

SUCCESS STORY

FROM REACTIVE TO REWIRED:

**How *Ritenour School District*
Found a New Path for Student Success**



BraveBrains



The [Ritenour School District](#) (RSD), located in Northwest St. Louis County, is one of the oldest districts in the St. Louis metropolitan area. Their proud history began with Buck School, a one-room log cabin built in 1846. They have grown from that one room cabin into 11 schools, an early childhood center and a large adult community program. Over 1,200 professional, caring employees, active district parents and a highly supportive community work together to educate a culturally, socially and economically diverse student population.

A Common Problem

“For a long time, our response to behavior was often seen as punitive rather than an opportunity to teach. Removing a child from school was happening too frequently at all levels.

While we had structures in place—behavior charts, check-ins, and behavior change plans—we were missing a deeper understanding of the role the brain plays in our feelings, emotions, and reactions.

We were managing behavior, but we weren’t fully understanding the ‘why’ behind it.

Once we began learning about the brain and how stress and strong emotions impact regulation, our perspective shifted—from simply correcting behavior to teaching skills that help students regulate, learn, and grow.”

Julie Hahn

Assistant Superintendent, Ritenour School District

A Search for Something with Lasting Impact

As district leadership began exploring potential behavior frameworks for implementation, moving each building forward into more restorative practices and less punitive, reactive moments was a must-have.

The NEEDs were crystal clear:

Concrete Tools

Staff were eager for change but felt they lacked the specific, tangible tools and resources to take back to their buildings.

Staff Capacity

There was a recognized need to help the adults in the building grow their capacity to understand kids and approach students with more calm and regulation.

Lasting Integration

Most importantly, success hinged on evolving past basic PD into lasting, trauma-informed practices that could be integrated across the entire staff.

Introducing the BraveBrains + RSD Partnership

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2023

In 2023, Ritenour School District and BraveBrains first began collaborating.

- **Convocation:** *Trauma, the Brain & Hope for the Weary Educator* with all staff
- **PD:** *Unlocking Student and Staff Potential* with social workers, counselors, and bilingual therapists



2024

55 classroom and counselor toolkits were purchased and used throughout the district.

- **Book Studies:** Several teams did book studies with Light Up the Learning Brain
- **PD:** *Breaking the Cycle of Defiance and Disrespect* with Ritenour Middle School staff



2025

In 2025, RSD hosted an in-house Behavior Rewired Train-the-Trainer event to further:

- **Reduce** the frequency and intensity of disruptive behavior
- **Increase** staff capacity to prevent, manage, and respond to behavioral challenges





Why Behavior Rewired?

The weight school leaders carry is heavy.

Their staff are drowning in student trauma and behavioral crises day in and day out.

For that reason, Ritenour School District leaders weren't looking for a quick fix just for kids – they were looking for a sustainable, long-term system that supported teachers and students.

››› Enter Behavior Rewired.

Behavior Rewired bridges the gap between *neuroscience* and the *classroom*, offering a shared language that everyone could finally speak – from **principals** to **parents**, from **social workers** to **students**.

During the immersive two-day Train-the-Trainer workshop, RSD leaders came together to learn:



How to apply the B.R.A.V.E. Framework to make sense of challenging student behaviors



Why building "Upstairs" brains is more essential for academic success than traditional behavior management



Brain-based strategies that can be applied to their specific school contexts



The connection between relationships and learning, and how to recognize when adults enter protection mode



Ways to shift from Protection Mode Leadership toward BRAVE Leadership in real-time



New techniques to help students with disruptive behavior strengthen their cognitive skills



The impact of tone, body language, and eye contact when navigating difficult staff interactions



Additionally, participants built **thoughtful and structured integration plans** to bring the B.R.A.V.E Framework into RSD's existing MTSS approach to behavior (*immediately applying what they were learning into real use-case scenarios!*).

“It gives the hard work more context. We often ask ourselves “why” in this profession; and this helps to answer that question.”

- Orianna Moccio, Assistant Principal



Ritenour School
District

Every Student, Every Day

Immediate Wins

Following the two-day Behavior Rewired Train-the-Trainer workshop in November 2025, the shift in RSD’s school leaders has been remarkable:

Final Feedback: 100% of attendees recommend Behavior Rewired to others (50% had no previous training with BraveBrains)

100%

felt confident in describing the B.R.A.V.E. Framework and how it relates to student and staff behavior

(baseline was 50%)

88%

felt equipped to facilitate training or discussions using brain-based strategies

(baseline was 38%)

100%

were ready to create a realistic plan to shift from behavior management to brain-based support

(baseline was 33%)



BraveBrains

But the real magic is in the feedback from the RSD staff themselves:

Connection

"Having a good mix of theory, research, and tangibles made for a great overall PD. It has pushed me to think more systematically."

Sam Brotherton,
Asst. Principal

Validation

"This is the first time I haven't felt dismissed in a training about trauma. I'm a hard nut to crack."

Security Officer

Practicality

"The best part? The tangible take-homes—actual things and resources I can use with staff members immediately."

Caroline Logue,
RCEE Coordinator

Shared Language

"I am already imagining using the common language and basic understanding to create a foundation in which we can build upon."

Jennifer Nilges,
Asst. Principal

A New Foundation

Ritenour School District is doing so much more than just managing behavior these days - they're completely rewiring their approach through:

- Mutual Respect Agreements
- Shared language (Upstairs and Downstairs Brain)
- Shifts from behavior management to brain building.

“When students and adults understand how the brain works—how powerful emotions can pull us into the ‘**downstairs brain**’ and how we can intentionally guide ourselves back to the ‘**upstairs brain**’—we give them far more than a strategy for the moment. We give them the power to **regulate, connect, and learn.**”

Through our partnership with BraveBrains, and because of the commitment of our SEL team members and building administrators who have embraced this learning, this understanding has come to life in our schools. **What began as brain science is becoming daily practice,** creating calmer classrooms, stronger learners, less stressful days, and skills that will support well-being for a lifetime.”

– Julie Hahn

They are actively working on the foundational building blocks for learning *without* sacrificing academic progress, including:

- Twice monthly “Community Days” for student connection
- Bolstering Tier 2 approaches with BraveBrains’ books and activities (*that students actually request instead of rejecting or shutting down!*)
- Introducing the concept of ‘Brain Protectors’ to their staff (*ensuring a student’s reaction doesn’t define who they are, but simply guides how staff responds in a particular moment*).

Behavior Rewired is built for the reality of school leadership, offering science-backed tools and strategies that actually stick because they make sense for both the brain and the classroom.

When asked what she would tell other school leaders considering Behavior Rewired, an RSD Assistant Principal, Jennifer Nilges, shared:

“

**It's doable!!
It is so relevant,
yet pushes you to
do better and
want to do better!**

That's really the heart of the experience.





We give you the tools
to handle the tough moments
without losing the spark that brought
you into education in the first place.

Interested in learning more about Behavior Rewired?
Visit [BraveBrains.com](https://www.BraveBrains.com).



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