
San Francisco Unified School District
San Francisco, CA

***Streamlining the
IEP Process***



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About SFUSD

San Francisco Unified School District is the 7th largest school district in California and is a single district county meaning that San Francisco is both a city and a district that is run by the district and the San Francisco Office of Education. Their mission is that “every day we provide each and every student the quality instruction and equitable support required to thrive in the 21st century.” With 143 schools and 9,551 staff, the district focuses on placing “equity, student achievement, and accountability at the forefront of every child’s education.”

SFUSD Enrollment

San Francisco has approximately 58,000 students in their district with 27% Latino, 13% White, 36% Asian, 8% African American, 4% Filipino, less than 1% American Indian, 1% Pacific Islander, 4% Multi-Racial, and 7% Declined to State. About 24% of students are English Language Learners, 11% Special Education, and 27% Gifted and Talented. 54% of students are in the free/reduced lunch program.

About Implementation

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) has been utilizing Rethink Ed since 2012 in an ongoing effort to increase the use of best practices in autism-specific classrooms. Prior to utilizing Rethink Ed, SFUSD spent months researching the most effective tool to support individuals with developmental disabilities. Rethink Ed stood out for its combination of evidence-based strategies, video modeling, progress monitoring, and an online platform for both teachers and paraprofessionals to access and they are now using the program across their district.

Writing High Quality IEPs Simplified With Rethink Ed

Jessica Ruth, a special education teacher with San Francisco Unified, loves her job “every day (she) comes to work it’s different” and “it’s an exciting puzzle that (she) gets to solve.” However, this can also make things difficult for a special education teacher. Unlike lesson planning for an entire class, a special education teacher must write targeted plans that cater to the needs and abilities of each student. In Jessica’s classroom, there is “a huge range of ability as well as age and so trying to meet the needs of all students while trying to make sure common core state standards are being met for every grade level is definitely a challenge.”

The process of writing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) can be time-consuming. Mark Thomas, a special education teacher and a Rethink Ed Trainer for the district, explains how IEPs and lesson planning are challenging for teachers, particularly when they are new to the field or new to a district. For many of these teachers, it’s basically “good luck; go be a teacher,” says Mark and “a lot of teachers have such a hard time that first year.”

Many teachers struggle with developing and implementing IEPs because as Mark states, “there’s really no great tool” to help teachers with this process. “That changed dramatically when the Rethink Ed program was introduced to SFUSD.”

Rethink Ed provides a comprehensive, easy to use system for writing high quality and measurable goals & objectives for IEPs. Both Jessica and Mark rely heavily on Rethink Ed for all of their students' IEP goals. Mark uses Rethink Ed "every day for 2 hours a day, 2 sessions a day, an afternoon session and a morning session, where the students rotate through and do one to one instruction. They work on mostly abilities and academic goals. They also work on some behavioral goals." Rethink Ed reduces the time necessary to develop quality goals and allows for more instructional time. This is one of Mark's favorite parts about Rethink Ed; More time to interact with their students can truly increase teacher satisfaction.

Tracking IEP Progress With Rethink Ed Engages Entire Team

The ability to easily track IEP progress is essential. Progress monitoring can be time intensive and difficult for teachers. Knowing what data to collect, taking data, and putting data into graphs for progress reports is not a straightforward process.

Jessica Ruth values this part of Rethink Ed the most. Both she and her paraeducators use the data sheets in Rethink Ed to track daily data for all the students' goals. She feels that "Rethink Ed has made (her) job easier in terms of being able to have quantitative data when (she) writes progress reports."

In addition to the data sheets, she loves using the app because, "it's really easy to track behaviors in the moment." Mark also sees the data collection and graphing as essential to a successful classroom and feels that measuring behavioral change is now "very trackable and easy to understand." Like the IEP writing process, Rethink Ed reduces valuable time spent on inputting and graphing data with Excel or other cumbersome programs.

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In addition to making data collection easier, Rethink Ed is valuable for parents. For IEP meetings, Mark prints out the student data and loves how he can engage parents; "makes them much more involved in the decision-making process of where to go next; they can see where the student seems to be slipping and make suggestions. Data provides a lot of information for parents; they've been very appreciative of that." Parent involvement is essential for successful outcomes.




Rethink Ed Empowers Paraprofessionals To Implement IEP Goals Effectively

No special education teacher can succeed without support from paraprofessionals. Unfortunately, schools often do not have the time or money to effectively train paraprofessionals; though all of their time is spent working directly with students, opportunity for training is limited. However, when paraprofessionals are effective, it can be life changing for the teachers and the students.

In Mark's classroom, his "paraeducators are using Rethink Ed more than (he) is." They work in Rethink Ed stations with the students, collect data, enter data, and even assist Mark with lesson planning. Since Rethink Ed was introduced in his classroom, he has noticed that his paraprofessionals "feel more empowered." When Mark is busy working with another student, he will often tell his staff to pick the next lesson and then he will check it when he can; They always pick correctly because "the next lesson is the next logical step" and now his paraprofessionals "feel more like teachers by having this program that they feel comfortable with and they know is a great benefit to the students."

The video training modules in Rethink Ed are also valuable for paraprofessionals. In Jessica's class, "Rethink Ed has been really helpful in terms of training staff on ABA." She has seen a big difference in outcomes for her students since she began providing her staff with a flexible and effective on-demand training option via Rethink Ed.

She states that “most of the students really thrive using discrete trial training” and that “being able to show the video models of the professionals using different tools has been really helpful in trying to create a cohesive and productive learning environment for (her) students.” Empowering paraprofessionals using Rethink Ed has been successful for Jessica, Mark, and many other teachers in the district. The platform streamlines the school day, making everyone more effective and saving time that teachers and paraprofessionals can dedicate directly to student instruction.



Conclusion

“Rethink Ed helps teachers become better teachers because it gives them this incredibly strong toolbox that is not just a data collection program,” states Mark Thomas. He believes that “Rethink Ed does a lot of the thinking for the teacher” and it helps with planning, progress monitoring, and supporting the teacher to be more informed when making decisions for what is best for the student.” Rethink Ed empowers paraprofessionals, eases the burden on teachers, and gives students more learning opportunities as well as engages parents in the IEP process. Having a tool to enhance decision making for everyone on the team has been a game changer for San Francisco.



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