



# MOVING FROM ISOLATION TO ENGAGEMENT

**Staff recognition and support foster empowerment and commitment in New Hampshire's Rochester School District.**



THROUGH SOLUTION-FOCUSED PROBLEM SOLVING, NEW HAMPSHIRE'S ROCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT WAS ABLE TO SUPPORT BOTH COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY.

## ➔ CHALLENGE

As a high-need district, New Hampshire's Rochester School District (RSD) has historically experienced an ebb and flow of grant funds, with a familiar pattern of isolated staff members working away in their silos until those funds dry up.

## ➔ SOLUTION

Through Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS), they have developed a collaborative, solutions-oriented culture in the district, where meetings have evolved into opportunities to solve problems collectively. Staff from RSD middle and high schools regularly gather to address school issues, many of them impacting the district's most vulnerable students.

For example, a problem RSD grappled with this past year was the transition between 8th and 9th grade—a tricky time for many Rochester students, with long-term implications for their education. Rochester Middle School staff had noticed a recurring pattern of 8th graders acting out and exhibiting anxious behaviors as they approached the end of middle school; the team recognized that making a successful transition to high school was a defining event in a student's life. How could they help entering 9th graders walk into high school with more connections and confidence?

The improved transition effort involved collaboration among team members from two schools and negotiating new territory. The team ultimately launched a new peer mentor program connecting 12th graders with new students using the extensive club program at Spaulding High School. Seniors provide new students with information about the array of available activities and show them the ropes, including how to start their own clubs to cultivate their interests.

**“When you bring a problem to the team, we work on solutions,” explains one Spaulding High School classroom teacher. “We no longer view people identifying problems as complaining or raising roadblocks to stifle action.”**



**ROCHESTER COUNSELORS ARE EMPOWERED TO IDENTIFY AND SOLVE PROBLEMS.**



**FOR ROCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT, SUSTAINABILITY MEANS A CULTURE SHIFT—AND THEY HAVE ACHIEVED IT.**

## → RESULTS

The shift in RSD culture has been a mark of success. One counselor reports that she now has access to key resources that she needs to do her job well: support of the administration, the right tools, and “access to the right players at the right meetings.”

This access in turn promotes a higher level of professionalism; she and her colleagues focus their efforts proactively, thinking about prevention and intervention across the student experience. “Now there is time to meet, plan, troubleshoot, and consider what it is that we can accomplish,” reflects this counselor.

## → LASTING IMPACT

The cultural shift has implications beyond better serving the needs of Rochester students. One counselor states, “When we recognize programs and people and identify positive effects, doing the work becomes worth the effort.” People who feel valued and empowered stay longer and want to do more.

## → SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The SS/HS work is constantly evolving and moving forward. There is always more work to do and ways to do the work more effectively. National conferences give the false impression of reaching a destination, which doesn’t reflect reality, notes a participant. SS/HS funds have provided the opportunity for schools to build and sustain long-term shifts in culture and attitudes of teachers, staff, students, and communities toward a positive, collaborative, and prevention model of safety and health for students and staff alike.

For more information about the program, contact:

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