



Fulton County Schools

Atlanta, GA

Achieving Student Success
With Quality Implementation



Case Study

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As the 4th largest school district in Georgia with almost 11,000 employees and 108 schools and administrative and support buildings, Fulton County serves a diverse group of about 94,000 students (41% Black or African American, 27% White, 16% Hispanic, 12% Asian, 3% Multi-Racial, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 0.1% American Indian). Of these students, about 41% are economically disadvantaged. To fulfill the goal of ensuring student achievement in and out of the classroom, Fulton has developed their Student Success Skills (SSS) program to “increase the percentage of students who demonstrate mastery of academic and interpersonal skills needed for college, career, and life success” (Webb, 2022). This social, emotional, and mental wellness program focuses on developing each students’ sense of belonging, self-awareness, self-management, social competence, collaborative problem solving, and reflective learning strategies. Fulton uses RethinkEd as the platform for educator training and student lessons, activities, and resources to achieve these goals.

Student Success Skills and RethinkEd Implementation

Implementation of SSS lessons via the RethinkEd platform is required at least two days per week for 15 minutes each. Many schools choose to do more than this, and most schools have a designated time that SSS is implemented across classrooms. The homeroom period is the most common time to implement SSS, but schools vary in their schedules. There are “school champions at every school to make sure that we can problem solve any challenges to support implementation,” says Nicole Webb, the Director of Student Supports. Parklane Elementary implements SSS lessons three times a week for about 20 minutes. This requirement across classrooms helps ensure the consistent delivery of lessons for all students. Chrissy Mingo, SSS Support Partner and School Counselor at Parklane, explains that “we want to make sure that they’re implementing all aspects of the lesson every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, first thing in the morning. And it’s what we call the sacred time.” Lessons presented through the RethinkEd platform are accessible for students and teachers to revisit after being accessed, and some teachers choose to review parts of lessons as needed for students. Sequin Armelin, a Liberty Point Elementary kindergarten teacher, recalls how the lessons are applicable year-round and demonstrate how some lessons help to emphasize essential skills continuously. Supporting children in lower-grade levels often requires reinforcement of lessons and skills. Sequin describes how “lessons I use throughout the year, such as the respect lesson, ties into when we’re talking about respecting each others’ personal space and being respectful with our words and actions. So yeah, I love the way the lessons are reinforced.” Sequin Armelin also states how the lessons are humanizing. They provide value in allowing younger students see the beauty of extending grace for others and themselves. She emphasizes, “All the lessons that I’ve taught, are all positive lessons, helping the kids to actually see themselves as important little people; that they are people first, you know. And that we gain respect if we respect each other’s differences, and give everybody a chance to, you know, to be a part of the environment.”

These skills are critical for teaching students as they learn and grow throughout their schooling experiences. Whole group lessons are how RethinkEd is typically delivered in Fulton schools, although students can also do small group and individual lessons or activities. There are 30 social- emotional RethinkEd lessons for every grade, and each of these lessons includes three components:

1. **Learn:** An instructional video of the SSS concept (e.g., empathy) is shown to the class, and there are discussion questions related to the video for the class to discuss.
2. **Practice:** Activities are provided in structured lesson plans for the students to practice the SSS skills with peers.
3. **Dive Deeper:** Activities allow the students to dive further into learning about the concept and exploring how it relates to their own lives.

This platform with clear instructions and simple lesson delivery creates a manageable system for content delivery by educators. One teacher noted that “you’re just trying to balance kids completing assignments and then pushing out the lesson. So, this year doing whole group lessons has been really working well for them; and the practice and the dive deeper, they always get to dive deeper,” stated Vanessa Louis, Instructional Coach and SSS Champion from Riverwood International Charter School. RethinkEd lessons are being administered to all groups of students and the multi-tiered curriculum provides a level of inclusivity to support the needs of all students. Everyone is exposed to and benefiting from the SSS lessons presented in schools and one teacher emphasized that, “the great thing about our building is that our special ed classes use this program, and we don’t feel like it should be limited to only a certain group of students, so everybody experiences it” states Brian Madej, Curriculum Support Teacher at Alpharetta Elementary School.

