

**Building Relationships to Strengthen
Parent Participation Networks.....**

Dear Parents:

Through several types of communications from Student Support Services staff since the beginning of the school year (i.e. newsletters; presentations; workshops; SEPTA breakfast/coffee's; BOE Special Education Report), there is a common theme to continue to improve services and programs for your children and to support you. Our goal through sound strategies linked to anticipated impressive outcomes is to expand our communication and planning partnership networks with you, to actively involve you through parent support group(s), workshops of interest, and with the development of new District initiatives. Student Support Services staff are working and learning to create conditions for children with special needs to succeed through "multiple pathways" with supportive parent involvement.

The recent Special Edition from SEPTA shared several articles about new District program initiatives to better service children (PreK-12) with special needs. Some of these new programs with the Assistive Technology Specialist and the Transition Counselor, were supported through active parent involvement at the District and BOE levels.

In school newsletters, psychologists and social workers are sharing articles on parenting skills and offering school-based workshops to help parents learn new skills to support their child's special needs. There have been recent presentations to help parents become aware of the new services of Co-teaching and Transition. A workshop for new CSE parent members was provided by Roni Kramer and Karen Gatto. They trained new parent members how to support the CSE planning process for the child. A new SEPTA Father's Club was established and the MHS STRIVE program staff organized a family "pot luck" dinner. The October 21, BOE meeting provided an opportunity for the administration and staff to share Special Education Department accomplishments since 2005 and areas for improvement. The report is posted on the Student Support Services website for your review. These are a few examples of how conditions have been created to strengthen our efforts to expand structures to support, involve, and communicate with parents.

Through these Parent Connection readings, I believe you will agree that there is a purposeful staff and parent interaction that will help us continue to cultivate deep and lasting change for all children. Our next Parent Connection Newsletter will be in March and June 2009; however, for current information, please view our new website.

<https://www.mamkschools.org>

Go to "District" and then to "Student Support Services"

Enjoy the readings! Happy Holidays!

Anthony Minotti
Assistant Superintendent
Student Support Services

SUCCESS COMES WHEN WE PULL TOGETHER!



Psychology Department Happenings...

Submitted by: **Barbara Merling**

“Psychology department has been working collaboratively”

The Psychology department has been working collaboratively with the social workers and guidance counselors to articulate the array of counseling services available for the district. This summer psychologists had workshops to research and explore various programs that address a core set of social competencies for all children. They have been continuing this work and are in the process of formulating a resource guide for parents that identifies a range of supports for the social and emotional development of children. This would include the small segment of children with significant social skills issues. The psychologists have also written several articles for the elementary weekly bulletins/newsletters that go home to parents. Look for them over the course of the year! Work has moved forward on organizing and planning for parent meetings at each elementary school as well

as a district wide parent meeting to be done in collaboration with Dr. Mark Levy from the Community Counseling Center.

There has also been ongoing work on identifying the kinds of behavioral interventions that will support children in classrooms. We have two new staff members who have added a wealth of knowledge and experience to the department. Tricia Bevilacqua presented a workshop on FBA on SCD. Samantha Gambino brings experience and creativity to the new support class at the High School. Jackie Fonseca did a power point presentation for Central School parents. Joan Chess and Social Worker Meryl Schaffer continue their ongoing work with siblings of special needs students. They are running a 3 session workshops for siblings of brothers or sisters with special needs. They have already held meetings in October and November. The group consists of ten siblings from third through eighth grades. Psychologists have also been working on the PATH committee, RADAR and the Special Ed Task Force. And, as always, the Psychologists continue their collaboration and consultation with children, parents and teachers.

2008-2009 Special Education Handbook....

Do you have a copy? If not, please contact the Office for Student Support Services, 220-3060, and a copy will be mailed to you.

What's Happening in Social Work....

Submitted by: Meryl Schaffer

This fall marked a new beginning for social work in the Mamaroneck School District. While there have long been social workers in the district, this year, under the direction of Dr. Minotti, social work services have been expanded and united as a department. Every school now has social workers assigned to help support students and families.

Meet the Social Workers

Elissa Kolb – Chatsworth and Central Schools
Dina Reynoso - Mamaroneck Avenue School
Adonis Calderon – Hommocks Middle School
Helene Fremder – Mamaroneck High School
Zoe Ruiz-Huttinot – Mamaroneck High School
Meryl Schaffer – Mamaroneck Avenue School and Murray Avenue School

Social workers provide:

- prevention and intervention services to families and students
- support for developing positive parenting skills
- advocacy for families within the school and with outside agencies
- counseling and consultation which supports student success
- connections to community agencies
- crisis intervention

Parent support programs and parenting skills programs are currently being facilitated by social workers at Hommocks and MAS and are being planned for all the schools. For example, **“Staying Connected with your Teen”** at the High School, focuses on successful parent-teen communication. Topics include *How to discuss difficult topics, How to set limits while maintaining your child’s sense of autonomy, Bonding with teens and How to talk so teens will listen.* **Padres Unidos** at the Middle School is helping parents to develop their own skills, such as computer literacy and how to prepare their children for college. There is an active parenting program at the Mamaroneck PreKindergarten Center for parents of preschool children, special needs students and Latino Parents (**Hablemos**). Topics include *Positive Discipline, Language and Motor skill development, Behavior management.*

New initiatives:

Social Workers have been very involved in PALMS (Post-Secondary Access for Latino Middle School Students and PATHS (Program Alignment Team for Hispanic Students) committees. PALMS, which began at the Hommocks, has now expanded to the High School. Two new initiatives evolved from PATHS:

- The social workers developed a brochure “District-wide Support Services for Hispanic Students and their Families”, which identifies community and school resources.
- The district-wide calendar is being translated into Spanish.

Meryl Schaffer was recently appointed as the Coordinator of Social Worker Services. Meryl brings many years of experience to the position. As you can read from the initiatives above, Meryl will have a busy school year.

Congratulations Meryl!

Speech Therapy Happenings...

Submitted by: Marge Gasthalter

Speech/language therapists have had a busy fall screening the speech, language, and phonological awareness development of kindergarten children as well as implementing our new therapy model. This model provides for traditional therapy for three weeks during the month and consultation for the fourth week. We have recently completed our October consultation week and are pleased with the model thus far. We have received positive feedback from many teachers who appreciate the collaborative time the model provides. Ongoing evaluation by the speech/language therapists will ensure that children are provided with the most appropriate interventions possible.

The staff met during Superintendent's Conference Day to address the role of the speech/language therapist at each level of RTI. We expect to document appropriate intervention at each level as well as entry and exit criteria for those students receiving traditional therapy at RTI Level 3.

Therapists continue to pursue professional development both independently and with the support of the Department of Special Services. During the summer, several therapists attended a two day PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) workshop. More recently, many attended workshops on creating social stories, building language competence with augmentative communication devices, and stuttering. Two staff members will be attending the ASHA (American Speech, Language, Hearing Association) convention in Chicago later this month.

Upcoming SEPTA meetings....

- * **Monday, December 8, 2008, 7:30 pm**
Emotional and Social Learning Needs/Tom Cone, Eagle Hill School, Asst. Headmaster
- * **Wednesday, February 11, 7:30 pm**
A Walk in the Rain with a Brain/Dr. Edward Hallowell/Co-sponsored with Mamk. Schools Foundation.
- * **Wednesday, March 25, 7:30 pm**
Music Within/A movie about the struggle for equal rights for persons with disabilities.
- * **Thursday, April 16, 7:30 pm**
Sensory Integration in the General Education Classroom/Laurette Olson, Asst. Professor Mercy College/
Consultant to Mamaroneck School District.
- * **Thursday, May 28, 7:30 pm**
The Year in Review-Student Support Services/Dr. Anthony Minotti, Asst. Supt. for Student Support Services.

All meetings are held at the Hommocks.

Thank you SEPTA!!!

Happenings in Counseling...

Submitted by: Nick Kourabas

The Counseling Department is building upon several of the initiatives that we began last year. At both Hommocks and MHS, counselors, psychologists and social workers are attending regularly scheduled meetings to plan for at-risk students. The conversations have been helpful as we collaborate our efforts to be more effective with supports for these students.

PALMS has come to the high school and is continuing at Hommocks. This program is designed to increase opportunities to access higher education for Latino students, through parent networking, educating parents and students about the “culture” of our district, how to access counselors, teachers and support personnel and generally for this population to feel more comfortable in our schools. We’re excited about the outcomes of the recent meetings and programs we have already held at MHS and we look forward to expanding this network, both in and out of the school setting.

At the high school, the guidance counselors have processed an unprecedented number of “early” applications. The admissions calendar moves deeper into the first few months of the school year. As in the past, we have a strong senior class and we look forward to another great year in college admissions.

