# rethink **Ed**

## North East
## Independent School District
San Antonio, TX

## *Using Data to Drive Instruction and Inform Families*

**CASE STUDY**

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## San Antonio, TX

## About North East

For more than 60 years, North East ISD has served the community of Bexar County, Texas, primarily in the city of San Antonio.  The district is led by Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Brian G. Gottardy and has an esteemed team of approximately 9,300 professionals working in the district.  All schools are fully accredited by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and all schools received the highest rating (Met Standard) by TEA during the 2015-2016 school year.  Several of their high schools rank highly in city, state, and national rankings.  North East ISD has 68 campuses with 13 magnet programs and 8 alternatives schools/programs.

## North East Enrollment

North East ISD serves approximately 67,500 students with 251 in early education, 31,242 in elementary schools, 15,337 in middle schools, and 21,141 in high school during the 2015-2016 school year.  Of these 67,971 students, 7.0% were African-American, 3.0% Asian, 57% Pacific Islander, 3% 2 or more races, and 27% White, non-Hispanic.  About 45% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch and 9.4% of students receive special education services.

## About Implementation

North East is in its fifth year of implementation with Rethink Ed. They started with a small, strategic implementation to ensure fidelity of usage amongst a focus group. This focus group consisted of a selected group of teachers from their behavior inclusion support teachers and their self-contained low-incidence disability classes. Over the next two years they expanded implementation to include every special education teacher in the district using Rethink Ed's platform. In North East's fourth year of implementation, they decided to increase their internal sustainability of the Rethink Ed implementation by enrolling in the Rethink Ed Trainer program. North East ISD now has over 600 special education teachers utilizing Rethink Ed to progress monitor student development and has 5 district Rethink Ed Trainers facilitating functionality trainings and monthly coaching sessions.

## Rethink Ed Data Informs Instructional Decisions For Teachers

Over the past five years, Rethink Ed has worked closely with North East ISD to effectively support teachers, improve instructional practices, and produce quality outcomes for students and educators. Kara Hallenberger, Special Education Program Coordinator, who has worked with the district for more than 20 years in various roles including as a teacher and an administrator, believes that the data collection and management system in Rethink Ed has been extremely valuable for NEISD.  Prior to the district adopting Rethink Ed, a different online system was utilized, it was deemed to not have the level of detail necessary for their needs, "it was just pure data entry and graphing of the data." Kara and her team were seeking something with "more curriculum rich information." Rethink Ed was able to provide this to help teachers not only take data, but more importantly to make data-based instructional decisions.  They were looking for a more comprehensive program that allowed teachers to build and implement quality IEP's and build behavior intervention plans that lead to student learning and decreased behavioral challenges.

Hallenberger explained that teachers had been engaging in a multi-step process: 1) developing data sheets;  2) putting data into a spreadsheet; 3) graphing data in Excel; and 4) analyzing the data.  This was a complex way to manage and present data to all stakeholders.  When she saw Rethink Ed, she thought "we have one system that does all of that for you and you're using three different kinds of systems to do that," Rethink Ed might be a valuable tool for teachers.  She explained that once teachers invest in Rethink Ed, you "see the light bulbs come on". She figured that Rethink Ed might be a valuable tool for teachers.

Taking data and graphing it is not sufficient for success.  It's important to use that data to make decisions for instruction. Hallenberger states "teachers that are consistently entering their data in Rethink Ed get really nice rich data that we are able to look at and really analyze."  These data drive decisions and are used to inform parents about their child's progress in a time-efficient and user-friendly format.   For instance, one of Kara's favorite aspects of Rethink Ed is the ability to include phase lines in the graphs to visually depict "what

things were implemented that might have caused a change in the data."  Phase lines are lines drawn in graphs to show when something significant occurs, such as an extended absence or a change in medication.  As she wisely points out, the data by itself isn't always sufficient, sometimes, we need to "see where was the change in the data and why was that change occurring for that student" so that we can make modifications to the child's behavioral interventions and begin to "see the progress in a particular student."  Data-based decision making is essential to quality behavioral programming and delivery of effective instruction.

