Large School District **Expands Mental Health and Wellness Programming** with **Proven Results**

ISD 728 **builds capacity** for highly effective mental health supports — without the burden of overwork or implementation fatigue.

SITUATION

School counselors in Independent School District 728 (MN) knew some students needed extra support. Still, they were also aware that counselors didn't have the capacity to provide the 1:1 coaching their students needed to make transformational change. With teacher exhaustion and implementation fatigue, the student services team knew they needed to invest at a district level to support their teams and **reach even more students**.

The program's success depended on staff buy-in in a district encompassing a large geographic footprint of rural and suburban areas, including four unique high schools. That meant conducting a pilot, measuring results, and demonstrating impact before asking more staff to join the program.

ISD 728 piloted a program for at-risk seniors in May 2019. Following its success — seeing some very **at-risk students graduate** — the ISD expanded the pilot. Then, when the pandemic hit, the district was prepared to scale.

PARTNERSHIP

In ISD 728, a large rural/suburban district, staff saw a **connection between mental health**, **self-regulation**, and **positive behavior** choices throughout their high school classrooms. While the district had a robust multi-tier system of support, a district MTSS leader, Rachel Hilyar, recognized that another layer of intervention support would benefit extremely disengaged students at their four high schools and six middle schools to help them get back on track. The district partnered with EmpowerU and enrolled disengaged students in a personalized online course with daily motivational coaching. Seeing previously disengaged students graduate provided compelling data to continue the partnership.

At ISD 728, addressing mental health and **whole child well-being** has been a school board goal since 2019. The district folded EmpowerU resources into its existing multi-tier system of support.

As pandemic isolation exposed growing needs among younger students, ISD 728 asked to pilot EmpowerU's curriculum over the summer for at-risk K-8 students. Using summer programming for the pilot, teachers experienced first-hand the truly **turnkey curriculum** that required minimal training and almost no teacher prep time. Students enjoyed learning to "take charge" of their thoughts and feelings and practiced calming exercises when big feelings were racing through their bodies.

empowerU

Case Study: ISD 728

Driving measurable **positive change...**

Today, the team at ISD 728 uses EmpowerU modules for their K-8 students. EmpowerU is also part of the MTSS Tier 2 Level of Support for high and middle school students.

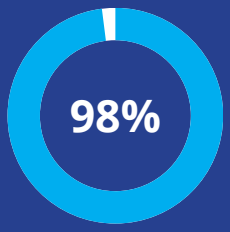
With EmpowerU doing most of the heavy lifting, teachers see the benefits of the targeted services. Once students with non-academic needs (anxiety, ADHD, depression, avoidance, behavior challenges) are identified, coaches in the program begin to **build relationships with students**. By developing positive behaviors and self-regulation through a multi-tiered system of support, students start to make progress and **increase their investment in learning**.

ISD 728 has also taken advantage of EmpowerU's Educator PD, covering the cost of the course and the teacher's time to **improve staff well-being** and effectiveness in resiliency learning. The pandemic took a toll on educators; it was emotionally exhausting and blurred workplace boundaries. The educator course **reconnects teachers with their why**, reteaches self-regulation, and provides stress-coping and calming exercises that support well-being. Providing this reset opportunity for teachers is the first step to resetting an entire school climate.

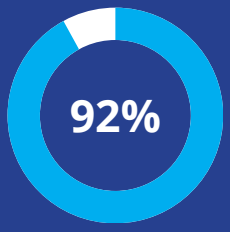
RESULTS

Through the multi-touchpoints to deliver support to students with Tier 2 needs, teachers and school counselors saw changes in classroom habits and behaviors. Students reported **increased personal well-being**, and **academic success** followed. Students and teachers share positive feedback in the data collected for each lesson. ISD 728 plans to continue growing its partnership with EmpowerU.

STUDENT OUTCOMES



made significant progress on their set goals



would recommend the course to other students or friends

said the individual coaching they have received is valuable

TESTIMONIALS

"We see this in our district as an intervention we can apply. Our counselors are highly skilled and trained but have a lot on their plate. EmpowerU gives them a place to go for students who have a few extra higher needs over Tier 1."

RACHEL HILYAR, ISD 728 DIRECTOR PREVENTION, SAFETY & GRANTS

"I learned to quiet my inner critic and use my inner coach...I get things done and finished now when before I was just stuck. When I was extremely behind in school, I learned to tell myself, 'one assignment at a time is all it takes for me to stay on track.' That helped me so much."

ISD 728 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT