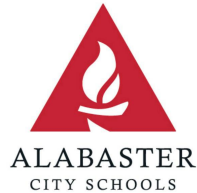


Optimizing Instruction. Building Capacity.



How a School District Eliminated DIY Lesson Planning for Students with Special Needs

ALABASTER CITY SCHOOLS, ALABAMA

Finding a consistent, structured, and comprehensive curriculum in special education is a challenge in schools across the country. This holds true in Alabaster City Schools, where teachers were often creating lesson plans on their own or sourcing from third-party channels. While this reflects a high level of commitment, it also makes sustainability and consistency quite elusive. STAGES® Learning's Language Builder: Academic Readiness Intervention System, ARIS®, is a groundbreaking neurodivergent curriculum designed with a singular vision: to ensure educators have access to a complete, hands-on, structured learning plan tailor-made for students with special needs.

Seeing its many benefits, Alabaster City Schools in Alabama introduced STAGES Learning to their K-3 students in special education. This adoption aligned with the district's goal to offer an interconnected and consistent educational experience, especially for students placed on an alternate curriculum due to significant cognitive challenges.

Lisa Radcliff is the Coordinator of Exceptional Education and 504 Services for the district with 35 years experience in special education. Lisa found that special education teachers were, too often, creating their own materials to target each student's specialized IEP goals. Not only were teachers using their own money to source materials and lessons from platforms like Teachers Pay Teachers, they unintentionally created disjointed learning activities that lacked a common approach and, just as importantly, a common language across the special education program.

Saving Time and Effort With Ready-to-Use Lessons and Materials

After trying several solutions, STAGES Learning emerged as a standout solution for Alabaster City Schools, primarily due to its combination of realistic manipulatives and highly-structured organization. Perhaps most importantly, though, was the opportunity for Alabaster to optimize the role of paraprofessional in a new and powerful way, "STAGES had manipulatives, like bread and carrots, that were so realistic kids could easily relate to them. It also meant that instead of relying on paraprofessionals to merely prepare materials, we could now utilize them more effectively in small group settings."

Educators with a range of experience and training, including paraprofessionals and aides, can utilize STAGES Learning, making it highly valuable for all stakeholders. Each kit houses hundreds of flashcards, realistic manipulatives, detailed lesson plans, and assessment tools. For the special education teachers in Alabaster City School Schools, STAGES Learning added more capacity to teaching duties. It eliminated hours spent on lesson planning and material sourcing. With STAGES Learning's materials, the paraprofessionals evolved from supportive roles to key players in the teaching process. Given their existing relationships within the classroom, these materials enabled paras to bolster the lead teacher's efforts, ensuring precise, 1:1 instruction for each student.

Most notably, each unit of the curriculum provided invaluable resources such as checks for understanding and data tracking sheets. This progress monitoring ensured educators could assess progress effectively and adjust teaching strategies as needed. It also meant that Lisa, as the coordinator of special education services, could ensure a common approach and language was in play across the entire program.

STAGES Learning Offers Initial And Ongoing Training And Support To Teachers

Alabaster City Schools also partnered with STAGES Learning to provide educators with professional development and coaching about how to implement ARIS in their classrooms. Lisa mentioned, "Our trainer was fantastic. He was so thorough about training the teachers, talking with them, and answering their questions." After that first training session, Lisa noted that teachers were excited and felt well prepared to implement the new intervention system in their classrooms.

STAGES Learning offers introductory training as well as ongoing access to learning consultants to ensure schools and educators realize both immediate and lasting benefits. For Alabaster's initial training, there was enthusiastic feedback. In an exit survey, one participant expressed deep appreciation for and excitement about using the curriculum. This kind of feedback does more than simply validate a third-party program. It helps teachers see that their school district is investing in their success as education professionals.

STAGES Learning offers a comprehensive, evidence-based solution that helps fill key gaps for Alabaster City Schools' special education curriculum. Lisa shared that ARIS, "is going to be what we need for our classroom to give us consistency."