The RethinkEd platform serves not only as a tool for teaching students but also as a resource for supporting adults. The platform provides professional development that allows practical ways for teachers to connect with their students and improve the overall culture that was affected by the pandemic, school closures, and other societal changes that have taken place over the past two years. Nhi Vu, a School Counselor at Alpharetta Elementary, discussed how “having those lessons, specifically for the teachers, just helps with rebuilding that relationship in the culture. I think a lot of that was missing with the pandemic. Not that that wasn’t already there, but I think it just has more of an intentional time frame for the teachers and something that’s very easy to use - like, nothing’s complicated. Rethink is very user-friendly. And I think in the short term that SSS has helped just all of us readjust socially.” Accessibility and user-friendliness have been praised across schools, allowing teachers to focus on delivering content rather than navigating a complicated platform. Melanie McCollum, a teacher from Holcomb Bridge Middle School, expressed, “I love how they’re laid out for us already and they are kind of an easy bank for us to go to and pull from, so then maybe if we have some kids that need some deeper learning around some of these skills.” Another staff member praised the convenience of having all resources laid out for them. An Administrative Assistant and SSS Champion at Parklane Elementary, Leondria Gray states, “So teachers have easy access to it. And I like how the platform has everything there for teachers to be able to teach you lessons.” This helps mitigate stress and focus on implementation and facilitation for staff members. Successful implementation starts with usability and buy-in, and it is clear that Fulton staff are finding the RethinkEd platform easy to use, effective, and essential for their students.

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Consistency and Growth of Fidelity of Implementation

Fulton prioritizes implementation fidelity to ensure consistency, effectiveness, and cohesiveness of the staff across all schools. The Fidelity of implementation is measured through regular classroom observations and RethinkEd data. Chelsea Montgomery, Executive Director for the Office of Students Supports, is “a big fan of doing lots of fidelity checks” and explains how “five different people can walk into 20 different classrooms and have universal agreement” and see “the exact same elements that we are looking for.” It is when this kind of consistency is in place that schools can expect to see a cultural shift and a common language across staff and students. Nicole Webb concurs and describes how implementation success varies and builds from year to year. While they started the program last year during the pandemic, this is the first year that they are “sticking to the schedule” and “teaching all components of the lessons” and “being consistent” and now they are “on the rails and really moving forward.” Next year, the goals will be to “master the content and really improve the fidelity of the lessons” and use “all of the wonderful lesson components included” in RethinkEd. Then, in year 3, the content will be “integrated into other content areas,” and there will be a universal “common language spoken throughout the whole district.” School buy-in is vital for effective implementation. Consistent implementation aids in overall success. Chrissy Mingo describes, “all of the students are aware of it; we’ve been doing it on the morning announcements before the activity. It’s on the morning announcement, what era we’re learning, what domain we’re learning. So, it’s just basically we’ve accepted, we have adopted that as a whole school.”

