
Clayton County Public Schools

Clayton, GA

**Effective Implementation of
Social Emotional Learning in
Clayton County Public
Schools and the Impact on
Students, Teachers,
Administrators, and Families**

Case Study Report 2 of 3



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Clayton County Public Schools (CCPS) has more than 7,300 employees who are highly qualified and effective educators serving more than 55,000 students. CCPS is the 5th largest school system in Georgia and is in the top 100 largest in the United States. They are now implementing Rethink Ed SEL district-wide in all schools and are committed to making SEL a top priority to create a safe, effective, and nurturing school climate throughout the district.

Teachers have jumped into Rethink Ed's SEL platform with enthusiasm and according to Ms. Alexandria Ellison, a 3rd-grade teacher, it helps her to be "intentional with the different pre-planned modules that cover the five (CASEL) competencies." Her students have improved their ability to "identify more emotions and learn how to express themselves and the way they are feeling." They are able to go beyond "happy, sad, and mad" and learn to "identify with their actions" and "learn different ways to react to certain situations." The platform has also helped her "implement effective behavior plans that have decreased challenging behaviors in (her) classroom and increased positive learning." One of the 2nd-grade students that she mentored demonstrated some behavioral challenges and she worked with him on SEL skills, and he has "completely turned himself around" and has "become a leader in his classroom" and "now he's a true leader even to this day."

The Rethink Ed SEL series has also helped her “build relationships with (her) students, starting with trust and compassion.” She points out how there is a tendency for educators to just “teach, teach, teach, but with Rethink Ed and social-emotional learning, you now understand that you must take some steps beforehand”. As Dr. Ralph L. Simpson, Deputy Superintendent for School Leadership and Improvement points out, you must “reach before you teach.” Ms. Ellison believes in this sentiment “wholeheartedly” and that “students learn best when they feel loved and safe and cared for and with SEL and Rethink Ed, (she) is able to create that type of positive environment in (her) classroom.” SEL has not only helped her classroom but the whole building with 120 staff members and “affects school climate by focusing on improving the inclusiveness of all stakeholders.” It has helped them develop shared beliefs and she and the other staff “know at any moment (they) can reach out and ask for help from anybody.” She says that “Rethink Ed has transformed the way (their) school learns, develops, and how (they) create relationships.”

Mark Dixon, a senior at Lovejoy High School, feels that for him and other high school students, the videos and discussion questions are really helpful. “That’s my favorite thing to do because it lets us have a chance to actually talk with each other and have a discussion about each topic.” He feels that SEL has brought him a little closer to his peers and “it definitely makes (him) feel more open with them.” He states that “it opens up a door for (them) where (they) can see (their) differences and who is similar to them” and this helps him “relate to what they’re talking about” and “it makes you feel like you’re not alone.”

Coach Krista Lucich, physical education teacher and the Chairperson for SEL at Lovejoy High School, also sees how the students are better able to “voice how they feel” and how they can support each other and how SEL has given them “strategies for the anxiety they were facing.” Dr. Kimberly Dugger, Principal at Kendrick Middle School, has noticed how Rethink Ed has helped teachers to “bring SEL strategies into the core curriculum” and how teachers

have really taken hold of the program and have “learned how to incorporate (SEL) into the content” instead of just having “SEL moments at the beginning of class.” One of the biggest changes in culture for Dr. Dugger’s school was when they decided to “remove ISS (in-school suspension) from (their) school and replace it with SEL” which completely changed the “dynamics of the way (they) discipline (their) students.” Instead of ISS, students now go to the “mood room” where they can talk through their challenges with a teacher and work on building better SEL skills such as “self-respect and in turn, respecting others.”

