



RTI AT WORK™ Success Story

John F. Kennedy High School FREMONT, CALIFORNIA

Over a three-year period, and after implementing a systematic, three-tiered system of behavior intervention based on the RTI at Work™ model, John F. Kennedy High School reduced its total number of suspensions by 46%.



Solution Tree

John F. Kennedy High School

FREMONT, CALIFORNIA

▶ DEMOGRAPHICS

- ▶ **1,406** students
- ▶ **42%** free and reduced lunch
- ▶ **13%** multilingual learners
- ▶ **18%** special education

▶ RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- ▶ **18.91%** White
- ▶ **8.84%** Black
- ▶ **35.42%** Hispanic
- ▶ **24.66%** Asian
- ▶ **1.13%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ▶ **0.36%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- ▶ **5.4%** Multiracial
- ▶ **5.28%** Other

John F. Kennedy High School is a public high school located in Fremont, a part of Alameda County and California's San Francisco Bay Area. The school was established in 1965 and serves grades 9–12. JFK is to be committed to the education of a diverse population that meets the changing demands of a global society.



▶ CHALLENGE

In years prior, John F. Kennedy High School had a reputation for being an underachieving school where parents did not want to send their students. Major concerns for parents were student safety, exposure to violence, very little school pride, and a low rate of students completing the necessary coursework to be eligible to attend a four-year college or university.

The school also experienced over 300 student suspensions in one school year alone. The parents and students of JFK wanted to see much lower suspension numbers, particularly from students of color.

Then in 2017, JFK's English department gave a reading assessment to every 9th grader. The results showed that 58% of students read three or more grades below grade level, 23% of students read one to two grades below grade level, and only 19% of students read at grade level.

▶ IMPLEMENTATION

JFK leaders and educators knew a change was needed. Principal Edward Velez, along with educators and administrators at JFK, collaboratively reviewed the Professional Learning Community (PLC) at Work® process and started introducing response to intervention (RTI) into their process.

With the use of Title I funds, the team later attended an RTI at Work™ Institute for two days with Mike Mattos. Over the last four years, JFK has used Title I funding to create opportunities for professional development, technology, and collaboration time in order to develop an RTI model at their school.

After the institute, JFK began to implement new approaches to student achievement with the PLC process. The school staff used effective collaboration, formative and summative assessments, data analysis, and targeted interventions to improve the experience of every student at JFK.

Within the first two years of using the PLC at Work and RTI at Work process, JFK staff spent time establishing norms and implementing foundational practices like essential standards and formative assessments. In year three, they voted to include interventions in the school day and experimented with different scheduling prototypes, adjusting their approach when data showed they weren't quite going in the right direction. They also invested in software that enabled every teacher to offer interventions or enrichments.

"We found that in order to be successful, we must constantly analyze our programs for effectiveness. In this sense, our school was constantly developing our system of intervention and support so that we never felt as if we completed the road to RTI," said Velez.

Each day, JFK offered 50 to 60 different sessions for intervention and enrichment. Students were also exposed to more than two hours within the school day to extend their learning or receive immediate intervention before they failed.

“We became, by nature, the place where everyone came no matter what the student had going on. And so we very quickly just kept taking everybody in because that’s what we do; we don’t turn away students.”

—Edward Velez, principal, John F. Kennedy High School, California

► **IMPLEMENTATION** *(continued)*

At the core of JFK’s new approach is PRIDE, which stands for be *prepared* for learning, be *respectful* to all, understand your *impact*, maintain *discipline*, and *explore*. These five rules serve as a foundation and response to student behavior that plays a major role in improved levels of learning.

“The biggest difference in our school is the culture that we built through it. The magic we found in lowering our

suspension rate was building the idea with kids that they are worth listening to. We also saw it in creating those essential behaviors and expectations, plugging in the RTI process, and from the beginning to the end allowing our students to understand what we expected and then having our teachers agree that they’d be held accountable for the same behaviors,” said Velez.

► **RESULTS**

After six months of deliberate instruction and intervention, students were assessed on reading levels again. The post-assessment showed that the number of ninth-grade students reading on grade level doubled to 38%.

JFK educators have seen a tremendous change in student achievement and investment as a result of the RTI at Work process. In 2018–2019, there were 27 students who were re-designated as English proficient as a result of targeted intervention and support.

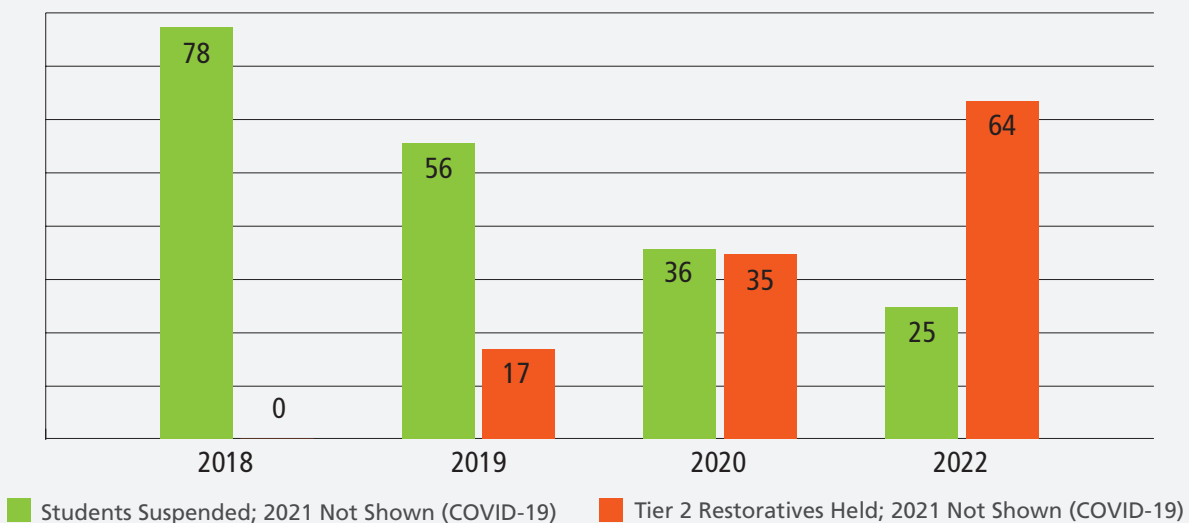
In 2017, there were 130 students suspended; that number dropped to 78 in 2018, 56 in 2019, and in 2020, just before COVID, JFK suspensions were in the 40s. By the time students returned in 2021, suspensions were at just 25.

The most rewarding piece of data for JFK, according to Velez, is the fact that 75% of African American students met or exceeded grade level in ELA.

Other noteworthy achievements:

- 97% graduation rate
- 68% of students in the “meets or exceeds grade level” category in ELA
- Honored as a California Distinguished School for their work to close the achievement gap for three consecutive years
- Since 2020, an average of five students each year have been found to no longer need IEP services (special education) due to their ability to meet grade-level standards
- Since 2015, Kennedy Athletic Teams have earned more than 15 California Interscholastic Federation Championships for having the highest GPA in Northern California

RTI at JFKHS: Tier 2 Impact on Student Suspensions





Start Your Success Story

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