



Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

The Comprehensive System of Learning Supports (CSLS) is a structured, systems-based approach to help schools meet the needs of students who are not benefitting from current instructional practices. A key aim is to identify and remove barriers to students' academic success and implement needed supports through a partnership with students, families, and the community.

Brief Summary	
Populations	Students who are performing below expectation in kindergarten through grade 12.
Gap addressed	Lack of school and community supports for underperforming students.
Core integration / transition strategies used	Classroom-based approaches to enhance learning and re-engage students; student and family assistance; community outreach; home involvement in schooling; support for transitions; crisis/emergency assistance and prevention.
Services, sectors, levels of care involved	Education; health/mental health; social services.
Resource requirements, feasibility	System change staff; team of champions to implement system change; other roles, as needed, such as counsellor, school nurse, social worker, behavioural specialist, special education teacher.
Readiness for implementation (e.g. tools, manuals, training)	The Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA offers information, guidance, and support to implement the framework, including in-person training, online professional development and guidance, and print and online resources.
Effectiveness evidence	One district level case study described implementation and reported improvements in district rates of student graduation and disciplinary referrals; no effectiveness testing.

Population

The CSLS approach is designed to provide educational services to students who are performing below expectation and are in kindergarten through grade 12.

Key Components

The CSLS approach emerged from a national initiative to support school change, led by Drs. Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor from the UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools. Called the Rebuilding





Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

for Learning Initiative¹, it provides education leaders with systemic approaches to reduce student dropout rates, narrow the achievement gap, and support schools in crisis, among other aims.

The aim of the intervention is to help schools improve how they use existing resources and make use of community resources to help fill any gaps in learning supports. For example, school programs could link with families, business and faith communities, as well as neighbourhood enrichment, recreation, and service resources. The anticipated benefit of the intervention is that the needs of the majority of students are met before they reach the point where they will need specialized resources and other intensive and high-cost interventions

According to the purveyors of the CSLS intervention, learning supports address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage students in classroom instruction. Learning supports can include resources, strategies, and practices that a school can use to provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual help.

The purveyors of the CSLS approach offer a program prototype that schools can use as a system change model. They also stress that groups of schools would benefit from being connected, and outline changes that can be made at the school board level.¹

The CSLS approach includes three areas of focus:

1. Promote healthy development and prevent problems;
2. Address problems as soon as feasibly possible;
3. Provide specialized assistance for students with severe, pervasive, or chronic problems.

The table on page 3 provides examples of strategies for these three areas of focus.¹

Within each of these areas of focus, the CSLS approach identifies the following settings where schools or school boards can put the intervention in place¹:

1. Classroom-based approaches to enable learning and re-engage students – For example, expanding the range of curricular and instructional options and choices to enhance teacher capability;
2. Student and family assistance – For example, providing support as soon as it's needed and in the least disruptive way;
3. Community outreach – For example, connecting with students and families who don't come to school regularly, including students who skip school or drop out;
4. Home involvement in schooling – For example, strategies to attract hard-to-reach families;





Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

Table: Examples of Strategies to Provide School and Community Resources		
Areas of Focus	School Resources	Community Resources
Promote healthy development and prevent problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation programs • Drug and alcohol education • Conflict resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation programs • Public health and safety programs • Internships / community service programs
Address problems as soon as feasibly possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dropout prevention • Drug counselling • Suicide intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family support • Monitoring health problems • Jobs programs
Provide specialized assistance for students with severe, pervasive, or chronic problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized services and other intensive help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis treatment • Drug treatment • Hospitalization

5. Support for students during challenging transitions – For example, school efforts to enhance inclusion; orientation, peer buddy, or mentoring programs.

6. Crisis/emergency assistance and prevention.

The three focus areas and six intervention settings form a framework that is intended to help schools identify barriers and potential responses.

The following are major steps that a school or school board should follow when putting in place the learning supports component of the system change:

1. Work with key stakeholders to build commitment to the system change.
2. Assign an administrative-level lead (such as an assistant principal, a student support staff member) to guide the process.
3. Assign key staff to a learning supports development team that will help the lead clarify, analyze, and identify priorities, recommend resource use, and establish and guide the groups that will develop each facet of the learning supports component.
4. Conduct in-depth and ongoing analyses to identify gaps, priorities, and resource use and ensure the decisions are reflected in all school improvement plans.





Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

5. Form and facilitate workgroups to carry out specific tasks.
6. Provide ongoing professional and other stakeholder development and training.
7. Ensure that a formative evaluation process is established. Such a process should include data on and analyses of all aspects of planning and implementation related to developing a comprehensive system of learning supports. Moreover, the process should provide guidance and support to foster progress.

