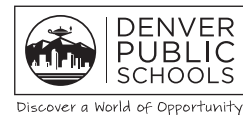




Denver Public Schools

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Denver Public Schools Partners with Rethink to Provide Effective Consultative Classroom Support

About:

Denver Public Schools is the largest school district in Colorado and is one of the fastest growing districts in the nation. Its mission is "to provide all students the opportunity to achieve the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens in our society."

Enrollment:

Denver Public Schools serves 87,398 students in Early Education- 12th grade on 185 different campuses: 14% African-American, 3% Asian, 58% Hispanic, 21% white, 3% two-or-more. Approximately 70% qualify for free or reduced lunch.

In the Spring of 2014, as Denver Public Schools (DPS) planned their Rethink implementation for the upcoming school year, they realized that if they truly wanted their staff and students to maximize the benefits of Rethink, they needed to take full advantage of their current system of support. The 2014/15 school year would target all members of their autism classrooms. District-level support staff, including their network partners, support coaches, classroom teachers and district paraprofessionals all underwent extensive Rethink training. Their goal was straightforward: they wanted each of the autism classrooms to consistently maintain high-quality, legally-defensible IEPs with measurable goals and objectives, sound data collection practices, and best-practice instruction.

DPS has seen tremendous growth amongst their autism classrooms in the quality of instruction, IEP development, and data collection. Gene Bamesberger, Associate Director of Special Education at DPS, says he has witnessed a marked shift in the attitudes of the special education staff over the past year. "Rethink is sparking a conversation that helps us start thinking differently about our kids," he said.

Rethink Trains the Trainers

Rethink's professional services team worked closely with DPS to roll out the Rethink Trainer model. Rethink Trainer builds capacity in districts through intensive training delivered to targeted professionals. Through a series of platform functionality trainings, coaching, professional development and ongoing support, district educators are prepared to provide effective consultative classroom support to teachers. Over the course of several months, Rethink's qualified professional services team worked hand-in-hand with the district's support partners to ensure they were not only fluent on the platform, but apt at providing meaningful consultative support to teachers— helping them identify strengths and areas of growth in the classrooms, build competency, and improve instructional practice.

The district's support coaches feel empowered in their roles as they become increasingly adept at effectively providing support and collaborating as a team with the teachers they work with. Using the Autism Program Environment Rating Scale (APERS), Rethink Trainers were asked to self-assess at the beginning and end of the school year and reported significant growth in many key areas. Every component listed as an opportunity for growth at the beginning of the year—including Curriculum & Instruction, Assessment, Communication, Social Competence and Teaming—was considered a strength according to the end-of-year APERS.

Providing Effective Classroom Support

Once the district's support staff completed their initial trainings, they began meeting regularly with teachers in their network providing coaching, training on the Rethink platform, and supporting teachers in self-assessment.

One of the most valuable ways the district trainers have been able to support teachers is through Rethink's Behavior Support platform. "The behavioral aspect of Rethink is something we find incredibly useful," said Bamesberger. Mary Sullivan, an associate support partner for DPS agrees. "It gives teachers a way of going through the process of assessing a student's behavior and creating a plan quickly and efficiently," she said. According to Sullivan, using Rethink to conduct a functional behavior assessment (FBA) and build a behavior intervention plan for a student not only helps teachers create more defensible IEPs and make data driven decisions but also educates them on best practices for behavior intervention. Kelsey Wales, a special education teacher in the district who has worked closely with Sullivan, explained: "Behavior is rarely addressed in a proactive way. We are always reactive. What I like about Rethink is that it instructs—it really provides teachers the background they need on how to effectively address behavior."

According the district trainers, video-based lessons have also been invaluable in supporting the teachers. Because Rethink's curriculum is video-based, teachers can be pointed to lesson plans in the curriculum and reference the lesson videos as a model. "The videos provide exemplars for teachers so they know what teaching the skill looks like, which isn't something we necessarily have time to do," Sullivan told us.

The Trickle-down Effect

By creating buy-in at all levels and building capacity in a focused and systematic way, DPS and Rethink have built a continuum of supports across the autism classrooms: as the Rethink Trainers provide effective classroom support to the teachers they work with, the teachers can more effectively support and train their own classroom teams.

Wales utilizes Rethink's Training Center and lesson videos to train the paraprofessional staff in her classroom on everything from data collection to effective teaching strategies. Using the Training Center and lesson videos, Wales saves valuable instructional time by assigning certain training modules or lesson videos to her paraprofessionals when issues or questions arise. "They are great," she said, "I don't always have time to explain to my paras exactly how to teach something or why I'm doing it the way I do. With Rethink, the videos can do that for me." Like Wales, other autism teachers across the district are also using Rethink to train paraprofessional staff and are utilizing Rethink's lessons and data collection tools to support data-driven decision making and instruction across the classroom.

General Education teachers have also been interested in utilizing certain aspects of Rethink with the special education students in their classrooms. One of Wales's personal goals this year was to use Rethink to support and train the general education teachers that work with her students. "I use Rethink to make a list of what step each student is on in their IEP goal and share that with their gen ed teachers. Recently, one of the gen ed teachers even asked me for it," Wales explained, enthusiastically.

Rethink Goes Viral

One of the most exciting things for DPS about what they have accomplished has been seeing how Rethink is catching on amongst teachers throughout the district. "As we are having success in the autism classrooms, more and more schools are hearing about Rethink and are asking about using it. We are now rolling it out to different classrooms and schools upon request," explained Bamesberger.

DPS will expand their Rethink implementation in the 2015/16 school year, rolling out the program in a focused and systematic way with Rethink Trainer support. The next step is to train district's related services providers to use the program to develop, track, and monitor IEP goals. "Eventually our goal at the district level is to use the Rethink data to track and monitor IEP goals for all students, but this will take some time" said Bamesberger.

In the mean time, word about Rethink is spreading, and those seeing the tangible benefits of the program are excited about the possibilities for the kids. "Rethink is a tool for everyone," Sullivan told us, "It can help us look at our kids differently, serve our kids differently, and create a way for everyone to be involved in the process."