## Rethink Ed Data Informs Parents And Keeps Them Involved

Rethink Ed's rich data management and curriculum are not only valuable to the schools, but, also to families.  Parents involvement in the decision-making process is important, but it can be difficult to explain what their children are doing in school and what is working and not working.  "Anytime you can

present a visual to parents, it's much easier than just presenting words," states Hallenberger. Presenting graphs to parents to show what aspects of the program are working best and which ones need improvement increases the parent's understanding and confidence in the schools and supports their engagement in the decision making process. "Everybody perceives words in a different way. Their interpretation of a student's progress improving might be different than what the teacher's interpretation of progress improving," she states. Having different interpretations can sometimes lead to parents feeling uncomfortable or confused, "whereas when you have concrete data, it's a little bit more easy to see and talk to the information." When the data are clear, the decisions are less subjective, and it creates a more pleasant IEP experience for the parents and the school staff.

## Rethink Ed Supports Quality Behavior Intervention

Rethink Ed guides the team through an effective process of development, implementation and evaluation of effective behavior supports. Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) are plans for decreasing problem behaviors and increasing replacement and adaptive skills for the student to be able to successfully learn. It can be a daunting, time-consuming, and technically difficult process to create a BIP and to implement it effectively. Jennifer Heritch, Behavioral Facilitator with North East, points out that "in the past, special education teachers have often struggled in writing behavioral plans and coming up with IEP goals that are measurable and observable." One of the toughest parts of writing a BIP for someone without substantial training in behavior analysis is "defining the problem behavior so we know what we're tracking and trying to change," states Heritch. Jennifer also believes that it's difficult for teachers to determine the function of the behavior, or why the student is exhibiting the behavior. The absence of identifying the function can lead

to an ineffective intervention.  As stated by Heritch, "once we know the function, we can come up with interventions that address that function to change the behavior."

While it is important to develop plans to decrease problem behaviors, "one thing we know in behavioral analysis, it's not enough to try to target the problem behavior and to decrease that target behavior," says Heritch.  "We need to identify skills we want the student to display instead of the problem behavior." Replacement behaviors are essential to reducing problem behaviors.  Teaching the student to do something appropriate that addresses the function of their original behavior will result in long term gains and reduces the likelihood of the problem behavior returning. For instance, a child who is engaging in aggressive acts to get out of difficult tasks may benefit from learning how to ask for a break or asking for help when tasks are tough for them. These appropriate, replacement behaviors serve the same function as the aggression, and the child is more likely to use less aggression if these more socially

acceptable behaviors are working for them.

Rethink Ed includes a BIP platform that simplifies the process for teachers, improving efficiency and decreasing the difficulty.  Jennifer Heritch really likes the Rethink Ed BIP system because "it takes them through a specific 6 step process, it starts with the target behavior and really defining the target behavior" and then "walks (teachers) through collecting baseline data of where the student is functioning right now" and helps them to "determine what could possibly be driving that behavior."  The system then guides teachers to "take that function and develop replacement skills that we want to teach them that still meet that same need but in a more pro social manner," which Heritch believes has historically "been really difficult for teachers." She likes how Rethink Ed "gives possible strategies and skills based on that function that we've identified, based on our data that we've collected then walks the teachers through what consequence strategies are for both the problem behavior, and the appropriate behaviors, how are we going to respond not

only when the problem behavior occurs, but more importantly, how are we going to respond to the appropriate skills that we are teaching them to do because we want to see more of it and we want to reinforce that behavior," says Heritch.  Kara Hallenberger also states that the 6 step process "has been really very helpful to the process of creating IEP goals and objectives."  She believes that this "has helped both family and teachers to be able to see that data go consistently across the board and to collect data on that and write additional goals and objectives."

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## Conclusion

Rethink Ed supports special educators in meeting the needs of children with disabilities. The ease of data collection and analysis saves time, improves planning, and increases effectiveness.  The data and visual graphs that are automatically generated in Rethink Ed guides the IEP process and supports parental understating of what is working and not working for their child.  Jennifer Heritch recommends Rethink Ed to behavior analysts working in schools "because it's an excellent

program, it gives very rich data and curriculum in helping teach the behavior skills that (they) want to see (their) students perform." She believes that "the progress reports that Rethink Ed produces provide excellent information for the parents and there's no arguing about how the student is progressing."  Kara Hallenberger recommends Rethink Ed, it is "very comprehensive and it allows (teachers) to start from the very beginning of the process to the end of the process as opposed to it being a data collection system."  "The important thing about Rethink Ed is that it is rooted in Applied Behavioral Analysis, especially the behavioral component side of it, everything ties to ABA principles and intervention" and she "believes that is very important."  North East ISD has embraced Rethink Ed as a positive difference for students and educators is the ultimate test, and Rethink Ed has met that criteria.