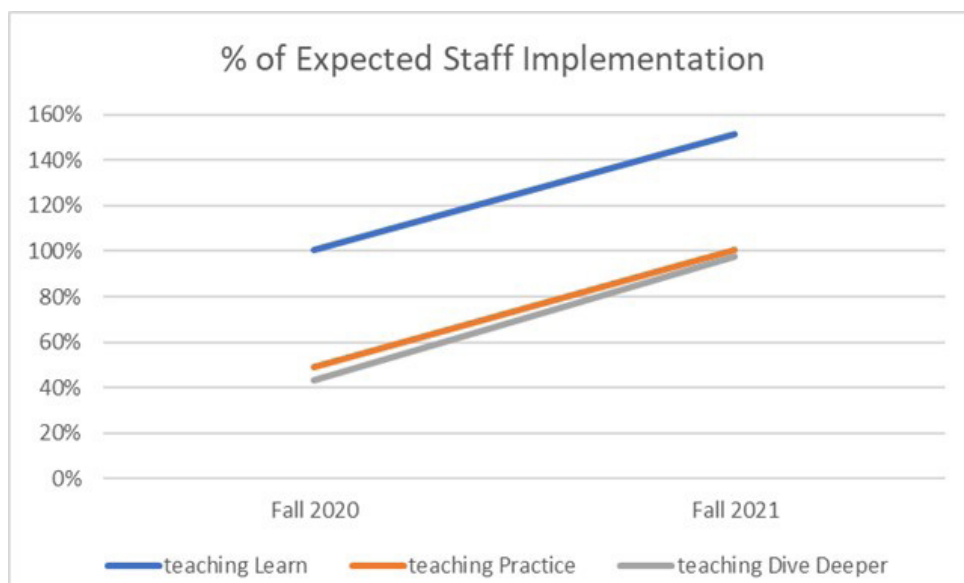
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RethinkEd is contributing to eliminating barriers related to seeking help. Normalizing support can increase comfortability and growth. Cayla Franzman, a teacher at Riverwood International Charter School, reflects on what success looks like to her. She states, “I think the success that I have really seen that I can attribute to SSS and the rethink ad program is people just being more willing to talk about and ask for help. Making it more known that it’s okay, if you’re struggling with something, it’s okay to ask for help.” Removing stigmas and barriers creates possibilities for positively impacting development. Addressing social-emotional needs has become a priority in student support. Without this, true fidelity is not effective. SEL is presented as a primary concern for many schools to ensure students receive a quality education. Kathleen Stamper, Principal at Liberty Point Elementary, discusses, “I guess some part of it was just a non-negotiable, like any other academic subject, because there was no way we’re going to proceed forward without addressing the need for that social emotional piece.”

Addressing social-emotional needs has become a priority in student support.

RethinkEd data shows school and district leaders the percentage of staff implementing SSS. Expected numbers are calculated based on the number of staff regularly using the program. Actual numbers are looked at to develop a percentage of expected staff using the program consistently. For the schools that participated in this case study, expected staff implementation shows improvement and often even exceeds expectations. This pattern is expected to continue as the program grows and matures with even more usage of the RethinkEd lesson components.

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Positive Impact of Student Success Skills

Lessons on the RethinkEd platform center around various skill sets that help students with social, emotional, and mental wellness. The program’s effectiveness occurs when teachers and students actively engage in the lessons and share knowledge. Nhi Vu, School Counselor at Alpharetta Elementary School, reflects on her experience with successful implementation. “I think that good implementation is just like those students, and even the teachers, sharing that knowledge that they’ve learned; and also sometimes re-sharing it with some of their other peers. So, it’s a great way for the teachers to see that it’s effective, and also have that buy-in as well.” Another way to indicate how schools know the program is valuable is if it is helping both teachers and students. Engagement increases, and both teachers and students are interacting so that content fosters a space that invites these critical conversations.

Leondria Gray recalls how she observed the impact of SSS in one of the classrooms in her school. She explains that she has “observed students just being able to have that kind of discourse with their teachers. So being able to talk through their problems, the teachers who are teaching SSS with fidelity, and those who have bought into the SSS program, they are really shining. They are my SSS superstars because their classrooms have a loving and caring environment. The kids feel loved, and they feel like they have a person to be able to talk to. We have very little discipline issues from those classes.” This rapport that teachers build with students can help to minimize behavioral challenges and create a safe and positive space for learning. The success and impact of SSS lessons are measured in various ways. However, one teacher recalls how she noticed a student understanding and applying the material in action. For this teacher, this was an indicator of the impact that RethinkEd truly has on transformation. Kimberlea Elliott recalls, “I know that in her heart, she’s hearing it. So, it’s little moments like that with students that you can see it’s working.” Small indicators of positive growth and impact help with the overall success and implementation of lessons.