Finally, we continue to increase articulation between the Hommocks and MHS. In addition to making sure that the transition is smoother for our students, we are working hard to ensure that students, as they enter ninth grade, will be properly placed in their courses. This involves articulation between and among the counselors and the academic and elective departments in both schools.

Much exciting work continues in our department!

Welcome to our new counselors:

Greg Cuddy, Counselor
Kristen Macaluso - Transition Counselor
Dina Powis-Borbon - Support Counselor



Directors/Department Chairs and Coordinators Make a Difference....

Our Directors of Special Education, Special Education Department Chairs, and Related Services Coordinators have gone above and beyond this year to implement new programs and services, provide parent workshops, serve on the Special Education Task Force, and are focusing with their staff to accomplish department objectives, planning process, expected outcomes for continuous improvement. Job well done!

School Health Services Happenings...

Submitted by: Karen Cofino

The School Nurses have had a busy start to the 2008-09 school year. There were three new nursing positions available and two of them have been filled already. Eileen Fitzgerald RN is the new registered nurse at Murray Avenue School and Madeline Lukas RN is the new part-time nurse at Mamaroneck Avenue School. We are continuing to look for a nurse for the part-time position at the Hommocks School. Very soon we will be a dedicated team of nine Mamaroneck District nurses!

The new Website is another avenue for School Health Services to communicate with staff and the community. Our nursing coordinator is beginning to enter health information onto the site. This information will provide not only the staff, but the community with up-to-date information about current health concerns. District registration forms for the Health Office are also now available online.

Future plans for School Health Services consist of continuing education for the nurses to keep them up to date with the ever-changing state mandates. Another goal for this school year is to continue to update the new Web site and provide you with more health-related information.

School Health Services wishes everyone a healthy 2008-2009 school year!

SEPTA Father's Club Happenings....

The first meeting of the new SEPTA Father's Club was held on November 12. The meeting was attended by 14 fathers who each brought a "Pot Luck" meal plenty of food for all. The discussion was facilitated by Michael Fox, School Psychologist and Anthony Minotti. The purpose of the Father's Club is to provide a support network for fathers to seek advise in parenting their child with special needs. The fathers asked for further parent skilled training. **Future meetings are scheduled for January 7, February 4 and March 4 at 7:00 pm, Staff Lounge/next to MHS Cafe.** These meetings will be facilitated by Michael and Anthony and "pot luck" delicious food will be provided. Please R.S.V.P. to Anthony (aminotti@mamkschools.org) if you are able to attend.



Happenings in OT....

Submitted by: Laurie Olson PhD OTR

The Occupational Therapy department welcomes two new members this year. Sarah Martin COTA and Allison Larow OTR have joined our team. Sarah works in Pre-K with Marcia two days per week and also provides services at Central and Mamaroneck Avenue. Allison is the OT for Chatsworth and Murray Avenue schools. In January, we will welcome back Melissa Pinto-Campanaro who is finishing her Graduate OT degree this fall. Melissa will be the OT in the non-public schools and will also work with some children within the district.

In addition to providing traditional OT services, the members of occupational therapy department have been focused on implementing the Pre-K and K fine motor centers this fall. The Mamaroneck Teachers Foundation grant allowed the purchase of supplies for individual kindergarten classrooms and the printing of initial curriculum cards that describe activities for each part of the center and also provide teachers with the key points for fine motor skill development that the activity was designed to address. The OT's and OT assistants have organized the FMC boxes for each K class and those boxes are now in classrooms.

Many thanks to the Foundation!!!

The fine motor skills of all of the kindergarten and pre-k children were also screened through October. This was a major task for a small department! A group of Graduate Occupational Therapy students at Mercy College are organizing and charting the massive amount of data that has already generated and will continue to be generated over the course of the year. In this way, we will be better able to identify the needs of a particular classroom, and monitor the progress of children. In collaboration with teachers, the department will be monitoring children who exhibited weaknesses in their fine motor skills and adjusting the activities offered within classroom to support the fine motor development of the children. At present, OT's are meeting with teachers to share results of the screening and integrating those results with teachers' observations of children.

Initial fine motor center activities have been introduced in a number of Kindergarten classes at the Mamaroneck Avenue, Murray Avenue, and Central Schools. They have been well-received by children and teachers. The department will now move forward in implementing the center activities biweekly in each kindergarten class throughout the district. In Pre-K, fine motor centers are off and running in each Pre-k class including Small Treasures. The teachers and OT's are in their second month of full implementation.

