



Everyday  Speech

Case Study: Washington County School District

A SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SUCCESS STORY

Situation

At the Washington County School District, **Markay Thorkelson faces a daunting task as a Special Education Teacher.**

His role is undeniably challenging, supporting students who have severe disabilities, communication challenges, and difficulties with social-emotional learning.

It takes a compassionate and dedicated individual to handle such responsibilities, and Markay is exactly that.

He notes, "A lot of the students that we work with have communication disabilities. So, I know that **being able to structure, to role-play, to see a video has helped to allow them to see how communication would work.**"

Markay observed significant challenges in helping his students learn social-emotional skills, especially since they often weren't sure how to engage socially or understand the nuances of social interactions.

He says, "The cool thing about it as you move into a high school setting is that **students really want to be social, but they're not sure how to do it or how to do it appropriately.**"



Teaching Self-Regulation

Markay discovered that **Everyday Speech is an invaluable resource for teaching social-emotional learning to his students.** The program's breathing techniques have been especially helpful for self-regulation.

Markay notes, "We use the breathing techniques just to come in, sit down, and give them an opportunity to move from a lunch setting into academics or whatever the lesson might be."

Time-Saving Materials

Markay finds the program to be a significant time saver since it is an extensive and updated curriculum.

"It saved me a lot of time because it applies to high school students. There isn't a lot out there that I have found that helps with those social skills lessons that apply directly to a high school student and that they can feel like they can relate to. It's been huge."

Markay also noted, "I really appreciate that it is tiered. We can gear it more towards the age because a lot of my students are aware of the fact that they're high school students, so when it is a high school student on the video in Everyday Speech modeling it, it really does help compared to just a cartoon of a younger student in elementary school."

Markay also mentions the benefits of the interactive lessons paired with videos, highlighting their relevance to high school students—a rarity in SEL resources.

"The interactivity of the lessons is so great. Yesterday, we did the comic strip that went with Tuning In, and it was nice because high school kids can relate to a comic strip, and we can sit and talk about it. 'Oh, look in this picture. How do you think that they are feeling at this point?'"

He notes that the program was helpful when transitioning back to the classroom setting, which was difficult for some of his students. "Having those videos to help them when we're moving from one setting back to this classroom and practicing the breathing techniques helps them to get ready to go."

Markay found that using the program daily was crucial in not only helping his students learn but retain social-emotional skills.

"By doing that every day, as they start to have behavior or feel anxious in other settings, we can say, 'Do you want to try the box breathing method or color breathing technique?'"

It's been a huge time saver, and the fact that it's a really good curriculum means that I don't have to spend time outside of my day trying to gather different areas to create a lesson.

Markay Thorkelson's experience with Everyday Speech has been transformative in his work. It allows him to structure lessons to address his students' communication needs as well as social-emotional skills more effectively.

He has seen a significant impact on his students' lives, with improvements in behavior, regulation, and conflict resolution. Comparing Everyday Speech with other programs, Markay found that others were not as extensive and he appreciates that Everyday Speech is continually adding new content, making it current and relevant to his students' needs.