an enhanced focus on Universal Design for Learning, better differentiation of special education students and ELLs, enhancing practices for specified subgroups such as those with learning disabilities, those in foster care, those designated as homeless)

II. Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching and Re-engaging Disconnected Students

- A. *Maintaining/Increasing Student and Learning Supports Personnel* (e.g., recommendations stress providing sufficient specialized instructional support personnel and student support services to meet the needs of the whole child and encompass all groups of personnel service professionals)
- B. *Enhance Coordination and Alignment of Student and Learning Supports* (e.g., recommendations stress improving coordination and alignment between schools and programs, streamlining comprehensive services for children, dismantling obstacles to collaboration between and among school systems and social, health, and safety services, establishing new initiatives to leverage and integrate community resources for student supports)

(cont.)

^{*} Center for Mental Health in Schools (2010). *Synthesis and analysis of recommendations to Congress for ESEA reauthorization from the perspective of addressing barriers to learning & teaching*. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/esearecs.pdf>

- C. *Enhance Organizational Infrastructure for Leadership, Staffing, and Coherence of Student and Learning Supports* (e.g., recommendations stress clarifying conflicting terminology, definitions, and role of pupil/related services personnel; changing current organizational and operational infrastructure to end marginalization of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students)
- D. *Intervention Focus for Student and Learning Supports* (e.g., recommendations stress ensuring early-after-onset intervention, transition supports, enhancing positive and preventative approaches, using RTI and evidence based interventions, ensuring access to social, mental health, and home support services, ensuring schools are safe and healthy)

III. Management/Governance

Many of the recommendations related to system management and governance clearly have implications for instruction and curriculum and for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

- B. *Finances/Resources* (e.g., recommendations stress increasing and aligning funding; ensuring and championing adequate, equitable, coherent, and sustainable federal, state, and local funding for all public schools; targeting resources to support reforms and enhance support for specific programs; ensuring transparency in distribution of federal, state, and local funds)
- C. *Accountability and Decision Making Policy* (e.g., recommendations stress modifying systems for gathering and reporting accountability indicators, expanding what is measured, improving approach to persistently failing schools)
- D. *Personnel* (e.g., recommendations stress ways to improve preservice education; certification; recruitment, hiring, placement, and induction; continuing professional development for teachers and principals/leaders; collaboration; evaluation, rewards, retention, and removal)
- E. *Data Systems, Standards, Assessment, and Measurement* (e.g., recommendations stress ways to maintain, enhance, expand, and facilitate and ensure appropriate use of data systems; enhance standards; improve and expand assessment and measurement)
- F. *Research and Dissemination* (e.g., recommendations stress enhancing research on the science-base for practices, innovation, and related dissemination)
- G. *Learning Environment/School Climate* (e.g., recommendations stress a focus on enhancing learning environments from early childhood and pre-kindergarten through postsecondary, including establishing a 21st century teaching and learning culture and extended learning time and developing community schools; increasing school options and multiple pathways; enhancing parent and community involvement, public information, and transparency)

Appendix B

Operationalizing the Third Component

The move to a three component framework is meant to be a paradigm shift. The complexity of factors interfering with learning, development, and teaching underscore the need to coalesce efforts to address the variety of factors that interfere with a school accomplishing its mission. A number of institutional indicators and evidence from pioneering work on moving in new directions to enhance student and learning supports all herald a paradigm shift.

As indicated in this brief, the shift is from a marginalized and fragmented set of student support services to development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system. The intent of the system is to ensure that schools are well-positioned to enable students to get around barriers to learning and re-engage them in classroom instruction. The emphasis on re-engagement recognizes that efforts to address interfering factors, provide positive behavior support, and prevent disengagement and dropouts are unlikely to be effective over time if they are not designed in ways that ensure students re-engage in classroom instruction.

As states and districts operationalize the third component, different designations are used. We refer to it as an enabling component; most places designate it as a learning supports component. And increasingly, learning supports are being 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.

