

# The End of Generic IEP Lesson Planning: Empowering Independence, Fostering Learning

*The Vida Bogart School for All Children – 352X  
Bronx, NY*

## About 352X

Established in 2006, The Vida Bogart School for All Children, known as 352X, is a K-8 school that serves the needs of students with autism, emotional disturbances, and intellectual disabilities. 352X is part of District 75, a network of New York City schools dedicated to the educational, vocational, and behavioral support of students with disabilities. The school's mission is to “create an academic setting where all students can learn” and to help students “become lifelong learners through a variety of teaching styles and expertise.” More than 100 teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers, and support staff work together to create a culture of academic and social skills learning that promotes independence.

## 352X Enrollment

352X has nearly 500 students, 100% of which are special education. For 2017, the student population was 39% Black, 56% Hispanic, 2% White, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Other. 16% of students are English language learners. 73% of students are male and 27% are female. As with all New York City Department of Education schools, both breakfast and lunch are free for 100% of students.

## **Executive Summary**

At 352X, individualized instruction isn't just a wish or want-to, it's essential to addressing student behavior, meeting student learning needs, and preparing students for success. So when 352X Principal Lourdes Mendez first encountered Rethink Ed at a principals' professional development meeting, something clicked—big time.

“Teacher preparation programs try to stress the importance of individualized instruction, but they don't give teachers the tools, the format, the template, or the starting point on how to do that,” says Principal Mendez. “Rethink Ed does.”

For 352X, Rethink Ed rose head and shoulders above other programs for one simple reason: the students. Thanks to data-driven strategies, progress monitoring tools, an online professional development library, an IEP instructional model, and an extensive academic catalogue, Rethink Ed is helping 352X refine, deepen, and expand its pedagogy to ensure professional development for staff, learning opportunities for parents, and college and career readiness for special education students.

Since implementation in 2013, 352X has gone from piloting Rethink Ed as a means of addressing ADL skills, to using it to match learning objectives with IEPs, to aligning the entire school's units of study with academic skills and Common Core Learning Standards. Most recently, 352X began using Rethink Ed for students who sit for the state English Language Arts and mathematics exams.

## About Implementation

**School:** The Vida Bogart School for All Children

**Location:** Bronx, NY

**Enrollment:** 467

**# of Sites:** 5

### Challenge:

- Support IEP goal development and progress
- Teach pre-primer, independence, and ADL skills
- Monitor student behavioral interventions

### Rethink Ed Solutions:

- **Behavior Success:** Research-based behavior intervention strategies, training, and tools
- **IEP Success:** IEP lesson plans, video models, and teacher resources
- **Training Success:** On-demand and on-site professional development training modules

### Results:

- Address ADL skills, especially those geared toward independence
- Transition students from an ADL focus to an academic one
- Align Common Core units of study with IEPs
- Match instructional activities to specific IEP goals
- Track, target, and assess student progress
- Train, equip, and empower teachers and paraprofessionals

## Learning Their Way: How Rethink Ed Helps the Whole Child

**For Lourdes Mendez, working in special education as a teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal and now as a principal, is a labor of love.** It is a wholly rewarding experience that she fell in love with early in her career, but it’s also an enormous challenge. Why? Because special education requires addressing the behavioral component long before introducing any of the academics.

“Our students,” says Lourdes, who is principal of The Vida Bogart School for All Children also known as 352X, “don’t learn by opening up a textbook and doing the work on page 50 or whatever curriculum they’re working. That’s just not the way our kids understand things.”

So, five years ago, with her deep professional understanding of special education and a solid in-house curriculum already in place, Lourdes received feedback from a reviewer that literally stopped her in her tracks. The reviewer, while impressed by the school’s academic programs, found that students lacked a certain level of independence, meaning that many still couldn’t do basic hygiene by themselves.

Lourdes knew then and there that the school needed to incorporate a program

that addressed ADL skills—especially those geared toward independence. And she wanted any program that the school implemented to help them balance students’ needs, per the IEP, with state mandates for education.

### Enter Rethink Ed.

The school started with Rethink Ed mid-year, piloting it with a small group of teachers who, as Lourdes says, “fell in love with it.”

That’s because Rethink Ed helped the teachers personalize their 1:1 instruction, showing them how to match learning objectives and activities with the goals of the student’s IEP.

