

Octorara Area Junior/Senior High School

Octorara Area Junior & Senior High School – Grades 7-12

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

You may remember hearing about a system called MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems and Supports) that the Junior/Senior High School will implement during the 21-22 school year. We are happy to share that MTSS has started in earnest and we are already seeing some of the very positive benefits. MTSS is a system that allows schools to improve students' overall success and school experience by using data to make important decisions.

MTSS has two main purposes: (1) Relationships: to build and maintain positive student-student relationships and student-teacher relationships; (2) Academics: to provide ample opportunities for every student to reach their highest possible academic goal by providing scaffolded and differentiated instruction. Simply put, if students have healthy, positive relationships with their peers and their teachers, they are more likely to be ready to learn. And, if school leaders and teachers are continuously analyzing instruction for its effectiveness, and adapting instruction to ensure students learn to their full potential, then all students will learn content and use learning strategies to help them in high school and beyond. It is a complex system with many moving parts, but it works

At this early stage in the development of MTSS, we are focused on building and maintaining positive relationships. "Restorative Practice" is a process that we are using to build and repair any relationships that are experiencing difficulties. For example, if two students have conflict, school administrators organize a "restorative conference" in which the administrator leads the two students through a structured conversation through a series of predetermined questions. Each participant has a voice in that s/he expresses their perspective, by relating any events that have occurred as well as the impact of those events on them personally. The other party has a chance to explain what they were thinking at the time of the event and add any details that are relevant to the situation. By the end of the conference, a resolution is discussed. More often than not, one of the participants chooses to apologize to the other and 'owns' the impact of their actions. This is face-to-face dialogue that results in a deeper understanding of the individual who was hurt. This process builds empathy for the other person/s involved and often prevents further incidences.

We understand that traditional (punitive) consequences have been in place for many years, and those consequences are still an option for negative behaviors. In other words, detentions and suspensions are still in-place as a possible consequence. However, we also understand that students are still very much developing and learning how to cope and solve social problems, and we know that offering opportunities such as restorative conferences is a

way that we can guide students toward conflict resolution. The hope is that students will eventually learn how to talk with one another to solve conflict, rather than allow conflict to fester and turn into something more problematic. The learning that takes place in a restorative conference is a highly transferable skill that follows kids out into their lives, outside of school.

We are proud to say that restorative conferences are happening on a daily basis and we are able to talk most students through conflict and avoid traditional, out-of-classroom punishments. Students need to be in school and in classrooms to learn and develop, so we will continue to employ restorative processes in this way.

Please understand that in no way does this mean that we are unwilling to assign detention and suspension when it is necessary. It would be great if we lived in a world where these options weren't necessary, but we recognize that punitive-type consequences are sometimes the right thing to do.

We have also started academic coaching, as part of MTSS. This means that two of our interventionists are gathering data in some focused classrooms. Eventually teachers will be coached to improve their practice and ultimately improve student learning. Coaching is also in its early stages, but by the end of the first marking period, we will have more information to share about how we're using student achievement data to raise the level of student learning in our focused classrooms.

We welcome your feedback and questions regarding MTSS. Please feel free to contact any one of us and be on the lookout for updates.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jon Propper, Principal

Mr. Mark Peticca, Assistant Principal

Mrs. Melissa Andrews, Assistant Principal

Mrs. Lisa McNamara, Assistant Principal & Director of CTE