SSS skills help students transition from primary to secondary school and into college, career, and adult life. These skills range from navigating peer and adult relationships, processing and managing one’s own emotions, being responsive to the feelings and values of others, goal setting, responsible decision making, and self-care. These skills are essential from kindergarten through high school and maybe even more critical as students approach adult life to prepare them for the world outside of school life. SSS lessons are instrumental in giving students “the tools and the basics that they need to survive high school socially and emotionally because it’s tough and it’s a different beast than middle school.

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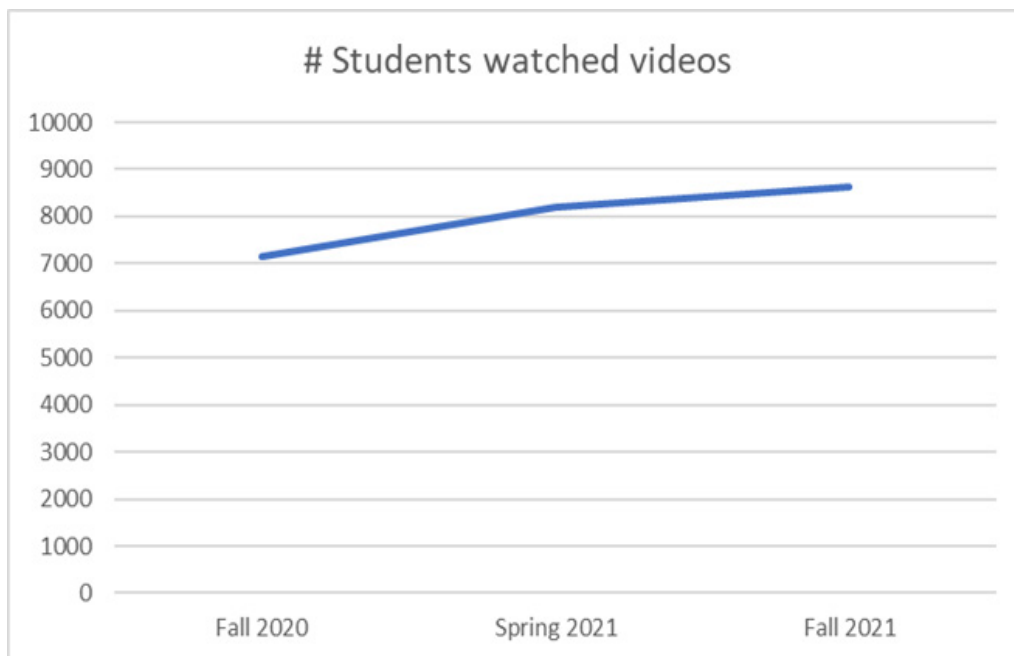
SSS definitely gives our students the social-emotional tools they need,” explains Kimberlea Elliott, a 7th-grade teacher at Holcomb Bridge Middle School. These lessons are also a pillar for students currently in high school. As mentioned before, SSS lessons provide students with guidance on navigating the pressures associated with high school. They vary from friendships, grades, responsibilities, etc.

Cayla Franzman emphasized that “in high school, they’re having a lot of feelings. They’re stressed out, they’re discouraged by their grades, they’re worried about their friendships, and SSS has given them a kind of a language to talk about those things.” It is important to note that the most common benefit of SSS said by teachers and administrators during these interviews had a common language that unites teachers and students.

