

# **Taconic Hills Elementary School**

## **PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

### **Academic Intervention Services (AIS)**

The purpose of AIS is to build the skills of elementary students in reading and math who have not met, or who are at risk of not meeting, the learning standards. Beginning in Kindergarten, students are assigned additional support services based on teacher, administration and in some cases parental recommendation. State assessments also determine students who need AIS services. These exams are considered check points that measure the student's achievement and indicate which students may need additional instructional support on the road to graduation. Exiting the program is based on the student's academic performance and progress, state assessment results and teacher recommendation.

Intervention Specialists work closely with the classroom teachers to provide the best program to meet the student's individual needs. (See also the section on Response to Intervention (RTI) below.

### **Academic Programming**

The Elementary School offers Universal Prekindergarten classes (UPK) and grades K – 5. Students are taught in the areas of English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, social studies, science, physical education, art, music, library skills and technology.

Through our reading program, LEAD 21, we offer a balanced literacy program that focuses on shared, independent and guided reading. Our literacy block includes both whole group and differentiated, small group instruction. Reading instruction focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, read aloud sessions, decoding strategies, fluency and comprehension. Writing instruction may include journals, reading logs, story writing, letter writing, poetry, drama and other age appropriate projects.

Early literacy is supported in grades K – 2 through our use of Foundations, an adaptation of the Wilson Reading System. Foundations focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary and fluency. Foundations is intended to provide all students with a foundation in reading, spelling and writing in a manner that is highly participatory and fun for children.

Mathematics and Science classes include a full range of learning experiences including hands-on-learning such as projects (home and in-school) and experiments to field trips and assemblies.

Social Studies topics vary according to grade level, but the curriculum focuses on history, geography, economics, civics, citizenship and government. Family and communities as well as local, state, and national history are common themes.

At times, assemblies, field trips and “artists in residence” are scheduled to reinforce concepts taught in one or more of the academic areas.

Students also experience classes in physical education, music and art that often support concepts taught in the classroom. Our elementary school values physical fitness and the arts. Students are given opportunities to participate in a wide variety of activities, including school-wide incentive programs aimed at improving health and fitness. Concerts and exhibits are held at certain times during the year to allow our students to share their musical and artistic talents with the community. Students in grades K – 5 currently have physical education classes three times a week as well as art and music classes weekly. At present, beginning in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, students may choose to participate in instrumental music study and performance (band).

Our Library/Media Center is utilized by teachers to encourage reading and to expose students to diverse literature, inquiry based learning and research techniques including web searches and the use of the latest that technology offers.

Instruction in technology is left primarily in the hands of our classroom teachers supported by our Library/Media Specialist and members of our instructional technology staff. The elementary school has two computer labs as well as computer workstations available to students in nearly every classroom.

### **After School Help**

All teachers and service providers are required to stay after school one afternoon per week to offer their students extra help, remediation, and an opportunity to make up or correct work. Students who stay after school for such purposes may ride the 3:40 PM plate bus home.

### **Before and After School Activity Program**

The Taconic Hills Before and After School Activity Program offers supervised recreation and activities for children in grades K – 6 from 7:05 to 8:05 am and from 2:30 to 6:00 pm. There is a fee charged for participation. For more information and registration materials please see the district website.

## **Cafeteria/Food Service**

Our cafeteria offers healthy meals, both breakfast and lunch, to students every school day. Parents may prepay for their child's lunch. They may pay ahead in their child's account by the day, week or month. If necessary, the student may charge up to \$10.00. If the charges exceed more than \$10.00 the student will not be allowed to charge a hot lunch. They will, however, be permitted to have a cold sandwich. In an attempt to avoid overcharging, the school sends home weekly notices to inform parents if there are overcharges or a zero balance on the account.

Parents, who believe they may qualify for free or reduced meals, should contact the elementary office for an application for participation in the program. This can be done at any point during the year. This is an important program for all families who qualify.

The cafeteria has adopted a program called PayPals. This web based program allows parents to pay on-line, view the status of their child's account, and see a record of food purchased by their child.

For information on meal prices as well as any other questions regarding our cafeteria program, contact our Food Services Department at 325-2885.

## **Child Study Team**

This team of teachers and other staff meet on an as-needed basis to assist classroom teachers and parents in developing strategies and plans to address a struggling student's academic, social, or behavioral functioning. Teachers and parents may submit referrals to hold a CST meeting for children, however, before doing so, it is expected that the parent and teacher will have previously tried to resolve the student's issues. If the problem persists and a referral is made to the CST, a CST meeting will be scheduled and the parent will be invited to attend.

