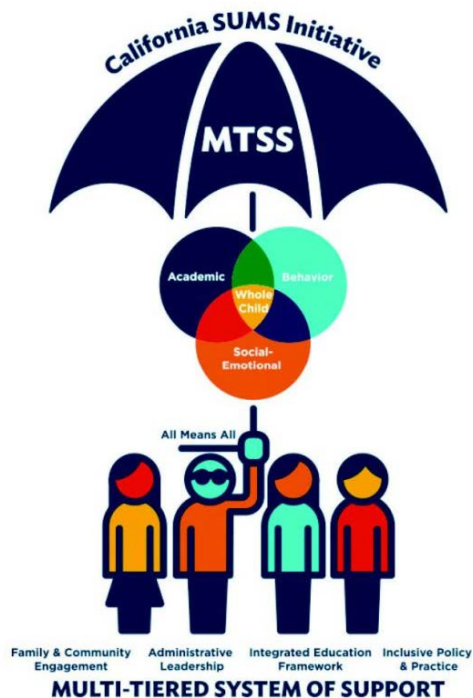




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Moraga School District receives grant to fund differentiated education

By Sophie Braccini



The multi-tiered support system for the whole child. Graphic provided

according to the data that are collected in their classroom.

The grant the MSD received is called SUMS or Scale Up Multi-Tiered System of Support (educators seem to love cryptic acronyms). Bishop explains that the small team will, for example, learn more ways to implement the Universal Design for Learning, a set of instructional strategies designed to give all students opportunities for learning through differentiated content. The lesson plans have to engage the students in distinctive ways, connecting learning to what the students already know; the teachers have to use multiple means of representation of the material, such as group learning or use of multimedia; they have to provide the students with multiple means of expression so they can demonstrate their learning in multiple ways.

Bishop explains that the transfer of knowledge between the small group and the teachers will happen during the monthly collaboration sessions where same grade level teachers meet and discuss teaching strategy. There will also be at least one full day of continuing education for all teachers throughout the district.

The MTSS system also aims to support the behavioral and emotional growth of the children, while respecting all differences. There again, the team will learn new strategies to support teachers. Bishop adds that the training will have a strong component of gathering and comparing data. She explains that the district already does a lot in the areas of differentiated education and behavior support, adding that the SUMS framework will help in leveraging and measuring progress.

In the area of behavior, she gives the example of measuring the students' engagement in the classroom. She explains that the members of the SUMS team will go to the classrooms and have objective elements to measure, such as the length of time students are off-task. Over the two-year period, strategies to improve engagement will be discussed with the teachers and progress will be measured.

Bishop is glad the district received the grant because it frees resources to reflect on improvements and support the teachers. She acknowledges that over the years, the demands on teachers have increased and the purpose here is not to add to their load.

The director hopes that next year her team will be able to propose to the MSD parents informational reunions to explain such new concepts as Universal Design for Learning or Multi-Tiered System of Support.

The Moraga School District has given itself an ambitious goal: differentiated education of the whole child. Today's educators want to be able to engage all types of learners to allow them to successfully master the academic program, while supporting the behavioral and socio-emotional needs of different types of students.

Continued training and cooperation among teachers helps them to reach these lofty goals.

The MSD was able to secure a state grant to support this objective. It will allow a small district pedagogic team to be trained in new methods and over a two-year period implement and measure results.

Susan Bishop, the MSD director of pupil services, applied for and got the \$25,000 grant. She explains that a team of five people - herself, another administrator, a teacher, a special education teacher and a psychologist - will receive their training in the months to come and that the implementation will begin with the 2018-19 school year and continue to 2020.

The underlying principles of the program are that schools should educate every student using differentiated methods because every individual has unique sets of strengths and weaknesses. The California Department of Education promotes the Multi-Tiered System of Support to meet the different academic and behavioral needs of all students. MTSS is presented as a set of practices that are research based and that teachers implement

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