

Superintendent's Newsletter November, 2008

Please allow me this opportunity to give you an update on our progress with respect to the implementation of RtI as well as the changes we are making in our Challenge Program. These two programs (same premise, different groups of children) are critical to fulfilling our mission as a school district.

RtI (Response to Intervention)

Response to Intervention is a model prescribed in the law that requires school districts to use RtI to identify Learning Disabled students. RtI prescribes that prior to placing a child in Special Ed for a Learning Disability the district must assess the child's current level of achievement, attempt a variety of research-based intervention strategies and progress monitor the effectiveness of those interventions. The expectation is that the interventions attempted will be successful and return the child to reading at his or her grade level. Only those students who do not respond to the interventions will become Special Ed students; and only after additional assessment and parent approval. Although this model comes from Special Ed law it is a general education initiative that models what we have been using previously but is now required in a more formal manner. The law requires implementation by the 2010; Germantown has chosen to be on the front edge of implementation deadlines because RtI models our District's Mission and our past practice in serving students who are not at grade level.

Our first step was the training of K-3 teachers last year and implementing RtI at those grade levels this fall. We are using AIMSWeb as a screening tool. We screened all of K-5th Grade students in August and based upon that screening data, plus ITBS and ISAT, we implemented reading groupings at each of those grade levels. Those students identified as needing additional intervention meet with Tina Altenbaumer in addition to receiving reading instruction in the regular classroom. Children move between groupings based upon data and performance, that is, no child is locked into a particular reading group forever. Progress monitoring of those students receiving intervention occurs every two to three weeks using the AIMSWeb tool. Interventions change as warranted. The intent is that the interventions will assist that child to move closer to reading at their grade level; or to be referred to Special Ed if after attempting multiple, unsuccessful interventions and Special Ed placement is warranted.

In the JHS we are currently screening students using AIMSWeb. It will assist the JHS teachers in providing appropriate reading instruction within their respective subject areas. In addition, Tina is meeting with identified JHS students from 2:30-3:00 for reading assistance using a computer-assisted-instructional program called Study Island. We also have extended the Accelerated Reading (AR) Program to include JHS students. Teachers in Grades 4-8 will attend RtI training this year. Full implementation of the RtI model for Reading at the JHS will take place next school year.

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In all cases in Grades K through Grade 8, each child that is receiving interventions from Tina will ultimately be tested for specific reading problems using the Woodcock-Johnson Reading Diagnostic test. That testing is nearly completed. This tool will tell Tina more exactly what each child's particular reading problem is and allow her to prescribe specific reading strategies to ameliorate it. She will communicate that information to the parents, as it become available, enlisting your support and assistance in helping your child to reach grade level in reading.

Gifted Education

This past year we also recognized a need to revise our Gifted Program and convened a Taskforce to meet and discuss how we could better serve our most gifted children. Based upon the study of the Taskforce and because our mission is to serve every child beginning at their point of learning, I chose to implement several pieces of that initiative this fall. Although the programs are not related in other ways, RtI and the changes to the Gifted Program complement each other in that they require assessment and identification followed by prescriptive programming for each child regardless of their current academic performance. One piece of that initiative we implemented is performance grouping the class sections at the JHS. We used their Math and Reading scores to determine who belongs in which section. Another piece is the release of the best readers in Grades K-5 to receive their reading instruction from an Advanced Learning teacher (Lynn McSparin). Another piece is the pullout of identified students in Grades 3 through 8 for enrichment activities. The expected result is that the children identified as Challenge Students will excel and be challenged to exceed expectations even further as they become the best learners that they are capable of becoming; the same objective we have for struggling readers in the RtI initiative.

Summary

In summary, we are implementing two separate, but new, initiatives that complement each other within the mission we have established for our district. We have an incredible teaching and paraprofessional staff that has always served our struggling readers with a variety of methods; we now have refined those methods for even more effectiveness on behalf of our struggling learners. And we have refined the programming that benefits the children who excel.

This continues to be a work in progress; gradually moving us closer to our stated Mission and our Goals as a school district. Please do not hesitate to call or e-mail with questions about either initiative and/or how they complement each other in fulfilling our mission as a school district.