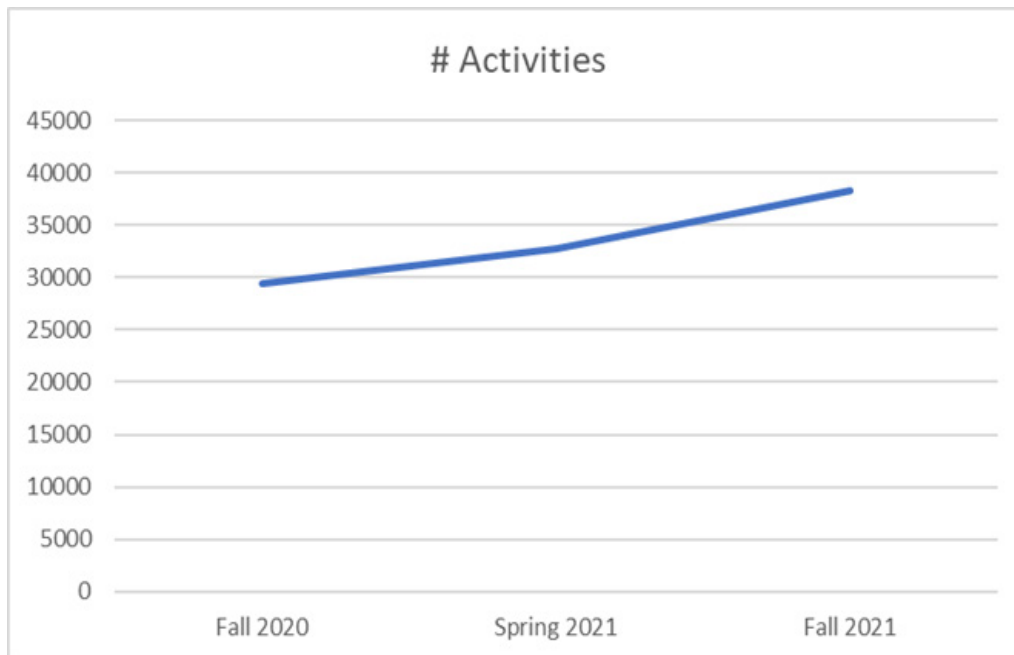
SSS lessons provide students with guidance on navigating the pressures associated with high school.

Lessons are implemented in the classroom; however, one educator notices differences in student awareness beyond the classroom. Dan Richal, a Language Arts teacher at Holcomb Bridge Middle School, sees students practicing this. “We’re starting to hear these things, not just in the classroom, but also in the hallways. And kids are starting to, I don’t want to say self-monitor, but they’re more aware of other ways to deal with situations than getting physical or getting loud, or, you know. We’re trying to instill the idea just because you’re loudest doesn’t mean that you’re the most right. So, I think that that’s definitely starting. We’re starting to see that in the lunchroom, on the playground on the buses, everywhere, including the classroom, but especially outside of the classroom.” Students create a sense of accountability for themselves and others in and outside the classroom where lessons are implemented.

Curriculum content and lessons are significantly valuable for various staff members working with students. Kathleen Stamper provides insight into how the lessons can help resolve conflicts with students. She recalls, “We had a great example as I had a fifth-grade group of girls with a counseling need, you know. They needed help with how to be nice, and we used the lessons straight from Rethink to link to our students’ success skills to help them; and we’ve not had one issue with those girls since that point.” As implementation grows, students gain more access to the RethinkEd lessons and the rich content available in each lesson. Since last year, students have been watching more of the instructional videos in the Learn part of the lessons, and this number is expected to continue to grow. Curriculum content showed to apply to teachers and students. Brian Madej speaks of the personal impact he has taken away from the lessons. He states, “Oh, my gosh, now I use some of these techniques myself. Like if I need to calm down, or I need to take a moment or reorganize my thinking; and, you know, because they’re exposed to it. So, naturally, I think some teachers have been adapting those behaviors themselves.”



Similarly, students have more access to the activities in the Practice and Dive Deeper parts of the lessons. This is also expected to continue growing as implementation builds across the district.



The impact of COVID-19 in schools increased the need for SSS. More than ever, supporting students, teachers, and families is critical. Chelsea Montgomery emphasized, “I say pre-COVID, we needed it. During COVID, we can’t go without it. It’s not a choice anymore. I mean, the kids are not in a good place, and their families and the teachers, no one is in a great place. So honestly, I think that the schools protected time to have these conversations. It’s a requirement to prioritize SSS. You have to because there’s too much other stuff going on.” The COVID-19 pandemic has limited peer interaction and slowed the development of social and emotional skills for students. Many students lack the maturity for their grade level

that would be expected due to the pandemic restrictions, remote learning, and in some cases, learning loss. SSS lessons served as an essential point of reintegration for students to foster relationships and return to the classroom. SSS lessons ultimately helped strengthen relationship building within schools where the RethinkEd platform was present. To introduce reintegration, “it kind of helps them with peers, you know, how to get along with each other, because some of them were at home last year, or some of them were in smaller classroom settings, and they have to get kind of re-acclimated to being back in the classroom,” says Danielle Florence, a 3rd-grade teacher and SSS Champion at Liberty Point Elementary.

