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## Brief Report on Responses to an Inquiry about *Which Schools are Taking Equity Seriously?\**

(July 14, 2017)

*Why do you think we'll do  
better at school this year?*

*Because I heard that Congress passed a law  
that says every student will succeed!*



\*Work related to the *National Initiative to Transform Student and Learning Supports*. See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

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*Feel free to share this with concerned stakeholders*

## Brief Report on Responses to an Inquiry about Which Schools are Taking Equity Seriously?

Given the call for schools to enhance equity of opportunity, we sent out an inquiry across the country asking *Which Schools are Taking Equity Seriously?* (online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/july92017.pdf> .)

We received a variety of interesting responses.

- (1) One response focused on *Colorado's Equity Toolkit* for Administrators – <https://www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary/equitytoolkit> .  
As cited in the document: “This toolkit is designed to support you and your community in creating a plan and action steps for intervention and maintenance of a more accepting culture.”
- (2) A district’s Equity Task Force Leader indicated they have found it helpful to use the *Leadership for Equity Assessment & Development (LEAD) Tool™*, created by the Oregon Leadership Network (OLN).Education Northwest – <http://leadtool.educationnorthwest.org/>  
As cited on the OLN/Education Northwest website: “With the LEAD Tool, school leadership teams consisting of educators and stakeholders can assess their school's current climate, instructional practices, and policies through the lens of 10 high-leverage equitable practices. By using the rubrics, teams identify strengths and weaknesses and clarify targets. Using the rubric also provides teams direction for planning next steps and action.”
- (3) Another response focused on the *SWIFT* school framework – <http://www.swiftschools.org/>  
“SWIFT is a national K-8 technical assistance center that builds school capacity to provide academic and behavioral support to improve outcomes for all students through equity-based inclusion” (quoted from the website).

As we reviewed these resources, we agreed that each was a valuable resource. At same time, it was evident each has significant limitations in the way it frames what is involved in enhancing equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond. Below is a set of brief comments about what’s missing in these guiding frameworks.

### Center Comments

The unfortunate fact is that all three resources continue to marginalize the role of student/learning supports in addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

Here are some specific points to consider:

>**Colorado's Equity Toolkit for Administrators** – This resource for school improvement with equity as a focus makes a nice start, with a strong emphasis on bias and cultural competency and proficiency. Clearly, countering bias, harassment, prejudice and discrimination is a critical aspect of enhancing equity, but there are other barriers to equity of access and opportunity that also must be addressed before there is substantial equity of access, opportunity, and outcomes.

The toolkit’s deficiency in this respect is evident in the section of the document that outlines School Level Assessments and Evaluations. Note the absence of items that deal with essential student and learning supports and ways to unify these supports and then, over several years, develop them into a comprehensive and equitable system.

>**Leadership for Equity Assessment & Development (LEAD) Tool™** – This resource for school improvement with an equity emphasis is a good one to build upon, but school improvement efforts must not be limited to what the tool’s rubrics cover (albeit it covers a lot).

In using any set of rubrics focused on improving schools, it is essential to look beyond what's included to consider what's missing with respect to enhancing opportunity for all students to succeed at school and beyond. As those who follow the Center’s work know, that means looking for how the work addresses major barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Enhancing equity requires addressing these concerns *comprehensively* through a transformative approach to improving student and learning supports.

We note that the LEAD rubrics spell out and emphasize matters related to *instruction* (see its section on "for improvement of equitable instruction."). *However, the tool does not have a section on improvement of equitable student and learning supports to enhance/transform how school address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.* The absence of a primary emphasis on these concerns means that overrelying on the tool’s rubrics has a high probability of contributing to the continued marginalization of these concerns in school improvement policy, planning, and practice.

>**The SWIFT school framework** – Again, we find this work has many nice facets. There are, however, three fundamental concerns that arise when one digs deeply into what is included.

(a) The framework stresses adoption of a typical multi-tiered approach. As widely conceived, this version of a full continuum of interventions is extremely insufficient. See our analysis in: *ESSA State Consolidated Plans: Rethinking MTSS to Better Address Barriers to Learning* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essamtss.pdf>

In this context, enhanced school-community-family collaboration is essential. However, the framework’s narrow focus on expanding and better coordinating/integrating school-based services is not a viable approach across most urban and poor rural school districts. This reality has been demonstrated over the years by the limited impact of various initiatives to link health and social services to schools (including co-locating agency and other community resources at schools). Simply stated, a narrow services orientation to student and learning supports doesn't account for the full continuum of interventions needed to promote healthy development and learning and prevent and treat psychosocial and health problems for all students.

(b) As described, the framework for school *transformation* does not address the need for a unified, comprehensive, and equitable systemic approach to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. To appreciate what’s missing, see *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide* (access free through a link on the Center's homepage - <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>)

(c) The framework also doesn't address the problems of going to scale in a district and sustaining transformation over time. To understand what’s missing related to this, see *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*. <https://titles.cognella.com/transforming-student-and-learning-supports-9781516512782.html>

So the SWIFT emphasis is good as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough to enhance equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond for too many struggling students in too many struggling schools.

[Note: Besides the resources mentioned above, take a look at the way the state dept. in Alabama has framed its much needed efforts to enhance equity at schools - see <http://www.alsde.edu/ofc/ols/Documents/ALDOEDesignDocument.pdf>.

The Center also has a Quick Find to resources entitled: *Diversity, Disparities, and Promoting Equity* -- <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quickfind/diversity.htm>]

**To be clear:**

Any guiding framework for enhancing equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school and beyond must address major factors causing so many youngsters not to benefit from instructional reforms. These factors include a host of external and internal barriers interfering with student development and learning. The impact of such factors is seen in the wide range of educational, psychosocial, and mental health concerns schools must cope with each day.

The deficiencies noted in the above works are reflected in the available state ESSA plans and in almost all school improvement plans.

As the National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports stresses: *Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights; AND transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to enabling equity of opportunity, promoting whole child development, and enhancing school climate.*

Such a transformation involves unifying and then developing (over several years) a comprehensive, equitable, and systemic approach to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re engaging disconnected students.

For more in-depth discussion of key concerns discussed in this report, see

>*ESSA, equity of opportunity, and addressing barriers to learning*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essaanal.pdf>

>*Integrated student supports and equity*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/integpolicy.pdf>

>*Addressing disparities by enhancing equity of opportunity in schools*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/winter10.pdf>

If anyone has contact with anyone using or associated with the development and distribution of the above resources, it would good to share our work with them.

Finally, we continue to seek information about schools that are significantly enhancing equity of opportunity. And we value all exchanges related to enhancing equity by transforming how schools address barriers to learning....

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