We are also piloting ways to better meet the sensory processing needs of children who may be disruptive or inattentive seemingly due to greater sensitivity to the everyday sensations within classrooms or who exhibit greater need for sensory input such as movement or touch. We have begun the using the computer program, *Stik Kids*. It allows us to more efficiently produce individualized programs with children that are easily understood by children and provide a clear reference and guide for teachers and teacher aides. In a number of classes, therapists have also introduced "Drive Thru Menus" which are a series of simple activities that students can use in their classrooms to increase their level of alertness or attention.

We look forward to a challenging, but very exciting year where we have the privilege to provide some of our services in an embedded way in classrooms that potentially can make a greater positive impact on the skill development and participation of all children in their academic activities. We look forward to collaborating with teachers, parents and administrators throughout the year on our department's initiatives.

Thank you Mamaroneck Schools Foundation for all your support!

Happenings in PreK and Elementary News...

Submitted by: Roni Kramer

The 2008-2009 school year has gotten off to a wonderful start. We have many new programs and staff this year. Our PreK program added a 3 year old class to the Small Treasures program which allowed for us to continue to provide an early childhood program for students who ordinarily would not have access to such a valuable experience. We are currently soliciting interest with local nursery schools and agencies to become a collaborating partner in Universal PreK for next year. Applications for the 2009-2010 program will be available in January.

We have made great strides in our Integrated Co-Teaching program. There are 13 Integrated Co-Teaching classes in PreK through 5th grade and 3 CTS/Inclusion classes (where the special education teacher is only in the room for part of the day). Our teams are working with a Co-Teaching coach on a regular basis so they can receive continued support and staff development on using co-teaching strategies. There have been parent breakfasts or talks in some of the elementary buildings to inform parents of the model. In addition, Roni Kramer, the Director of Special Education, PreK-5th grade, gave a presentation on Integrated Co-Teaching on Nov. 6th through SEPTA.

We have also been very successful in the creation of an additional Special Class for students with Severe Autism. We now have programs in district from PreK through High School to meet the needs of this very special population.

The Special Education staff is working together on many initiatives. Our district website is up and running and there is a vehicle in place for staff to share their wonderful skills and knowledge with each other.

Lori Dressler was recently appointed as the Special Education Coordinator of Elementary Special Education Services. Lori is presently a teacher at Central, and brings many years of experience to the position. Lori will be working very closely with Roni Kramer to continuously improve special education services and program at the elementary level. Congratulations Lori!

MAMARONECK SCHOOLS FOUNDATION GRANT HAPPENINGS...

Student Support Services submitted seven (7) grant proposals to the Mamaroneck Schools Foundation as listed below. **Wish us luck!**

- Assistive Technology Jump Start (PreK-12)
- Reading Plus—Hommocks-MHS
- Educational Evaluations—Jump Start (K-5)
- High School Head Start for Hispanic Students
- Transition Services (6-12)
- Fine Motor Centers—K and Grade 1— Level 2/3 RTI
- STRIVE—MHS

Happenings at the Secondary Level....

Submitted by: Karen Gatto

The school year has gotten off to a good start! We are providing support to students in a variety of ways within our new programs and services at the high school and the positive effects of this are evident. It is very rewarding for me to be a newcomer to the district and to be sharing in the new efforts also. The Transition Academy has produced many vocational and community opportunities for our students already, the Project Success class has been in a steady growth process since day one, the Advisory period provided in our STRIVE program has given students the opportunity for self discovery and self expression, the STEP class has been able to provide focused learning activities related to activities of daily living, and our new Transition Counselor has developed many structures for helping our students and their families to make connections from school to adulthood.

At Hommocks, we are focused on starting the Transition Planning process at the 8th grade level and will be talking to parents, students, and staff more about this process. Additionally, teachers at the high school level are starting to implement the Strength Based Level One Vocational Assessment and attended a Transition Planning Presentation during the recent Superintendent's Conference Day. It is wonderful to work with parents and staff who embrace this very important process.

I look forward to the coming months as we reflect on our beginnings and plan for our future growth.

It is great to be part of the Student Support Services team!

Parent /Staff Networking Happenings....

