



Pursuing Opportunities for Moving Proactively from the Margins into the Mainstream of School Improvement

Recent policy and program analyses conducted by our Center make it clear how few support staff are full participants at school and district tables where major school improvement decisions are made (see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/whatsmissing.htm>). It is not surprising, then, that student support staff are not appropriately accounted for in school improvement planning and implementation. This maintains the tendency for student supports to be fragmented and narrowly-focused and to reach only a small proportion of those in need. Moreover, this state of affairs fundamentally undermines efforts to elevate the status of the student support enterprise in policy and practice, and thus, we see already sparse budgets further cut and support staff forced into counter-productive competition with each other and with community professionals working with schools. Changes clearly, are needed.

Given federal policies as reflected in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) and the recent reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), there can be little doubt that action is essential. Moreover, with the impending reauthorization of NCLB, the field must move quickly, with a focus on assuring that a comprehensive system of student/learning supports is fully integrated into school improvement policy and practice.

One of the most proactive steps student support staff can take is to find a seat at school and district tables where planning and decision making are happening. To take action, indicate to the school principal and relevant district administrators that you want to contribute to the efforts of *School Improvement Planning Teams*.

Related to this, you can greatly strengthen your position if you also indicate that you want to help establish a *Resource-oriented Learning Supports Task Force*.

The aim of such a task force is to design a process to replace the current ad hoc, piecemeal approach to student support and redeploy those resources to begin developing a comprehensive system of learning supports. This includes

- analyses of how all relevant "initiatives" are incorporated under a unifying concept
- plans for developing a *Learning Supports Resource Team* at each school and a *Learning Supports Resource Council* for school clusters (e.g., feeder patterns) so that there is a regular focus on the type of resource analyses that is essential if school improvement planning and decision making are to appropriately and effectively address barriers to learning and teaching
- a process that reduces inappropriate referrals for special education and special services through development and implementation of a *Response to Intervention (RTI)* approach that goes beyond reteaching and includes major strategies for addressing barriers to
- and so much more!

The center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563 Phone: (310) 825-3634. Support comes in part from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Office of Adolescent Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.