

Partner Spotlight: Desert Sands Unified School District

An Innovative Approach to Para PD Throughout the Year

The Desert Sands Unified School District, located in La Quinta, California, serves almost 27,000 students in 34 schools, ranging from early childhood to high school. Founded in 1964, Desert Sands USD primarily supports students from five communities in the central Coachella Valley. Students from the surrounding desert communities are also welcome to attend.

Ryan Seymour is the Special Education Project Facilitator for the district, and a former special education teacher with 22 years of experience. He has a deep understanding of the challenges paraeducators are facing in classrooms these days.



New Challenges for Paras: Student Behavior, Educator Teams

Paraeducators are still dealing with the repercussions of COVID isolation, and Seymour is constantly looking for new and innovative ways to support their work. “There needs to be a ton of SEL training,” he says. “This would help staff reframe expectations more realistically, and understand how to better address the increase in challenging behavior we’re seeing across grade levels.”

Seymour also noted that paras needed support with working more collaboratively as part of the educator team. “There can be up to seven paras in a class at one time,” he says.

“It’s nice to see paras using these strategies, and referring back to the learning throughout the year.”

Overcoming Obstacles, Supporting Paras

To address these needs, Desert Sands partnered with 321 Insight to provide access to the ParaSharp professional development series. ParaSharp features online, on-demand videos, 3 – 13 minutes in length, and job-specific resources paras can access anytime. Staff was looking for professional development that introduced, and then modeled, strategies they could immediately implement to support their students.

“Paras needed PD on how to use prompting and confronting effectively, that explained the different levels of support they can provide to help students with special needs, and more learning around inclusive practices,” explains Seymour. “ParaSharp covers all these things and gives strategies paras can use right away. That’s what’s so great about it.”

A Collaborative, Innovative Approach to Implementing PD with ParaSharp

Seymour's overarching goal for the learning was to support building strong educator teams that were aligned in best practices for addressing challenging behavior. "When there is a real cohesive team, where everyone is on the same page and has the same goal, it's awesome"



In order to build strong educator teams, Seymour and his team found an innovative way to implement ParaSharp with staff. After identifying the specific staff needs they wanted to address, they worked with the 321 Insight Implementation Team to select and assign content that best supported staff learning around taking a team approach to proactively manage behavior.

"We assigned the perfect amount of content that didn't overwhelm or underwhelm people. It was perfect for a full day of PD," he says. "This approach also gives paras agency over their own learning."

Positive Feedback & Engagement: Best Practices to Apply Today and Throughout the Year

Staff reaction to ParaSharp has been overwhelmingly positive. "I have spoken with many paras and they are very happy with it," says Seymour. "They are all engaged and can all relate to the content."

During frequent classroom visits, Seymour and the team often see paras putting this learning into action. "We're out in the field constantly, in classrooms," he says, who's team often witnesses paras putting the learning and research-based, job-specific strategies into action. "It's nice to see paras using these strategies, and referring back to the learning throughout the year."

Next Steps: Getting Teachers on the Same Page with PD

Desert Sands and 321 Insight will continue to partner for the 2023-24 school year. Seymour would love to expand ParaSharp access to classroom teachers. Although they have their own PD, he thinks it would be beneficial for teachers to see and understand what their paras are learning: "It goes back to being a team and being on the same page. The paras are trained in doing this and the teacher should be modeling it as well."

Empower your paras with job-specific tools for addressing challenging behavior.

Visit www.321insight.com/parasharp for more information on our on-demand, bite-sized PD and training for paraeducators.