



About Rochester School District

Rochester School District, located in Rochester, Washington, is a public school district that serves over 2,100 students in grades P-12. Rochester provides a wide range of educational opportunities for students in all subject areas, including social-emotional learning.

Within Rochester School District, is Rochester Primary School. Rochester Primary School serves about 500 students in grades P-2, with an estimated 65 staff members on campus each day. Rochester Primary School offers tailored instruction to all students, which includes students receiving special education services, students in general education, students who receive multilingual services, students in the highly capable program, students who experience poverty, and students who may struggle with behavior regulation.

Looking for Solutions

Prior to Ukeru, Rochester Primary School was seeing a high number of incidents involving restraint and isolation. As a district, they wanted to pursue an alternative to restrictive practices. They wanted to give staff a tool to not only keep themselves safe, but to also help them be more proactive and better understand and respond to the behaviors they were seeing. Additionally, they wanted to build a culture rooted in safety and trauma-informed care, to ultimately create a more supportive and comforting environment for both students and staff.

Ukeru was appealing to them as a partner because of its focus on trauma-informed practices and safe blocking. They also appreciated the added support that the Ukeru team offers to their customers. This support includes free virtual consultation with Ukeru trainers to discuss implementation, provide extra training, debrief/ talk through incidents, and so much more.

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The Ukeru team has been incredibly supportive throughout our journey. When we began researching the use of Ukeru in schools, the Ukeru team provided us with resources, references, and case studies. Since we adopted Ukeru, they have provided continued mentorship and support. This includes reflection, debriefing, and brainstorming. The Ukeru team is encouraging and non judgemental.

Jessica Whitehead

BCBA

Working with Ukeru

Rochester School District began working with Ukeru in May of 2023. They started with having four staff trained as trainers. From there, their trainers trained about 65 staff members. The majority of staff received the full Ukeru training, while a small group only received the trauma-informed care/philosophy portion of the training. In addition to training, their trainers consulted with the Ukeru team quarterly to assist them with implementation and offer support with next steps.


They were extremely strategic with how they implemented Ukeru. They began by training administrators from each of their buildings. “We felt it was important to first garner support from administrators as Ukeru was rolled out,” shared Jessica Whitehead, a Board Certified Behavior Analyst with the district. From there, they trained other staff in Ukeru, emphasizing their goal of reducing the use of restrictive interventions and strengthening their use of trauma-informed practices. As staff became more confident and competent with Ukeru usage, they started to witness more and more benefits of the approach. **“Staff and students became increasingly curious and supportive of the use of Ukeru and training is in high demand,”** Whitehead excitedly shared. Additionally, to help generate more buy-in, a presentation about Ukeru was given to the school board. They wanted everyone to be informed of the direction their district was going in and how Ukeru would help them get there.

Results

In less than a year, the results have been groundbreaking. They have transformed their culture to one that is trauma-informed and inclusionary for all. **The use of restraint has been reduced by an impressive 85% and seclusion has been reduced by a remarkable 97%.** It is truly phenomenal what they have been able to accomplish in a short period of time.

The feedback from staff, students, and families has been overwhelmingly positive. **“Staff have communicated that they feel so much better about not using restraints,”** said Whitehead. Additionally, parents have expressed gratitude to the district for offering an alternative to restraint and seclusion and have even inquired about training for families and caregivers.

Perhaps one of the biggest victories they have found is avoiding retraumatization by not having to restrain students. Nicole Kernutt, Assistant Principal, shared an example of a breakthrough with a student who was triggered by the use of restraint. “Once we implemented Ukeru blocking techniques instead of restraints, he drastically reduced his use of physical aggression toward staff when escalated and expressed that he liked it better when staff used the pads. Since September 2023, that student has not had any instances of physical aggression toward staff,” Kernutt proudly shared.

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Restraint
reduction

A white rounded square containing the text "97%" in blue.

Seclusion
reduction



Positive feedback
from students,
staff, and families



Culture
shift

Next Steps

As far as next steps, they plan to continue to train all of their staff at Rochester Primary School in the trauma-informed care/ philosophy portion of Ukeru. The district also plans to expand Ukeru into the larger district to help more of their schools achieve the same success. Additionally, they plan to continue to build trauma-informed environments for their students by educating their staff on trauma. “Most importantly, we are working with staff to better understand brain development, how the brain works, and how the brain is impacted by trauma,” stated Kernutt. She continued by sharing more great things that they are doing to further support their efforts, “We are creating calming spaces around the school, changing our approach when we talk with students, building positive relationships, and evaluating our current practices.”

In addition, they plan to share their success with others to encourage more districts to follow in their footsteps. “People who have used restraint and seclusion in the past do it because they might think that is encouraging safety. In fact, restraint and seclusion provide quick results to people other than the student involved. However, I would share our data and testimony about the positive effects of trauma-informed practices and blocking practices on both staff and students. I would also offer information on the long-term effects of restraint and seclusion, as well as the possibility of retraumatization,” shared Whitehead. Whitehead concluded by stressing the importance of building and maintaining positive relationships and using trauma-informed practices with staff and students. Ukeru helps to strengthen relationships, minimizing the need for restraint and seclusion. Rochester School District is well on their way to a restraint and seclusion-free future.