

August 29, 2008

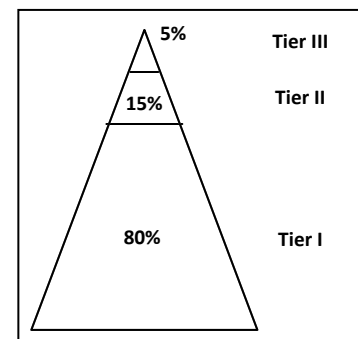
Dear Keysor Families,

One challenge we face as educators is figuring out how much information to share with parents so what we do share is useful and makes sense. We never want to keep things from you, of course, but we recognize that sometimes too much information can be counter-productive. There are times we feel common language and understandings are important to our collective work. This is one of those times.

Over the last year and a half we've undergone a shift in thinking about problem solving and interventions for students who need additional supports. We have at times been a little slow to respond to student learning issues – not on a teacher level but as a school, sometimes out of necessity but often due to external constraints, laws, or policies. If we suspected a student needed additional help in school we often spent several months figuring out the problem – and making sure there really was one, before we put interventions or supports in place. These supports were often paired with a disability diagnosis and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Problem solving at Keysor and in Kirkwood has thankfully become much more proactive and responsive to student needs. Our work reflects an initiative known as *Response to Intervention (RTI)*, which has been prominent in some states for decades but has recently gained national attention. Many Keysor teachers have had wonderful training opportunities and have emerged as leaders in the area; teams from roughly ten schools across Missouri visited Keysor last year to observe our work, even though we were in our first full year of implementation.

Our focus at Keysor is first and foremost student achievement, particularly in reading, writing, and math. When students struggle, or when they need more than what our regular curriculum demands, their achievement will suffer, too. The research behind RTI and our student support model suggests that on any given task or subject to be learned, roughly 80% of students will be successful with regular, quality instruction (see graphic). An additional 10-15% of students will require focused, small group instruction – *in addition to* what everyone else receives, in order to meet achievement expectations. Adding those numbers together you'll realize we have some students still not "getting it," which isn't acceptable to us (or allowable under *No Child Left Behind* legislation).



Roughly 5-10% of all students on any given task will require the universal instruction provided to all students, strategic small group instruction, AND additional intensive interventions – often in group sizes of three or less.

How do we know which students require additional assistance or intense support? Teachers certainly know their students, so their input is highly important. In addition, Kirkwood has started using quick, research-based assessments called CBMs (curriculum-based measurements) that help us identify students who may struggle and monitor their progress over time. The CBMs used at Keysor are grade-level specific and take 2-8 minutes to complete. Assessments are given to all Keysor Kids three times a year (Sept/Jan/May) and data is analyzed to identify possible concerns and areas of strength.

Students identified for additional reading or math help will get it – and will usually get it quickly. Children who have a disability will continue getting the special education support they require. Many students who struggle do not have an IEP, however, and we expect that our comprehensive problem solving and intervention process will result in fewer instances where special education testing is necessary. Our problem solving and intervention team works closely with teachers to put appropriate supports in place, often in the classroom but sometimes in a small group, pull-out format. As we provide additional instruction, student progress is monitored to determine if our teaching is making a difference – or if we need to try something else. Keysor Kids who receive Tier II supports (less intense, usually in classrooms) are assessed roughly every month. Those who receive Tier III interventions (more intense, usually outside of class) have their progress monitored on a weekly basis. In addition, we examine overall student growth every 6-8 weeks and make adjustments accordingly.

Our communication with families will reflect our tiered levels of support to students. All Keysor families are receiving this overview information, just as all Keysor Kids receive quality, Tier I instruction. If your child should be identified for additional Tier II supports at any time throughout the year, you will receive additional information from your classroom teacher. If your child requires Tier III intervention in reading or math, likely in a small group setting outside of class, a specialist will communicate with you and your classroom teacher about these supports and your child's ongoing progress toward learning goals.

Problem solving around student needs – and our instruction to meet these needs, is a collaborative effort. We hope to provide early intervention before problems become critical in nature and achievement suffers. Our goal is not to simply study the problem or identify learning disabilities. Our goal is to avoid student failure. We appreciate your ongoing support of Keysor and our Keysor Kids. As always, if you have questions or comments please feel free to call (213-1620) or email me at [painteb@gw.kirkwood.12.mo.us](mailto:painteb@gw.kirkwood.12.mo.us).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bryan".