
District 75

New York, NY

**District 75's Unique
Approach to Utilization of
Rethink Ed for Special
Education Through the
COVID Pandemic**



District 75 New York, NY

Throughout New York City, District 75 provides instructional support to about 25,000 students with significant challenges such as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), cognitive delays, emotional disturbances, sensory impairment, and other disabilities. It is a culturally diverse district with approximately 36% Black or African American and 40% Hispanic or Latino. All students have IEPs and they have general education and special classes and the types of programs are individualized to meet the needs of each student. Vocational and transition services are provided for high school students.

District 75 began adopting Rethink Ed in 2015 with an emphasis on supporting para-professional staff in learning evidence-based teaching strategies through a Professional Learning Community and Professional Development model. From there, several schools began using Rethink Ed for a larger implementation around supporting their entire student body with Rethink Ed's Skills Success Program which supports IEP goal development and tracking in addition to the professional development for staff. Parents and caregivers also have access to the Rethink Ed program so that consistent supports between home and school are available.

Professional development has been a priority since the district first adopted Rethink Ed. Jennifer Currie, Principal, says that “the professional development aspect of Rethink has really helped (their)

paraprofessionals” as they have 250 in their building alone and “getting them in one room for professional development is near impossible.” In addition, she feels that having the ability to choose topics that are “most aligned with what’s going in their classroom” motivates staff to engage in professional development and lets them take control and get what they need the most. Michelle Asaro, Master Teacher, has noticed that more staff are interested in building their own professional development and likes how the trainings are directly related to the work that they are doing in the classroom. One of the teacher’s, Regina Thomas, feels that the professional development series has been really helpful not only for herself but for her staff and parents as well. Melinda McFadden, a high school teacher, finds the professional development videos and resources to be “really, really helpful.” She likes how they are “self-paced and asynchronous” and how it asks questions to ensure that teachers and other staff understood the training modules. She feels that the trainings improve the teachers’ instruction with the students. Michelle Torres, a high school teacher, also likes the professional development, particularly the videos that model how to teach something and then she can “just accommodate or change it based on the students’ needs.”

Prior to the COVID pandemic, District 75 embraced the data collection, reporting, and IEP development tools on a daily basis. Jennifer Currie relies heavily on the data reporting as an administrator because they have a very large building of 650 students and Rethink Ed allows her to keep track more easily. Because of their familiarity with the system, the transition into remote learning was not as challenging as it might have been without Rethink Ed. Michelle Asaro believes that the data tracking is essential for their district and now that the teachers are all very competent in using the system, it helps everyone to stay better connected. Prior to Rethink Ed, she feels that teachers thought of data collection and teaching and separate entities and that data collection was “very cumbersome in terms of paperwork” so when they were able to start using Rethink Ed,

data collection became “embedded with instruction” and is now “very seamless.” Regina Thomas uses the data collection consistently and believes that the system helps guide instruction and decisions on a daily basis. Melinda McFadden notes that unlike other systems she has used in the past, Rethink Ed is “the easiest one to use” because there are “presets in the system and you have the opportunity to edit them.” She loves “how you can make all your choices as a teacher based off exactly what your student will need, how many trials, what percentage they need to get correct, is it prompt-based? – everything is in there.” Michelle Torres is also fond of the data collection and graphing and how “everybody in the class has access to it, so if a speech therapist or a sub teacher comes in, they know where the kid is and it’s very easy to understand the graph” because “you don’t have to say much, you see the goal and then you see the graph and everybody’s on the same page.” Volel Jude Casimir, a teacher of a low to moderate class of 12 students, also feels that the data reporting is really helpful for sharing data with his paraprofessionals and being able to all be on the same page for each student.

The Rethink Ed resources including lessons, activities, videos, and visual aids are really valued by District 75. Jennifer Currie points out how the curriculum aligns to their assessments and IEP goals in the district and that it provides “a map of what (they) want to focus on for the year.” She has seen a huge improvement in student engagement with Rethink Ed and attributes that to how the program has made planning easier and more targeted for teachers. Michelle Asaro thinks that the resources are “accessible in so many ways” for students and that the videos and visuals help the students make a “connection to the academic content.” Melinda McFadden particularly likes the videos and that “all of the videos have closed captioning on them, which really important for (her) students.” She also likes the pacing of the videos and that “the students are able to engage and they can focus on tasks for brief periods of time.”