Teachers were buzzing about it and by September, the school rolled out Rethink Ed with even more teachers. Since then, Rethink Ed has expanded across more sites and more timeslots in the school day, including small groups and entire classrooms.

352X also gave Rethink Ed their in-house-developed curriculum so that Rethink Ed could work with the teachers to help them select academic skills that aligned with specific Common Core Learning Standards.

As for the independence and ADL skills, Rethink Ed revolutionized 352X’s teaching in that area, too.

“Rethink Ed has given us a bridge to teach independence and ADL skills with a slow and steady transition into the academics,” says Lourdes.

She credits Rethink Ed’s professional development libraries with showing teachers how to teach the pre-primer skills that are so important and lacking in the school’s students.

“Rethink Ed showed our teachers how to teach ‘sitting down’ and how to teach ‘holding a pencil,’” says Lourdes. “By the time a student enters the 1st grade, they’re a totally different student than when they entered kindergarten. It’s because of Rethink Ed.”

## **Teaching to the IEP: Using Rethink Ed Data to Inform Instruction**

When it comes to special education, there’s often a disconnect between student IEPs and Common Core curriculum. Couple that with the fact that far too many IEPs are written to be somewhat generic, and it’s easy to see why it can be difficult for teachers to develop personalized lesson plans, teach to specific goals, and monitor student progress toward the IEP goal.

Because Lourdes believes that it’s up to the school to help teachers avoid those very mistakes, she also relied on Rethink Ed to

help with teacher and paraprofessional preparation and training.

Fallon Lloyd, a paraprofessional at 352X explains, “What I like most about the job are the kids. The kids make it worthwhile coming here every day—it makes my heart smile—but Rethink Ed makes the job easier. I can just pick out the exact goal the child needs and Rethink Ed gives me a detailed lesson plan, teaching materials, everything.”

In addition to professional development training and instructional support, having data about how students are progressing is essential.

Rethink Ed makes it easy for 352X teachers to keep track of the number of learning objectives the students are meeting based on IEP goals. Plus, the teachers can use Rethink Ed data to ensure that other data sources are also in alignment.

“The data informs everything,” explains Lourdes. “For example, students at a specific Fountas and Pinnell reading level have a specific IEP objective—and data from Rethink Ed—that supports their reading level. If we’ve assessed a student at a Level P, then I know the Rethink Ed skill is not consonant skills; it’s going to be a little bit higher, such as extracting information or summarizing.”

Rethink Ed supports data integrity, helping Lourdes ensure alignment between different programs and assessment tools, such as Fountas and Pinnell or the school’s own in-house math assessment tool.

“Rethink Ed helped me organize the school a lot better,” she says. “The biggest challenge when you have more than one building is that you have to have a lot of faith that the building two miles away is doing right by the students.”

Rethink Ed not only helped Lourdes make sure that the instructional activities in the classroom meet the IEP goals, but the Rethink Ed data reports show her—and the parents—that they’re being constantly monitored so that once an IEP goal is met, the teacher is picking the next goal to work on.

“Our parents understand that even though their child comes to school, this is not babysitting,” says Lourdes. “They ARE going to learn how to read and write and do math and whatever is appropriate for the child’s level. Rethink Ed is the language we use to show them.”

## Conclusion

From developing IEP goals and lesson planning, to goal monitoring and data management, it can be overwhelming to put all the pieces of special education together—and communicate progress to the parent.

Rethink Ed not only simplified the process for 352X, but it did so to the benefit of teachers, parents, and students, as evidenced by these four key results:

- 1. Rethink Ed taught teachers how to incorporate ABA (applied behavior analysis) principles into the 1:1 area.**
- 2. Rethink Ed ensured that instructional activities in the classroom met both IEP goals and Common Core Learning Standards.**
- 3. Rethink Ed helped teachers readily and effectively monitor student progress on IEP goals.**
- 4. Rethink Ed supported the creation of a learning environment that meets student academic and social needs.**

“Although academics is important, we also have to address the behavioral and emotional issues that students have,” concludes Lourdes. “Rethink Ed anchors our teachers, lets us tailor strategies and programs back to our mission and vision, and, most importantly, becomes the common language of the IEP so that parents and teachers both understand what’s being done in the classroom to get to the goal. Students inherently benefit from that.”

***Let Rethink Ed improve the way your students develop the academic, behavioral, and social & emotional skills they need to succeed.***

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