Resources Required/ Feasibility

Tools are available for school or boards to use when they develop the framework for system change, for example, the matrix for reviewing the scope and content of a component to address barriers to learning.¹ Other resources that would be needed to implement the intervention are determined after resource mapping is complete and the school or school board knows what roles it will need to fill.

Human Resources

The human resources needs depend on funding as well as the areas of focus that the planning team decides are high priority in their specific context.

One role that is recommended to implement the CSLS framework is a system change leader who is trained to guide the process, create readiness, build partnerships, maintain daily oversight, problem solve, and resolve stakeholder conflicts, among other tasks. Also, a team of champions would help steer the process and provide a mechanism for guiding change. These individuals must be competent planners, highly motivated, and committed to sustaining the change.¹

A learning support resource team could be put in place gradually, as specific roles become necessary. This team could include the following²:

- Principal or assistant principal;
- School psychologist, special education teacher, counsellor, social worker, nurse;
- Behavioural specialist;
- Community agency representatives;
- Student representatives;
- Others that have a particular interest and ability to help with the functions.





Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

The UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools provides a detailed description of the human resources needed to implement the CSLS approach.²

Evidence

A system change case study reports how the Gainesville City School District in Georgia used the CSLS approach to reach out to the 20% of its students who were performing below expectations.³ Using the matrix, the district decided to address the fifth area of focus—providing supports for transitions. Among the interventions that were put in place to fill this gap were strategies to help students adjust to a new school, such as student tour guides, peer-buddy systems, and orientation events.

The case study also describes other practices and policies that Gainesville developed as a result of the gap-mapping exercise. For example, related to the second area of focus—student and family assistance—the district streamlined the referral process for students needing treatment for substance use problems. They also made several changes to address the other areas of focus (such as home involvement, crisis assistance, and community outreach). For example, they worked with a local agency to ensure that students with single parents receive adult mentorship.

District-level results for the two years after Gainesville initiated these changes (early implementation phase) show that fewer students were referred for disciplinary action and there were higher rates of high school graduation compared to the period before the changes took place. These findings suggest that the framework has potential for identifying and responding to barriers in the Gainesville school system. However, it's not possible to attribute the cause of the changes to any specific intervention with the available data. Also, the district put in place a range of new supports that might have had some effect on these results. The authors of the case study did not include a comparison of outcomes for students before and after they participated in the intervention.

No other examples and evidence of CSLS implementation were found.

It appears that the CSLS approach offers a framework and process for structuring how to go about making changes in a school setting, with each school or school board identifying the barriers that exist in its own context and developing appropriate responses. The Gainesville study provides some formative evaluation data, but it's not necessarily relevant to other settings, which may identify different barriers and solutions.





Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

Readiness for Replication

Since the CSLS model was designed for use in the U.S. school system, it's recommended that, if implemented in an Ontario setting, it should be adapted to reflect the local school board/ministry requirements.

Step-by-step guidance to replicate the model is available in *Rebuilding for Learning: Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching and Re-engaging Students*.¹ The UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools, which published the guidance handbook, offers information, guidance, and support to implement the framework. This includes in-person training by a qualified trainer, online professional development and guidance, and print and online resources.⁴

Sustainability

Some key elements that may help to sustain the intervention through the development, adoption/adaptation, and system-wide implementation phases are⁶:

- Use of social marketing;
- Commitment to vision and policy;
- Partnership negotiation;
- Leadership designation;
- Development and enhancement of infrastructure, existing and new resources, capacity building, standards, evaluation, and accountability.

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Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

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Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

We welcome your feedback!

This summary is one of a number of transition/continuity of care practice summaries developed by EENet and the Performance Measurement and Implementation Research (PMIR) team, which are part of the Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). The purpose is to support the selection of an evidence-informed intervention by Ontario's Systems Improvement through Service Collaboratives (SISC) initiative. It was designed to give the reader a starting point in understanding the intervention along a number of dimensions.

The intervention summarized in this document was identified through a targeted search of the scholarly and grey literature, and key informant suggestions. The summary was developed from a selected review of reports and journal articles. The evidence review section examined quantitative effectiveness studies only. Other issues, such as acceptability to users and cost effectiveness, are also important to examine but were out of scope to review in the available time frame.

This summary is a living document and the information on which it is based may evolve over time. While great care was taken to prepare this summary, we acknowledge the possibility of human error due to search limitations and rapid timelines. Therefore, we do not warrant that the information contained in this document is fully current, accurate, or complete. If you have any comments or suggestions to improve its content, please contact us at eenet@camh.ca.