Her students are very visual learners and they have learned to track their own progress by looking at graphs of their progress in Rethink Ed. She is able to have discussions with them such as “we’re peaking, we’re valleying, why? How are you feeling at this moment?” or helping them identify distractions and using the data to get back on track. She feels that the Rethink Ed data “supports their maturity in a way and especially over the years” as they become more competent at self-monitoring and self-managing. Regina Thomas, who Jennifer Currie says is “really savvy at using Rethink Ed,” also notes that her students are visual learners and that the videos and resources help break things down for her students in a way that they can understand. Michelle Torres feels that Rethink Ed has been very helpful during COVID and remote learning and although students were using it regularly prior to COVID, they are using it even more now. She likes how easy it is to use the content remotely and how it seamlessly transitions back into the classrooms. She also points out that in addition to learning the content in the program, her students are “learning to navigate technology without (her) even noticing.” Volel Jude Casimir finds that the Rethink Ed ELA lessons are a “tremendous resource” as they align to standards and include visual supports that his students need. He shared that adding Rethink Ed has helped him to expand more on a lot of topics and has helped him to be less linear in his teaching on certain topics.

Parents in District 75 are also engaged with Rethink Ed, even more so since the COVID pandemic and having to spend more of their time working with their children at home. Michelle Asaro has seen an improvement in parent engagement during remote learning and attributes much of that success to Rethink Ed. She thinks it is important for parents to be able to log in and regularly monitor progress and that this increases parent engagement in the students learning. Bibi Sahadeo, a parent of a 17-year-old male, feels that her son learned a lot from Rethink Ed. She feels that it is user friendly for him and that it engages him which can

sometimes be a challenge for him. “Without it, (she) does not know what (he) would do.” With Rethink Ed, he can go on his own and “do math, stories, and read and if he has to submit something, he can do that fast.” She has watched her son grow more and more independent and one day, when she was pretending to be the teacher with him, which she often does, she “asked a question and was surprised that he answered without any help, (she) was kind of in shock.” Another parent of a high school male, Laury Luciano, has also found Rethink Ed to be very useful and shared that her son “likes it because he can learn a lot in the site” and she can “use the site with him” at home. Volel Jude Casimir also reports that Rethink Ed has helped engage some of the parents more and in turn, has helped engage some of the students more.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is an important focus for the district and Melinda McFadden feels that the Rethink Ed SEL special education lessons and professional development are “very on the pulse” and that “it has definitely made a difference.” Some of the benefits that she has really noticed is how students “learn to advocate for themselves and learn how to distinguish between want and need and what’s considered an effective communication to broader society.” She loves to see how it builds their confidence over time and how the SEL lessons fit so well into a lot of their IEP goals. One of the most remarkable outcomes from using the Rethink Ed SEL curriculum is that her students have learned to understand and talk about abstract concepts such as “resilience, being a change maker, inclusion” and other topics that they were not able to grasp before. She attributes this to the SEL lessons being able “to really break it down and make it tangible for (her) students because that’s what they really need.” Her students were even able to watch the president’s inaugural address and understand the part about “resilience of the constitution” and they were able to react to that and express themselves. Michelle Torres also loves the impact of SEL on her students and uses the lessons to teach self-management, conflict resolution, and teach them about emotions. During COVID she has seen

a real benefit of SEL and states that “we live in times that are very stressful” and SEL “helps a lot” and notes that even her parents are saying “this is good, I’m learning so much” and that makes her “happy because you’re not only teaching the student but everybody’s getting something.” Regina Thomas thinks that SEL helps students with self-awareness and self-management and also believes it will be one of the most important things to focus on when all of the students return to campus. Volel Jude Casmir believes that SEL will be the primary focus in September when everyone returns to school because everyone will be “going from two extremes, so we’re going from the extreme of not having to get out of their pajamas to all of a sudden they’re in a classroom” and he thinks that “a few students are going to really, really have a tough time” but knows that consistent use of SEL and watching the SEL videos is going “to help them deal with that transition.” Michelle Asaro stated that “the social emotional learning components of Rethink are really making an impact on our school community and our curriculum for our students this year.” She believes that “now more than ever, we need to be connected to our students, not only our students, but their families, and having the opportunity to embed this curriculum, both in person and remotely, has allowed us to make deeper connections with the families.”

District 75’s success with the Rethink Ed program is a model program that not only takes advantage of the special education tools but embraces the SEL curriculum for their students, staff, and parents. Although the district faced many of the same challenges as other special educators during COVID and remote learning, they were able to keep their students and parents engaged using Rethink Ed. The passionate and skilled professionals in the district have mastered implementation in the classroom and in a remote learning environment and have empowered their students to take ownership by sharing data with them and keeping them engaged in their own learning. Their ability to tailor the Rethink Ed program to the specific needs of their students and community is impressive and the passion that drives this team is remarkable.



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About Us

Rethink Ed combines the power of technology and research to deliver innovative, scalable and evidence-based instructional materials and supports for learners with disabilities. The comprehensive suite of tools ensures that every student develops the academic, behavioral and social/emotional skills they need to succeed in school, at work and in life. Rethink Ed positions educators, students and families for success. Rethink Ed is a division of Rethink First, a company that aims to place evidence-based treatment solutions in the hands of every educator, clinician or parent working with a child with special needs. We are unique in our footprint, leveraging the power of technology to provide clinical support, best-practice tools, and research-based content to all market segments, reaching more children with special needs than any other solution.

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