



In partnership with



SUCCESS STORY

Building a Districtwide Foundation of Belonging in Ogden, Utah

Situation

When Ogden School District (OSD) in Utah first piloted Second Step® programs, the district started small. A second-grade classroom was struggling with low engagement, high behavior incidents, and frequent disruptions that often required up to six adults in the room to manage.

After three months of consistently implementing Second Step® Elementary, the same classroom was unrecognizable.

Nicole Lovell, OSD's director of student advocacy services, noticed a major shift. Students who previously couldn't engage in any lesson were now actively participating and thoughtfully discussing what the lesson concepts looked like in their classroom. It was a visible, concrete turning point. Students weren't just behaving better. They were actively engaged in their own learning.

"That was a really notable time," Nicole explains. "Now those instances happen a lot within our district. . . . We're hearing the language around lessons that get taught. Our students can speak to it. We're even starting to get to that point where our parents can speak to it, which I think is really impressive."

Approach

Fostering Belonging Through Strategic Alignment

After seeing what was possible in the second-grade classroom, Ogden School District opted to use Second Step programs to provide universal instruction in PreK through Grade 6 classrooms.



When we initially started with our strategic plan, we identified, using different data pieces, that a low percentage of students were indicating a sense of belonging as a strength. So, we were really looking for and asking, how do we build that sense of belonging or that sense of community within our schools?



—Nicole Lovell
Director of Student Advocacy Services
Ogden School District



The Ogden behavioral support team immediately appreciated the programs' ease of implementation, stressing the ready-to-teach lessons, program alignment, and scalable features.

“

We want to make sure we're putting in protective factors so we can create an environment where students know they are safe and can be successful.



—Nicole Lovell
Director of Student Advocacy Services
Ogden School District

”

Over the years, OSD has implemented several unique models for Second Step® instruction due to its flexible implementation options, including combining classrooms for designated Human Skills™ sessions. In this model, one teacher provides direction instruction of a Second Step lesson, another provides behavior or engagement support in the classroom as needed, and the third teacher uses the time to pull individual students for reteaching, progress monitoring, or other independent conversations.

Innovative strategies like these ensure every student receives high-quality Second Step instruction. It also builds a shared language around human skills that students and teachers continually use throughout their learning, across entire schools. For Nicole, the key operative concept is “reinforcement,” where students experience multiple touchpoints of human skills concepts throughout the day and through multiple learning modalities.

Teacher Empowerment

Ogden School District also stresses teacher efficacy in teaching human skills.

“Teachers leaving traditional education programs aren't necessarily trained or have resources or experience in teaching social skills to students at a Tier 1 level,” Nicole explains. “And that's where we found Second Step.”

The district has now been consistently implementing Second Step programs in PreK through Grade 8 classrooms for nearly a decade. Teachers are no longer asking whether they have time to teach Second Step programs. Now they're completing their lessons and asking, “What's next?”

Outcomes

Belonging Is Just the Beginning

Ogden School District's journey with Second Step programs began with identifying belonging as a core student need based on survey data. Today, belonging is no longer the primary objective in Second Step implementation, not because it's no longer important but because it's already there. With that foundation, the district can prioritize other outcomes like improving emotion regulation and attendance.

Student surveys also reflect improvements in school climate, which is difficult to quantify but easy to spot. It's visible in hallway conversations, classroom engagement, and peer relationships.

Ogden School District also began implementing Second Step® High School on a pilot basis in 2025. In the future, district leaders plan to expand instruction, primarily through instruction from in-school social workers.

Conclusion

Building a districtwide culture of belonging takes time. But with consistent, coordinated instruction, the progress becomes visible everywhere.

Nicole reflects, “It's just part of our culture in Ogden that we provide this level of instruction. That, to me, is a big success story.”

**Ready to bring
these results to your
school or district?**

Schedule a Consult