## **Kids in Motion**

Thanks to grant money we have been able to offer after school activities for students that include large and small group physical activities such as jump rope, bouncy-ball races, tag, various ball games, speed stacking, playground use, supervised free swim and track & field events. This program often becomes available to us each spring.

## **Library/Media Center**

A library is available at each of our schools. Students are able to participate in our library loan program, which is generally for one week. The librarian will assist students in the selection of

books, web quests, and research for projects. Please remember that it is the responsibility of students and their parents to pay for any books, which are lost, stolen, or damaged.

## **Looping**

Looping, also known as “teacher-student progression” and “multi-year grouping,” is the practice of teachers moving with their students to the next grade, rather than sending students to another teacher at the end of the school year. Some loops are two consecutive years with the same group, while others may be three or more. Since the availability of looped classes varies from year to year, parents interested in looping should discuss this with the principal.

## **Nurse and Health Office**

The school nurse provides a variety of health services to students. Among other things, the school nurse assists students who become ill or are injured at school, screens students for vision and hearing problems, scoliosis and blood pressure problems, and periodically records student height and weight. The nurse maintains medical records such as immunization histories for students and can assist families in obtaining health insurance for children.

In cases of emergency, the school nurse will first try to contact parents and advise them to contact their child's doctor. If the parents are not available, she will proceed with further emergency procedures.

**Student Accident Insurance:** Though not required to, Taconic Hills Central School District carries student accident insurance. This is not health insurance, but rather supplemental coverage.

**Medication:** Medical care given to students, beyond the basic first aid administered in school, remains the parent's responsibility. Medication, regardless of whether it is prescription, must be brought to the school nurse. The nurse will dispense any prescribed medication per written order of a physician and a parent's written request. Prescription medications must be provided to the nurse in original containers.

Non-prescription medications such as cough medicine or aspirin can only be given to students by written order of a physician and a parent's request as well.

Students are not permitted to take any medication on their own during the school day. All medications must be given by the nurse.

Please notify the school nurse if your child is taking medication at home and your physician has recommended limited physical activity. A physician's note is required for any exemption from physical education classes for any period of time beyond a few days.

**Immunizations:** The school cooperates with the Public Health Department in carrying out a complete immunization program in school. Parents are urged to keep updated records of their

child's immunizations. Unless these immunization records are complete, the school has the right and responsibility to exclude children from school.

### **Parent Teacher Conferences**

Parent-teacher conferences play an important role in reporting student progress to parents. Parents are encouraged to take advantage of scheduled parent conference opportunities as posted on our school calendar. In addition, parents may initiate a conference by calling the school office and making an appointment with the teacher and/or principal. When a parent requests a conference with a teacher, the teacher will make every effort to arrange a mutually convenient time. Such conferences will be planned so as to not interfere with class time. If a parent cannot attend a scheduled conference, he/she should notify the teacher as far in advance as possible so that another conference time may be arranged.

### **Physical Education**

All students are required to participate in physical education classes, unless excused by a physician's note. Students are to dress appropriately in order to participate in physical education classes. They are to wear sneakers with laces. Slip-on sneakers are not recommended since they can slip off the foot, give little ankle support and may have poor traction.

### **Psychologist (Evaluations and Referrals)**

When a child's teacher or parent feels that more information is needed to provide the basis for making decisions regarding a child's academic ability or behavior, a referral can be made to the Committee on Special Education (CSE) for testing to be done by the school psychologist. Screening for specific concerns may also be recommended by the Child Study team (CST). In all cases, written parent consent must be obtained before any evaluation is initiated. At the completion of the evaluation, the psychologist will review the results with the parents. The psychologist consults with classroom teachers and is available to talk to with parents about behavioral and academic concerns regarding their children.

### **PTO**

The Elementary School Parent-Teacher Organization meets monthly per the school calendar in the ES Library/Media Center. New members are always welcome and the meetings are open to the public. The PTO organizes a number of activities and events to support our students. While fundraising continues to be a focus, the PTO also seeks to keep parents informed regarding school programs and services.

## **Response to Intervention (RTI)**

The State Education Department defines response to intervention (RTI) as follows: “RTI is a multi-tiered, problem solving approach that identifies general education students struggling in academic and behavioral areas early and provides them with systematically applied strategies and targeted instruction at varying levels of intervention.”

