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Dear Parents/Guardians

**The Road to Success: Optimal Student Achievement
A Design, Universal in Scope and Individual in Approach for All Learners**

As we move through several budget cycles, the school district has never lost its main mission: student achievement. This paper serves as not only my reflections but also my vision about a well connected and an integrated model for the improvement of student achievement. As architect and learning strategist, I offer these thoughts:

In order to think through a design, schools must have a school committee, backed by its parents, that believes and funds such efforts. *We do*. The community must have its administrators and faculty think of student achievement as a top priority and engage students in dynamic, creative ways to encourage thirst for learning. At the same time, excellent instruction must occur, connections made to the Commonwealth's frameworks and standards, and instruction evaluated as a group (system-wide, building level, grade level, etc.) and as an individual, through various acceptable standards for measurement.

That said, for achievement to be successful, the following steps would be considered:

1. More integration of regular and special education. In other words, there would be a thoughtful movement of more special needs students to integrated classrooms with accompanying support. As we move toward more integration that supports peer modeling and high expectations from teachers for student achievement, we will examine each student's IEP with the anticipation of more integration to regular education. Each disability category will be examined, comparative State data will be tallied, and discussions will be held to ensure compliance with FAPE (free and appropriate education) in the least restrictive setting.
2. There would be opportunities for designated academic coaches to analyze and synthesize data by targeting special education and reading literacy to develop "learning focused strategies" for the classroom and assist in Response to Intervention (RtI) approaches.
3. Based upon the aforementioned findings, there would be opportunities for students to receive direct instruction by groupings within the classroom, pulled aside clarifications and/or specific skill building in the classroom, or pulled out intense instruction for pre-requisite skills for a short period of time. Over time, we would shift instructional assistants to work with broader groups of students in the regular classroom; the classroom teacher will design instruction.
4. Carefully monitored differentiated teaching and evaluation would naturally occur not only as an expectation, but also as a standard for all teachers.

In designing a model for learning for all students, which is universal in reach, but individual in approach, we must consider that we base our instruction on a solid research-based curriculum that is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum frameworks, that we incorporate and utilize this data driven instruction to assess the curriculum horizontally and vertically, and that we realign instruction accordingly. Moreover, we continue our efforts to shift from teacher directed instruction to cooperative learning through inquiry, and to enhance student ability to compare and contrast, estimate, generalize, predict and conceptualize at a higher level of thinking and learning.

Albeit, support, assessment and communication aspects of computer technology support research based instruction. These efforts will assist individual and group instruction, the accountability of benchmarks (a measurement of progress), and create indices of accountability for those who are responsible for delivering instruction. Embedded in this daily instruction are the core values reinforced by the School Committee through its policies on academic achievement and keeping schools safe. Critical to this discussion is the effectiveness of the daily operations of every building, with its acknowledged uniqueness; each building synchronizes its efforts to enhance respect for each individual in our school family so that the student can learn in a safe environment.

But, how do we get there? How do we make this model operational and practical? The following ideas are listed for consideration:

- Enhance and systemize our initiatives in regular education by adopting the principles of RtI (Response to Intervention).
- Study data and develop “learning focused strategies” that are effective for student learning, measure them, and realign them where and when necessary.
- Enhance and develop lesson plans for differentiated instruction by the use of data analysis worksheets, student tracking methods and pyramid planning of instruction.
- Encourage co-planning for the aforementioned interventions. The secondary gain would be mutual and interactive support for the planners of curriculum, and a built in balance and checks system for improving individual needs and curriculum realignments, where necessary.

More specifically, RtI has three tiers for the collection, analysis, synthesis, evaluation and realignment of instruction from its data. Tier I is designed to deal with the successes of all students and potentially reaches 80%. In other words, through constant monitoring and measuring success, every student can be successful in this good teaching model. Tier II is problem solving and intervention for those students’ needs not met in Tier I and embraces potentially 15%. Tier III is specialized instruction, special education, and reaches 5% of the student population. There is much fluidity among all tiers and with vision, stamina, and direction, we can move forward in achievement while at the same time reducing our numbers of referrals to special education and perhaps reducing the numbers and scope of our special education IEPs and services. This design provides for services for all learners so most learners may be able to master skills without necessarily utilizing the full extent of special education services.

Supplementing this model is differentiated instruction. It is a process that teachers individually and cooperatively use to plan content in specific subject areas by using a graphic to determine three factors: what content will be learned by all students, by most students, and by some students. Students will have access to all levels of the pyramid as we expect that students vary in moving up the pyramid due to variances in knowledge, experience, and interest of subject matter.

Critical to the implementation of this design is co-planning. It helps teachers in adjusting instruction so that all students benefit from class instruction. This partnership between the regular and special education teacher, or two or more same discipline subject matter teachers is empowered by the common goal to have students master the material by preplanning the content, delivering instruction and reflective post planning. And, that cycle is repeated over and over to ascertain quality in instruction.

This template for a learning design that is universal in scope and individual in approach also sustains not only this collaboration between regular education and special education but embraces teacher training, with accountability and responsibility.

To fully promote, develop, implement this culture of cooperation, maintain and sustain its efforts, the following steps are recommended:

- A. Create a small task force to further design and discuss this model and examine closely the impact of this universal and individual approach to learning on learning, release time for planning, teacher training, fiscal opportunities (saving money and offsets) and fiscal constraints (planning for organizational design changes, etc.)
- B. Once issues are defined, enlarge the task force to include more teachers who will fully design the model with consultation. Professional development credits will be available to them as “teacher training”.
- C. Carefully and thoughtfully think through systemic and focused professional development modules that intentionally target this design.
- D. Examine methods of data collection, analyses of data, collaboration with teachers on planning, the development of lesson plans, and learning approaches for students.
- E. Monitor and evaluate instruction through data so that realignments of instruction take place.
- F. Consider school wide results from MCAS and individual growth models as a litmus test for the success of the design, supplemented by parent and teacher input.

The take away messages from this achievement design is as follows:

1. All students can learn and achieve.
2. Regular and special education consistently enhance “learning focused” classroom strategies through:
 - ⇒ Response to Intervention
 - ⇒ Differentiated Teaching
 - ⇒ Co-planning
3. A new level of thinking and mutual problem solving, from identifying the needs of the individual student to systemic intervention in curriculum, is applied by examining data on a regular basis.

4. MCAS scores, its growth model, and other factors including the student, family and teacher, measure success.
5. Reductions in both referral and the number and scope of IEPs in special education are possible and within the design.
6. Students with special needs will have more opportunities, based upon the study of data, the emphasis on learning strategies, and the implementation of design models that are short, intensive, intentional and focused for skill building, clarification, and/or review.

The aforementioned thoughts are my design and vision for a coordinated view of examining, monitoring, and evaluating student achievement. In the OnTeam editions (September 2008 and October 2008) I began to enumerate these ideas, many of which have been completed. This paper is designed to build upon and consolidate those ideas, expand the thinking to systemic intervention(s), capture the conversations of our administrators and staff, and respect parent input. This learning design is universal in scope that affects all students through co-planning, good teaching, evaluation of the curriculum and realignment of how and when we deliver instruction to students. It's individual in its approach because every student passes through the lenses of the pyramid from the tiers (I, II, and III) of Response to Intervention (RtI) and differentiated instruction for mastery of skills.

As always, I thank you for your extraordinary support of Pupil Services and wish you the best as you wrap up the 2009-2010 school year.

Best wishes,

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