RethinkEd lessons provide age-appropriate lessons applicable to students at various grade levels. Vanessa Louis recalls time management and organization lessons delivered to her high school students and the importance of having them as they are transitioning out of high school. She states, “So I think a lot of your videos on time management and organization, like it’s not your parents’ responsibility anymore. It’s on you, you are super important because our kids are a little bit behind in that. This ends the pandemic that did this for them.” The impact of COVID-19 has affected students worldwide. However, students transitioning out of the traditional school system into adulthood also need tangible skills that will help them progress throughout life.

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SSS and RethinkEd lessons support the transformation of critical and impactful conversations that students need to have with adults and each other.

Some conversations are challenging and having a common language, a safe space, and structured activities can help to foster these conversations productively and healthily. For example, these skills and lessons can help facilitate conversations for students around race and gender expression. Dan Richal recalls how helpful the lessons have been to break barriers for students to express themselves honestly. He explains that “in my SSS class, I have multiple students that are non-binary, or they are transgender, and allowing us to have these conversations with them coming out of their shell more; really being true to themselves, not backing away, has been very valuable.” SSS is an empowerment tool to support student expression. RethinkEd lessons are helping to create a sense of community and belonging and can ease students into having difficult conversations about global issues that are impacting the world. Creating meaningful dialogue around these topics allows students to have a voice in the larger conversation while also staying informed. Chelsea Montgomery reflects, “So I think just that having that time, having that community in that classroom, will give them space to talk about things that they maybe wouldn’t have talked about before, or would have talked about it at the lunch table without an adult; or would have done way too much social media digging and potentially could be misinformed. So, I think just having the safe space. The sense of community is really helpful.” RethinkEd lessons provide educators with content on various cultures. This provides students with cultural awareness skills and humility as they are learning and growing. Danielle Florence states, “it gives you strategies for how to deal with other people like, like today, our lesson was on cultures. Hence, they know how to interact with different types of cultures that are different from themselves.” Exposure to lessons surrounded by culture is especially beneficial for younger students.

SSS is an empowerment tool to support student expression. RethinkEd lessons are helping to create a sense of community...

Fulton County is an exemplary model of implementation of a social-emotional curriculum. With buy-in from their staff and a dedicated team of administrators and SSS Champions, the district shows how staff can find the time and prioritize teaching students the skills that they need to be ready to learn. The skills targeted in Fulton's SSS program and the RethinkEd curriculum are not just a nice-to-have; they are a must-have, particularly now following the pandemic and school closures. As Chelsea Montgomery astutely points out, "I don't think we have a choice. It is of critical importance," and "if no one is in a headspace to teach or to learn, it doesn't really matter."

References

Webb, N. (2022). Student Success Skills Implementation Guide 2021-2022. Fulton County Schools.



About Us

RethinkEd was founded on a simple, yet powerful idea: To re-think education. To make it better and easier. To unburden school districts and empower educators. To improve outcomes and elevate accountability. To promote collaboration and inspire learning. And most importantly, to make a difference in the school day for everyone – administrators, educators, and students.

The RethinkEd solution is part of Rethink First, a global company that is transforming behavioral healthcare. Similar to Rethink First's other solutions that are innovating and improving outcomes for clinicians and employers globally, RethinkEd is pioneering EdTech with our relentless pursuit of innovative methods that put evidenced-based, data-informed, digitally delivered instruction and assessments into the hands of educators, clinicians, and parents who share our singularly minded focus: To power the potential of all children and to work together to help them succeed.

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