Each school district is required to establish a plan and policies for implementing school-wide approaches and pre-referral interventions in order to remediate a student’s poor performance prior to referral for special education. The RTI process may be included as part of a district’s school wide approach to providing such pre-referral interventions.

Whereas AIS services are generally provided after a student experiences failure, RTI services are typically provided to students who are at risk of failing. Through RTI, students are taught concepts and skills using a variety of approaches (interventions) to help determine if the lack of understanding on the part of the student is due to the particular instructional approach or approaches used by the teacher, or, a potential learning disability that a student may possess.

Currently, a team of teachers are working on a draft RTI policy and implementation plan for grades K-5.

## **Section 504 Accommodation Plans**

“Section 504” refers to a section of federal law dealing with Civil Rights. It prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in programs receiving federal financial assistance. It prohibits discrimination against anyone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities [such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, etc.] Section 504 is separate and distinct from Special Education protections established under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Principals have the responsibility of ensuring that Section 504 accommodations are afforded to all students who qualify. Such students receive Section 504 accommodation plans developed by a Section 504 team which is chaired by the CSE Chairperson and includes the student’s teachers, guidance counselor, principal, etc. Special Education students, on the other hand, receive Individual Education Plans (IEPs) developed by the Committee on Special Education.

## **Shared Decision Making Committee**

The Elementary School Shared Decision Making Committee meets monthly per the school calendar. This committee comprised of teachers, parents, community members, and the school principal meets to plan for school improvement and support student academic success. All members of the community are welcome to attend meetings and speak during the public forum portion of the meeting.

## **Special Education Services**

There are times when AIS/RTI services and/or additional program strategies given by the classroom teachers are not sufficient for the student's academic growth. If that becomes the case, following a set protocol, students may qualify for additional services from our Special Education Department. Parents are involved with this process from the beginning.

Students that receive Special Education Services receive an individualized educational program (IEP) with specific goals that outlines the educational program that will help the student become successful in school. The special education teachers also work closely with any teachers that are involved in the student's education. Together this team plans, strategizes and monitors the student's progress.

Currently, most students with disabilities are served in general education classes through Integrated Co-Teaching. This model provides for the delivery of special education academic services by a special education teacher working collaboratively with the general education teacher in the general education teacher's classroom. Special classes and out-of-district placements are also available depending on the needs of students as determined by the Committee on Special Education (CSE).

Speech and Language services as well as Occupational Therapy (OT) and Physical Therapy (PT) are also available to those students who qualify. Such services may include individual, small group and push-in sessions.

## **Speech and Language Services**

Speech and language services offered in school include screening, evaluation and therapy. All Pre-K, Kindergarten and new entrants are screened. Should the screening indicate a potential problem or delay, the school will contact the parent to request a more thorough evaluation. Children determined to need speech/language services will be given services either individually or in a small group as determined by our speech and language pathologists.

Children slated to receive mandated services are our first priority. If all of the mandated services are covered, speech and language pathologists will provide “speech improvement” services to non-mandated students with priority given to those students with the greatest needs first.

### **Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK)**

Making use of grant monies, we offer Universal Pre-Kindergarten classes to district residents’ children. In order to be eligible for this program a child must be four (4) years old by December 1<sup>st</sup> of the given school year. Again, our program is only for students who reside in our district.

If the number of requests for placement exceeds the number of seats available in our UPK classes, we use a lottery system to determine selection. Lottery selection forms are available on our website.

### **Visiting the School**

Upon entering the building, visitors are to “sign-in” at the reception desk and report directly to the elementary school office. Visitors will be issued a Visitor Pass in exchange for their driver’s license. Visitor passes must be displayed prominently on the visitor’s person while the visitor remains in the building. Visitor passes must be returned to the reception desk upon departure of the visitor. Students are not permitted to bring visitors to school; however, parents of prospective students may arrange for a visit with their child to observe the school in operation.

Visitors are welcome; however, reasonable precautions must be taken to insure the safety of students and to avoid interruptions to the instructional program. As stated in our Code of Conduct, “Visitors, including parents and legal guardians, must make every effort to inform District administration of their desire to visit the school building and/or their child at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to their arrival, absent extenuating circumstances.”

### **Volunteers**

We are fortunate to have a number of parents and community members volunteer their time in our classrooms throughout the school day. Volunteers who serve in their own child’s classroom need not go through our Volunteer Program, however, volunteers who serve in classrooms other than their own child’s classroom should be involved in our Volunteer Program, currently supervised by Joan Madsen. Joan can be reached at (518) 672-7369.