

GUEST OPINION

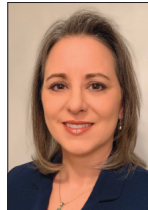
Tailor-made tutelage helps students succeed

Individualized instruction, data analysis parts of modern schooling

By Jen Wimmer

Stepping into an elementary classroom today may provide a nostalgic trip down memory lane upon seeing the markers and crayons, brightly colored posters, and reading area. In the West Bend School District classrooms, visitors would also witness something that is more contemporary: differentiated instruction. In fact, this strategy helps to provide a more tailored education for students to ensure they are meeting their individual goals.

In this model, we highlight the importance of all students learning within their classroom community. Specialists might “push in” to a classroom to serve students and collaborate with teachers. In addition to whole-class lessons, there will be students receiving individualized instruction as they read a book with a reading specialist or examine a math worksheet with a math specialist. The special education teacher may work collaboratively with the classroom teacher to deliver specialized instruction to students with disabilities in the classroom setting. Another group of students may be working with the teacher while yet another completes an assignment at their desks.



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Classrooms today reflect the knowledge that no two students are alike, and in fact they comprise differing strengths and skills. Therefore, their needs must be met to ensure they are both engaged in learning and gaining the knowledge to successfully move forward with their education.

Our elementary and intermediate schools use resources, including the services of our reading and math professionals, not to mention dedicated teachers, to provide differentiated instruction to students at their various levels of understanding. Children who are beyond their classmates, or a group who need additional support, remain in the classroom to learn with targeted instruction that allows for meeting individual or small-group needs. It also improves collaboration and participation among students, teachers, and specialist staff. There is no doubt that students are gaining more instructional time by staying in their classroom rather than moving between classrooms. This strategy is an example of our “all hands on deck” approach.

To pinpoint the areas students should work on next, teachers work

with their grade-level colleagues to examine data from classroom and standardized assessments, daily work, and observation. The West Bend School District’s STAR and classroom assessments provide valuable data throughout the school year that teachers examine closely. Teachers can use this data and their knowledge of the child to know how to best support them.

This differentiated instruction strategy is only successful if the elementary and intermediate schools staff are agile and purposeful in actions related to instruction. Our school district is lucky to have such accomplished teachers, staff, and administrators to ensure this approach works for students.

Just as West Bend Schools fourth-grade students learned when they visited the early-20th-century Stony Hill Schoolhouse this fall and used a quill and ink to write, schools have changed significantly. What has never changed is the desire to help children succeed. Employing activities such as data analysis and differentiated instruction, the West Bend Schools are tailoring our work to best meet the needs of our students.

(Jen Wimmer is the superintendent of the West Bend School District.)