



Pasadena ISD Improves ARD/IEP meetings and Ensures Student Focus with Spectrum K12's Professional Development Training

Profile: Pasadena Independent School District - TX

54 schools
46,500 students
4,000 special education students

Student population

- 70% Hispanic
- 20% White
- 6% African American
- 3% Asian

Challenges

Primary focus of IEP meetings on legal compliance, rather than the needs of the child

Broad, rather than student-centered, learning goals and objectives

One team member, the diagnostician, responsible for coordinating and directing all ARD/IEP team meeting functions

Lack of clearly defined roles for ARD/IEP team members

Solution

Pasadena Independent School District implemented Spectrum K12 School Solutions' Professional Development Training workshops to provide all team members with the tools to foster collaborative, consensus-based decision making among all ARD/IEP meeting participants and conduct efficient meetings focused on the needs of the child.

Challenges and Objectives

The Pasadena Independent School District (ISD) is a large suburban district in Texas covering 85.5 square miles in portions of Pasadena, South Houston and Houston. In Pasadena ISD, as in all Texas school districts, an Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee meets to discuss each student's educational placement as they enter, continue, or exit special education services.

However, the district was faced with a number of challenges resulting in unproductive IEP meetings and frustrated participants. Thus, Pasadena ISD chose Spectrum K12 to provide a continuum of professional development training for school members of ARD/IEP teams to address their challenges and to change operational cultures at the campus level.

"I was looking for training that would help our ARD/IEP team members make the process a much more collaborative effort to help participants see that they were not just token team members, but that they each had roles and responsibilities," said Cathy Sartain, Executive Director of Special Programs for Pasadena ISD. "Equally as important was finding a solution that would help us gain agreement with all participants, particularly parents."

A Professional Development Training Solution

Spectrum K12, the first company to offer facilitated IEP meeting training, provides the breadth of courses to meet the needs of the full range of ARD/IEP meeting participants. Spectrum K12's professional development consultants, all of whom have been educators themselves, have trained more K-12 educators in the facilitated IEP meeting process than any other company.

Unlike other courses that focus solely on the meeting content or forms, Spectrum K12's professional development training equips participants with the knowledge and skills to shift the meeting's focus to dialogue about the needs of the child by incorporating proven process strategies and tools.

With Spectrum K12's comprehensive training offerings, the district's goals were to:

- o Create efficient, student-focused ARD/IEP team meetings
- o Foster collaborative, consensus-based decision making
- o Clarify ARD/IEP team members' roles and responsibilities
- o Develop positive relationships between staff and parents

Customized Facilitation Skills Training and Coaching

Pasadena ISD kicked off their long-range plan with one of Spectrum K12's core two-day training courses, *Essential Facilitation and Leadership Skills for ARD/IEP Meetings*. Pasadena chose campus principals, assistant principals, counselors, and team leaders to participate in this course, so that they could learn effective leadership and process management techniques. This course provides a compliant meeting process framework that ensures the focus remains on the student. The Pasadena participants sealed their skills development by participating in four practice meetings held during the training. The training consultants provided additional coaching for skills improvement and mastery.



Extraordinary Solutions for Exceptional Populations

"Spectrum's facilitated IEP process training has resulted in dollars saved and redirected from costly legal disputes and hearings to resources for supporting staff and student achievement."

Cathy Sartain, Executive
Director of Special Programs
Pasadena, TX ISD

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- o Money saved and redirected from costly legal disputes and hearings to resources for supporting staff and student achievement
- o Collaborative, consensus-based decision making among ARD/IEP team members, including parents
- o More efficient, student-focused meetings
- o Improved quality of IEP goals and objectives
- o Improved staff morale, due to clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- o Improved relationships between staff and parents, resulting in fewer disagreements and complaints

RESULTS

Pasadena ISD has dramatically improved the ARD/IEP process by creating ground rules with standard practices for ARD/IEP team meetings and posting the rules at each campus to ensure accountability district-wide.

An agenda is now used at all ARD/IEP meetings, which has helped increase efficiency and ensure everyone comes to the meeting with information and input.

In addition, all ARD/IEP meetings are now facilitated by campus principals, building neutral facilitation capacity within the district, and eliminating the need to bring in outside facilitators.

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"Looking at the big picture, the tone of our ARD/IEP meetings has changed," said Sartain. "There's been a shift away from focusing only on legal compliance responsibilities to focusing more on the needs of the child. All our participants now understand that, while the legal pieces are important, to develop a successful program for a child, everyone has to come to the meeting with information and input. That was a huge philosophical shift for us."

In this course, participants learned:

- o To use visual tools, such as ground rules and posted agendas, to organize meetings and keep members working together on the important student-centered questions
- o To incorporate respectful listening and communication strategies that encouraged all team members to ask questions of one another and to clarify understandings before gaining consensus on student recommendations.
- o To share ownership and decision-making among each team member

In addition, Pasadena ISD used Spectrum K12's *Overview of Facilitated ARD/IEP Meetings*, a one-day course, for all appraisal staff. This course provides an awareness and knowledge of basic meeting processes, but does not train participants to be meeting facilitators. During the one-day workshop, participants learned:

- o Basic meeting facilitation and communication strategies
- o Meeting processes, roles and functions
- o How to support ARD/IEP process leaders and facilitators in district meetings

The final training used to sustain new operational cultures was Spectrum K12's *Effective Teams: Roles, Responsibilities, and Legal Concerns* course. The course provided an action-oriented day for school-based teams to evaluate and plan for their effective teamwork. Participants learned:

- o Frameworks and practice for implementing roles and responsibilities and shared decisions in ARD/IEP meetings
- o Legal implications and compliance considerations for ARD/IEP teams

Next Steps

In addition to facilitation training, Pasadena ISD is providing Spectrum K12's *Writing Effective Goals & Objectives* course for all special education teachers and instructional specialists on an ongoing basis. In the one-day course, participants learn how to:

- o Identify and write measurable goals to meet each student's strengths and challenges
- o Comply with federal and state requirements
- o Document Adequate Yearly Progress to address No Child Left Behind requirements

about Spectrum K12

Spectrum K12 School Solutions (formerly 4GL School Solutions) is the leading provider of software applications and professional development for teachers and administrators of special populations. Designed for school districts of all sizes, Spectrum K12's products remove the paperwork burden from teachers and administrators, giving you more time to focus on what you love - educating children.