All Departments within Student Support Services have provided several workshops/presentations to reach out to our parent community and keep them informed. Roni Kramer and Karen Gatto have provided presentations on Co-teaching, Transition, and a CSE Parent Membership workshop. Karen and the MHS Special Education Department hosted a breakfast Open House for parents to become familiar with the new special education programs and services at MHS. Special education teachers from MHS-STRIVE hosted a family pot luck dinner, and displayed student work. Psychologists and social workers have provided parent focus group meetings, while guidance continues to provide several evening presentations on various topics at the Hommocks and MHS. The Prek has sponsored a fundraising event. These are only some examples of the type of commitments staff make to support the parent community. Just view the District calendar to see the "big picture" of all our efforts. It is impressive! This type of networking with staff and parents is essential to continuously strengthen our partnerships to improve programs/services for all children.

SUCCESS COMES WHEN WE PULL TOGETHER!

Happenings in the English as a Second Language Department...

Submitted by: Mary Diffley

The ESL Department met on October 29 and November 4 to discuss our goals, their implementation and other pertinent topics.

We were happy to hear the most recent change in the testing policy made by the NYSDE; they have extended the test accommodations previously afforded to current English Language Learners to former English Language Learners (ELLs) for up to two years after they have tested out of the NYSESLAT. One of the advantages of this change is that it gives former ELLs an opportunity to show their content knowledge in their native language while they still continue to develop the academic language and vocabulary in English which can take up to seven years.

Our department will be making an annual presentation to all the new teachers in the district at the December 4 mentor meeting. At the November 4 meeting we modified our existing presentation to include more information on best practices for teachers to help ELLs acquire English. These modifications are based on current research on ELLs (one of our goals) found in a recent article from *American Educator*.

We will reconvene on January 28. Our next goal is to review the data from the Office of Testing and Evaluation on ELLs' annual yearly progress (AYP) in state exams in 2007 - 2008. We will review the current academic program for those students who did not make their AYP to see if they are receiving the appropriate intervention services.

Assistive Technology Happenings...

Lori Moskowitz-Ritvo, our New AT Specialist, began with us on December 1. Lori, a speech therapist brings many years of AT experience and expertise to the District. Lori will be working closely with the Technology Department, and her office will be located in Mike Kollmer's office, Director of Technology. Lori will be working with the newly formed Elementary and Secondary school-based AT Consultation Teams (ATCT's), and she will be part of the Speech Department. More information will follow.

Welcome to Mamaroneck Lori!



Special Education Task Force 2008-09 Action Plan...

The Special Education Task Force began to address the ten areas they identified on June 16, 2008, from the 2007-08 Special Education Program Review Report. Five sub-committees were established and each will meet for a full day during the school year with Roni Kramer, Karen Gatto, and Anthony Minotti, to address the areas of improvement listed below. Following the completion of the sub-committee meetings the Task Force will reconvene for a full day to review recommendations from the sub-committees. The Task Force will report to the BOE in June, 2009.

Sub-Committees Areas of Focus

1. Student Data Review / Student Identification
2. Department Structures / Program Issues
3. General Education Connections / Response to Intervention
4. Related Services / IEP's
5. Out of District Placements / Transition Planning

Sub-Committee Membership

Members of the Task Force will serve on sub-committees along with other invited staff members (i.e. general education teachers; special education teachers; related services staff).

Task Force Outcomes

Results of the sub-committee recommendations will be shared and discussed for further input at department and administrator meetings. Some recommendations will be implemented during the 2008-09 school year. More complex recommendations will be implemented at the beginning of the 2009-10 school year.

Sub-Committee Meeting Dates

October 31 - December 5 - January 30
November 14 - January 16

Full-Committee

- February 27

Happenings with the Special Education Task Force...

The Task Force met on October 31 and November 14, and future meeting dates include December 5, January 16, January 30, and February 27. The October 31 subcommittees (Student Data Review; Student Identification; Department Structures; Program Issues) addressed several essential questions from the 2007-2008 Special Education Program Review Report. The highlights of our discussions are outlined below:

- **Student Data Review/Student Identification Committee -**

It is clear that the identification rate for children classified with special needs is decreasing at the elementary level, which is attributed to the effective work of the Instructional Support Teams (IST's). The highest levels of identification continue to be Learning Disabled (LD), Other Health Impaired (OHI) and Speech. We are clearly over identifying Hispanic children in the area of speech/language. There are higher numbers of speech/language students at the elementary level and higher identification of LD in the secondary grades.

- **What do we hope to learn?**

- Reflect on the data in order to understand what interventions are needed and effective.
- Do we have appropriate assessment tools and screenings in place to inform instruction and determine if further assessment needs to be done?
- Why high levels of OHI?
- Why high identification at certain grade levels?
- Is our reading instruction as effective as it can be?
- What has been offered prior to a referral at the secondary level?

