

Milpitas public schools eye intervention impacts

by Shannon Barry, Milpitas Post

Posted: 05/20/2010 10:29:13 AM PDT

http://www.mercurynews.com/milpitas/ci_15126376?nclick_check=1

Milpitas Unified School District staff members are working to ensure there is a continuous upswing in the number of students measuring up to their academic standards of success.

Making sure such benchmarks are met begins in the classroom but often goes beyond that, said Audrey Fong, the district's coordinator of literacy and intervention.

"High quality core instruction should be preventative," she said. "It should be the first line of defense against the student's experience in learning difficulties. The better the classroom instruction the less likely it is students will need intervention."

Fong said several schools have adopted programs to help strengthen their core curriculum. Robert Randall Elementary School implemented ST MATH this year, an interactive computer game that develops learning and conceptual understanding of math topics, as part of its "core" math curriculum for second- through fifth-graders while Board Math was put in place for kindergarten, first and sixth grades.

The goal of using such programs is to increase the number of students reaching proficiency with classroom instruction alone and to reduce the number of students requiring intervention services.

"On the other hand there will always be a percentage of students who require some kind of intervention during the course of their school careers," Fong said. "In this case intervention programs are most effective when paired with high-quality classroom instruction."

She presented a report on existing intervention programs and their impact during the Board of Education meeting April 27. The previous two reports on district intervention programs which appeared in 2005 and 2008 focused exclusively on the area of reading intervention. This year the report was expanded to include an in-depth analysis of current reading intervention programs and a list of effective, recommended interventions as well as baseline information on the status of district mathematics and behavioral intervention programs.

Reading has four intervention programs with different student focus groups, including Read 180, SuccessMaker, Literacy Support Specialist and Pathfinders.

The main criteria used to determine program effectiveness is looking at the percentage of students enrolled in each intervention who gained one level on the California Standards Test such as moving from basic to proficient which provides some evidence of accelerated learning. The district goal is to have 67 percent of students in each program make gains on the CST.

"This would mean at least two out of three program students shows effectiveness, a high but reasonable target," Fong said.

Based on data collected so far she said there has been an increase on all fronts, some more significant than others. Fong added results often vary, citing fidelity and program implementation as the largest factors.

Literacy Support Specialist, a research based program designed by the district, saw the most significant gains since it was put in place at Alexander Rose and William Burnett in 2007. It was added to Randall last September.

"With the data from Rose and Burnett over the past two years it is extremely promising," Fong said. "Seventy-two percent of the students at Rose and 54 percent of the students at Burnett made gains in 2008, 2009. ... The effectiveness of the Literacy Support Program may be one reason why those two Title I schools have been able to avoid Program Improvement status."

Although progress has been made in the area of reading intervention since 2004, Fong recommended other areas for future research and growth.

Intervention and supplemental support programs in mathematics is one extremely limited area. Fong said the current status of math interventions resembles the status of reading intervention programs back in 2004, a patchwork of knowledge, programs and personnel. This has been further complicated by the relatively small body of research and programs available in the area of math intervention in comparison to reading, she said.

In coming years the district will be looking to strengthen this area and create a menu of research-based math intervention programs. Another area the district is eyeing for growth is behavioral intervention.

"Both academic and positive behavioral interventions are essential," Fong said. "Student academic success is directly related to a student's engagement, motivation and behavior and vice versa."

Although all elementary and secondary schools have some kind of behavioral intervention program in order to provide a safe, positive learning environment for their students including **Peacebuilders** there are limited services like group and individual counseling for general education students who require more intensive intervention services.

"That is always a piece I thought was important," said Marsha Grilli, Board of Education president, during the presentation. Fong agreed that while much has been done in terms of intervention, there is still more to do.

"As you know interventions are a key component of the district's strategic plan to close the achievement gap while improving academic achievement for all students," Fong said. "Our classroom teachers need to truly understand their role in accelerating student learning and how what they do in the classroom on a daily basis can either help or hinder the impact of interventions."

Contact Shannon Barry at sbarry@themilpitaspost.com or 408-262-2454