

Impacting Student Achievement Through Accessibility Training

Imagine you're a student given a reading assignment or handed a worksheet to complete in class...but you are physically unable to flip the pages of a textbook or are unable to view the handout content.

For a student with low vision, a physical impairment or a learning disability, this is often a reality that prevents them from participating with their class. Any educator working with students with disabilities who fails to provide accessible instruction and materials is inadvertently building barriers to learning.

At North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas, professional development training from Atomic Learning helps support Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and is helping students in Response to Intervention (RTI) programs by giving general education teachers access to technology training to support all learners.

Shifting to Online Professional Development

The Assistive Technology team at North East encourages teachers to be independent learners in the district. Some teachers naturally gravitate to online learning, some are not as easy to convert. "It's a shift to make the leap to online learning," said Terri Grundy, Program Coordinator at North East ISD.

Atomic Learning helps bridge the gap. With online professional development, the school can do more with less. "Atomic Learning has the potential to support all teachers in an economical way," shares Grundy.

Online training is a much more economical solution. "[Atomic Learning] is a tool that allows us to do more with less when budgets are tight," Grundy added.

This is a work in progress and it's coming around. "We're all supporting this and asking teachers to consider looking to Atomic Learning for an answer first, it's a shift, it takes awhile to re-program," Grundy said of her team.

The North East team always supplements training with simple introductions to software—short pre-requisites from Atomic Learning—so there's a commonality in terminology. And, if they need more support, or a review? The team again points them to Atomic Learning.

"Atomic Learning saves us a lot of time in helping general education teachers learn about technology that is available for all students, not just those with special needs. The features support so many students," Grundy said. "Not having to write an evaluation for the non-special ed needs, teachers can just hop to the training, not have to order, install, and train. It's made the entire process much quicker."

Problem:

Lack of teacher technology skills to successfully reach students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Solution:

An online professional development tool that trains teachers on creating accessible instruction through technology.

Outcome:

Support for UDL and RTI programs, resulting in improved student learning.



For more information about Atomic Learning, please contact us at (866) 259-6890 or visit us on the web at www.AtomicLearning.com/k12

What is UDL?

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. With UDL teachers present information in multiple formats, and students are given a choice for the ways they will express what they know. There is a vast variety of technology tools that help support these multiple formats.

What is RTI?

Response to Intervention (RTI) is defined as “the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions” (Batsche et al., 2005).

There are a lot of technologies that can be used to support UDL and as interventions for RTI programs. Atomic Learning provides training on many of these technologies to help teachers, students and parents learn.

Creating Accessibility

North East ISD has just over 65,000 students, and over 4,000 faculty and staff who all have access to the Atomic Learning Assistive Technology collection of training. This is also open to the students and parents in the district. “Atomic Learning is useful for a variety of students, whether general education or gifted and talented,” Grundy said.

Depending on the educators’ teaching and technology experience, some teachers at North East may have not had a chance to learn a new technology for a particular student with a disability in their class. The school relies on the expert and independent learners to learn the technology used in the classroom. “Students know when they need guidance and are intuitive about the process, which helps,” said Grundy.

“Teachers may say: ‘I haven’t had a chance to learn this software, yet’ and I say ‘students need to be the ones to know, you only need to know XYZ, not everything about an application,’” Grundy added. “Teachers don’t need to know everything to use the technology. We want our students to be independent users.”

Atomic Learning provides short, easy-to-use tutorials so teachers can learn as little or as much as they need to reach their students.

“At North East, we have built-in so many assistive technologies, every computer has some sort of text to speech program,” said Grundy. “Any campus, every student has access.” With UDL, there are so many students who are reached. North East has a lot of schools that have shifted to the UDL piece because of having access on every campus. Grundy added, “This bridges the gap from what we used to consider ‘very specialized AT training’ to UDL—opening it up for everyone.”

The training applications benefit many students, not just those with IEP’s. The team at North East always supplements face-to-face training with Atomic Learning—before and after—for parents as well as students. “There’s never excuses like ‘I forgot how to do XYZ so I couldn’t complete the assignment’, because the training is all there.”

Impacting ALL Students

The primary focus for North East’s Atomic Learning training is on special education teachers, however, when there is a student who is having difficulties, or has identified the need for special support, Terri and her team are able to quickly send a link to the special ed and general ed teacher on the necessary training, and the problem is addressed. It helps the AT team focus on other projects.

“There’s usually a number of students that can benefit from that support, whether they are struggling learners in general ed or special ed,” Grundy said. “These tools are really good for all students.” Grundy concluded with “The Atomic Learning technology support guides demonstration and the student’s acquisition of information, which is a big step in the right direction.”

Atomic Learning, Inc. is focused on promoting the practical application of technology in education. Thousands of schools, colleges, and universities have made Atomic Learning a valuable curriculum supplement and an anytime/anywhere software training resource.