In all instances, the emphasis in operationalizing the component is on

- (1) a full continuum of interconnected subsystems of intervention and
- (2) a multifaceted set of content arenas that cohesively integrate classroom and school-wide interventions

The continuum encompasses integrated *subsystems* for

- (a) promoting healthy development and preventing problems,
- (b) responding as early after problem onset as is feasible, and
- (c) providing for those whose serious, pervasive, and chronic problems require more intensive assistance and accommodation.

At schools, the content (or curriculum) for addressing a full range of interfering factors can be coalesced into six classroom and school-wide arenas. These focus on:

- *enhancing regular classroom strategies to enable learning* (e.g., improving instruction for students who have become disengaged from learning at school and for those with mild-moderate learning and behavior problems)
- *supporting transitions* (i.e., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes and many other transitions)
- *increasing home and school connections*
- *responding to, and where feasible, preventing crises*

- *increasing community involvement and support* (outreaching to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
- *facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed.*

Developing the component involves weaving together what schools already are doing and enhancing the effort by inviting in home and community resources to help fill high priority systemic gaps. The matrix on the next page coalesces the continuum with the content to provide a planning tool that can guide school improvement by indicating where current and proposed activity fits and what's missing (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf>).

At this point, it is relevant to stress that the three component framework does nothing to detract from the fact that a strong academic program is the foundation from which all other school-based interventions must flow. Rather, an enabling or learning supports component provides an essential systemic way to address factors that interfere with students benefitting from improvements in academic instruction.

And, given that so many leaders for school improvement have a propensity to limit the focus in addressing barriers to linking and coordinating health and social services to schools, we stress that an enabling component is meant to be operationalized into a *comprehensive system of student and learning supports*. From this perspective, note that:

- *Comprehensive means more than coordination* – The need is for *system building* within and across a full *continuum of intervention* and includes weaving together school and community resources.
- *Comprehensive approaches to student and learning supports involve much more than enhancing availability and access to health and social services* or limiting the focus to any other piecemeal and ad hoc initiatives for addressing barriers to learning, development, and teaching.

For more on all this, see:

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2008). *Rebuilding for learning: Addressing Barriers to learning and teaching, and re-engaging students*. NY: Scholastic, Inc.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/rebuild/RebuildingV11RD28.pdf>

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006a). *The implementation guide to student learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide: New directions for addressing barriers to learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006b). *The school leader's guide to student learning supports: New directions for addressing barriers to learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2008). *Frameworks for systemic transformation of student and learning supports*. Los Angeles, CA: Author.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemic/frameworksforsystemictransformation.pdf>

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2011). *Where's it Happening? Examples of new directions for student support & lessons learned*. Los Angeles: Author.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/wheresithappening.htm>

Matrix for Reviewing Scope and Content of a Component to Address Barriers to Learning*

		Scope of Intervention		
		Subsystems for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems	Subsystem for Early Intervention (Early after problem onset)	Subsystem of Care
Organizing around the Content/ "curriculum" for addressing barriers to learning & promoting healthy development	Classroom-Focused Enabling			
	Crisis/ Emergency Assistance & Prevention			
	Support for transitions			
	Home Involvement in Schooling			
	Community Outreach/ Volunteers			
	Student and Family Assistance			
		Accommodations for diversity (e.g., differences & disabilities)	Specialized assistance & other intensified interventions (e.g., Special Education & School-Based Behavioral Health)	

*General initiatives and specific school-wide and classroom-based programs and services can be embedded into the matrix. Think about those related to positive behavioral supports, programs for safe and drug free schools, full service community schools and Family Resource Centers, special project initiatives such as the *School Based Health Center* movement, the *Safe Schools/Healthy Students* projects, and the *Coordinated School Health Program*, efforts to address bi-lingual, cultural, and other diversity concerns, compensatory and special education programs, and the mandates stemming from the No Child Left Behind Act.