- **What is the plan to study trends?**

- Distribution of questions to different departments in a priority order.
- Distribution of questions to appropriate sub-committees.
- What information is readily available to study and what data needs to be collected before the data is analyzed.
- Gather information from similar districts.

- **Department Structures/Program Issues Subcommittee**

This subcommittee focused on many clarification topics. The highlight of these discussions focused on clarification of roles and responsibilities of special education/related service staff, general education teachers, and principals/assistant principals, as it relates to the CSE process. How to better communicate with parents prior to Annual Review CSE's was an ongoing question.

This is just a brief update. Coordinators, Department Chairs, Roni, Karen and I will be sharing more information with you throughout the school year, and seeking your input.

Our major outcome from the Task Force will be to develop a cohesive Student Support Services manual, with a structure and systems for each Department, that the parent community clearly understands.

Response To Intervention (RTI) Happenings...

The Curriculum/Instruction and Student Support Services Departments are continuing to expand upon their collaborative initiatives to align practices, services and programs presently in the District for learners who are struggling. The Departments are also working together to design new support systems that will be embedded into the cohesive K-12 structure for RTI, that is mandated by NY State Regulations for implementation in 2012.

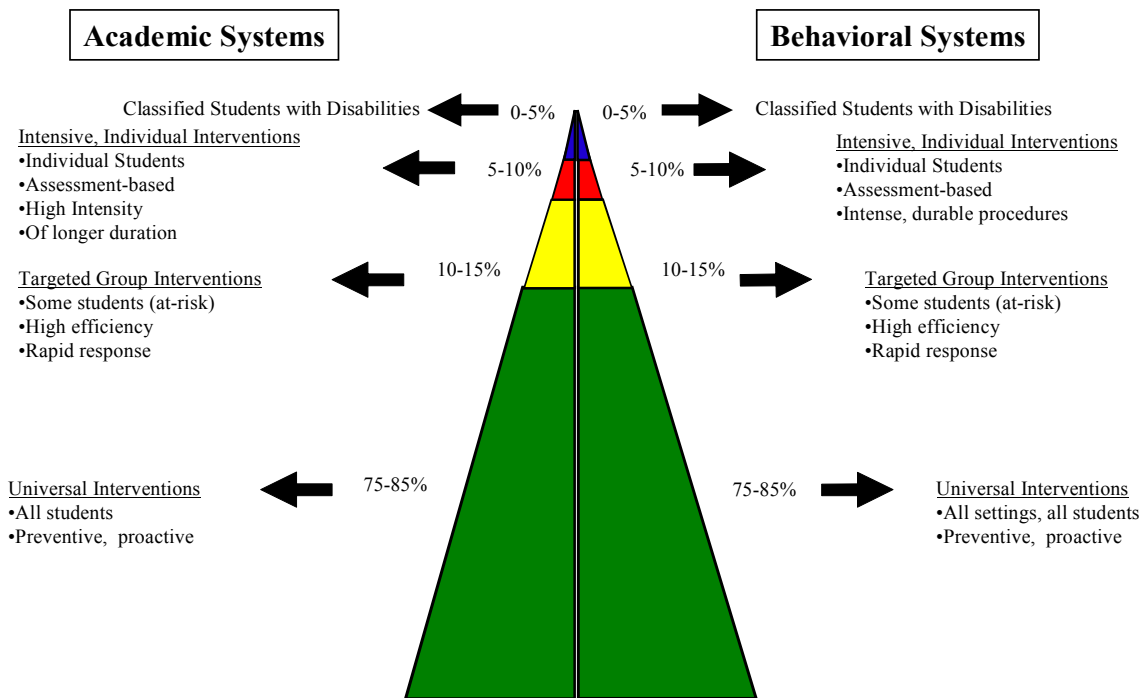
RTI awareness presentations are being made at faculty meetings throughout the school year. The District sponsored a RTI awareness presentation on December 1, for the parent community.

Our teachers and support staff are presently using a variety of research-based learning strategies to accommodate learners who are struggling. Our challenge is to align these practices in a systemic, systematic, and sustained four level structure that addresses academic and behavioral learning needs of children (PreK-12).

The Special Education Task Force, Subcommittee (General Education Connections/RTI) is discussing the design, implementation, and the evaluation of the new RTI structure in Mamaroneck. A report will be made to the BOE in June, 2009.

PROPOSED

RTI - School-Wide Systems for Student Success



Stay connected....With us....We will continue to make a difference!