P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School (http://www.edutopia.org/school/pk-yonge-developmental-research-school)
GRADES K-12 | GAINESVILLE, FL

Academic Success for All Students: A Multi-Tiered Approach

At P.K. Yonge, using Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) enables teachers to differentiate and provide each student the right level of instruction to succeed.

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Using Data to Personalize Instruction

The Student Success Team (SST) makes all decisions about tiered instruction. The team is made up of the K-12 MTSS Support Specialist, the Learning Community Leader, all of the core teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, speech and language pathologists and sometimes occupational therapists. Additional people are brought in on an as-needed basis, and parents are consulted on all decisions. The SST meets every four and a half weeks across K-12.

Determining Tiers

For academic instruction, the majority of students get their needs met through core, or Tier One instruction. P.K. Yonge uses a standard measure of 80 percent effectiveness for students hitting targets in core instruction. Tiers Two and Three are seen as deep, meaningful support for students, not as band-aids for what’s not working in Tier One. If less than 80 percent of students are succeeding in Tier One, then Tier One instruction needs to be strengthened. Typically, Tier Two has about 15 percent of students, and Tier Three about 3 to 5 percent.
Each tier builds upon what’s happening in the tier before it. For example, in reading, core instruction could be centered on comprehension strategies and specifically inferring, and then Tier Two, would be supplemental instruction on inferring.

For Tier One, the student-teacher ratio is approximately 22-to-1; for Tier Two, approximately 6-to-1; and for Tier Three, between approximately 3-to-1, and occasionally 1-to-1.

**Collecting Data**
The SST collects a variety of data that helps determine how students are doing, and what specific supports they need. At the elementary level, the school uses different measures like DIEBELS progress monitoring, Fox in a Box diagnostic measures, and a Gates-MacGinitie reading test. They also analyze the outcomes of the annual state reading test for the third grade on up. For math, they have used different standardized measures including AIMS and GMADE. It is important that measures are valid and reliable and generate some kind of norming or statistical information that will help faculty know how students are doing as compared to students across the classroom, district, or nation.

In the 6-12th grades, the faculty spend a lot more time looking at students’ grades, attendance and discipline records. They may also look at some district measures or class-made assessments to determine students’ progress in their skill development. All of the conversations in the upper grades include an analysis of state and national testing as appropriate.

**Questions Used to Monitor Progress**
The SST team looks at all the data for every student in the school. They then determine an action plan based on the following questions:

- What percentage of students are getting their needs met through core (Tier One) instruction?

- Which students need supplemental instruction in a Tier Two configuration?

- How is the supplemental instruction defined? There can be multiple Tier Two defined support – some students may need to work on a certain set of skills, while other students have a different set of needs.

- What about students already in a Tier Two – how are they progressing? Are there students in Tier Two who may need to move to Tier Three supports?

- How are students already in Tier Three doing?
The SST works diligently to have a sustained period of time that students receive the intervention to see if it’s effective. Students are typically in Tier Two for at least four and a half weeks, and in Tier Three from nine to twenty-seven weeks, with progress being monitored on a regular basis.

Students who need Tier Three support for significant periods of time beyond the 27 weeks, may then receive possible placement into exceptional student education, to receive an IEP or an EP or a 504.

**Using Individual Strengths**

Teachers organize themselves around tiered instruction in a variety of different ways and it depends on teacher strengths and student needs. When Tiers Two and Three are defined, teachers determine who leads particular instruction based on their individual strengths, or students in that tier that respond well to them.

During instruction time, all teachers teach core instruction to their 22 students for about 30 minutes. Then everyone moves into Tier Two, Tier Three or autonomous time for another 30 minutes. Another rotation then occurs, and teachers and students reorganize themselves again. At all times, teachers are either leading a tiered group or supervising autonomous time.

**Teacher Collaboration**

At P.K. Yonge, all core teachers in each grade level have a common daily planning time. While they may quickly check in during this time, it is really during the weekly learning community meetings where they have time to talk about instruction and students. Collaboration continues in the SST meeting, where the focus is on data assessment and problem solving.

A lot of trust and communication is developed between teachers within the learning community to talk about the students they share, and the work they are doing across the tiers.

**Reducing Stigma**

One of the things P.K. Yonge has worked hard on is to reduce the labeling and stigmatism that can go with being identified as a student who needs more support. Some of that normalizing and making it safe comes from the ways in which they have organized their personnel, the ways in which faculty try to balance "pushing in" and "pulling out." The staff strive to ensure that there is never a certain cohort of students that are always in the particular tier in all subjects. As Director Lynda Hayes, says, “It can be quite an orchestration. We don’t always accomplish that, but that’s always our goal. How do we make this seamless and as normal for all of our students as possible?”