For Dr. Avery Kenly, Teacher Development Specialist, the data reporting in Rethink Ed’s SEL program helps with implementation and tracking progress and it is valuable to see “what skills are still lacking” and what improvements students have made. He agrees that the program is very beneficial for teachers because it is a “platform that they can use” and it is “very user-friendly and doesn’t take a lot of heaving lifting” so they can embed SEL “into their lesson and into the flow of their class.” Mr. Nelson Render, Principal at Lovejoy High School, feels that Rethink Ed “has streamlined” what they were already trying to establish in their high school and “the curriculum really helped (them) to make sure (they) have a very defined role of what (they’re) going to do and a clear roadmap.” Dr. Bonnie Waring, Assistant Principal at Lovejoy High School, says that Rethink Ed has “opened the door for (their) teachers to have the permission to talk to their kids” and “it gave students the ability to reach out to their teachers” and so, as an administrator, Rethink Ed “has made (their) job easier” and it helps “keep (their) students more well-balanced.”

The Rethink Ed SEL Professional Development Series has had, and Dr. Simpson believes will continue to have a “drastic impact on the adults and the teachers” that goes “beyond math, science, English, and social studies” and that if they get this right “and lay this foundation and implement with fidelity, then you will see the academic achievement that you’ve always wanted.” He values the professional development and states that they “align with what

(they) do.” He points out that teacher education programs can teach you how to teach “but they can’t teach you how to love.” When he says, “reach before you teach” he is highlighting how important it is to teach educators to connect with their students and that “when we talk about reaching children, it’s about providing teachers with a tool belt full of nuggets and full of weapons that they can use that will help for them to be able to reach.” SEL is one of these weapons in the toolbelt but CCPS also educates teachers on restorative practices and restorative justice, as well as making “sure that teachers are well versed and informed about what trauma looks like” and how to help.

Kim Blackwood, Training Specialist of Professional Learning and a lead for SEL in the district, has looked at the data for professional development and found that most of the districts’ schools are at or above 100% logging in and completing training modules. Dr. Dugger notes how the Rethink Ed SEL program has helped her “take a look at (herself) as an administrator” and forced her to “reflect on ways that (she) can improve to support the needs of staff emotionally and not just push academics.” SEL is not just a part of the classroom but an important part of faculty meetings and trainings. Dr. Kenly has seen first-hand how SEL can change the lives not only of students but teachers too. One of the science teachers that he has worked with used the Rethink Ed SEL platform and built better relationships with his students and learned that “relationships are paramount” above and beyond academics. He describes SEL as a “bridge to the content” because “we have to know our students in order to help them learn.”

Ms. Blackwood states that “SEL must be practiced from the top-down” and “this means that every employee, every teacher, nutrition worker, bus driver, everyone should be trained on SEL.” Dr. Duncan also believes that professional development is crucial because you have to work “from the top all the way down” and teachers need to reflect on their own self-awareness and reflect “on what we need to change in order to make that change with the

students.” She points out how SEL can help with teacher retention rate and focuses on the importance of making teachers feel that they are heard and that administrators empathize with them. She says that we need to “practice what we preach” and “make sure we have a clear understanding of what’s relevant” to the teachers. She reports that the teachers love the trainings and that each time they meet they light up with questions and she can see that they feel relevant and important and that inspires them to learn more and do more for themselves, each other, and for the students.

Ms. Ellison feels that the SEL professional development has “helped (her) professionally as well as personally” and has “allowed (her) to identify and work through some strengths and challenges within (herself).” She also feels that it “has expanded (her) tool belt in categories such as communication, self-care awareness, and mental health” making her “more competent, knowledgeable, and helped (her) to keep her skills relevant.” Coach Lucich, “an advocate for health and wellness,” has also learned a lot from Rethink Ed’s SEL professional development series. For her, it has given her ways to “think outside the box” and it has helped her to be more “mindful of what everyone is going through.” Dr. Waring fully agrees with Coach Lucich and adds that the professional development helps the administrators support the teachers and lets them know that the administrators are “thinking about them and supporting them so that they can support families, and in turn, support the students.” Mr. Render also agrees that the professional development is essential for making “everyone feel connected” and he appreciates “the fact that professional development is designed to build in SEL while you’re learning SEL.”

With an exceptional staff and a diligent plan to implement SEL throughout the district, CCPS is paving the path for other districts. Their consistent use of Rethink Ed SEL student lessons is making a dramatic impact on their students. Their commitment to professional development and

continuing to learn and grow as educators is also inspiring. As they continue to make SEL a core part of their school culture, it will be exciting to see the impact over the next several years.



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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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