

Success Story:

Washington Virtual Academies (WAVA)

Live Online Speech Therapy Expands Educational Options for Washington State Students

The Challenge

Expand Student Inclusion & Accelerate Progress

While the school may be virtual, WAVA has always handled speech therapy the conventional way, through in-person meetings between students and speech language pathologists (SLPs). And that, says WAVA's Special Education Manager Kristin Hirschmann, has caused huge headaches. "There's a real shortage of available speech therapists these days," she says. "Our parents want therapists who can work with the kids in their homes, so they don't have to interrupt learning by travelling to a school or office. But finding local SLPs has been horribly hard."

It's difficult enough hiring SLPs for conventional school environments, Hirschmann says, let alone private providers who can make house calls. Where SLPs can be found, they are often fully booked. "I was spending a lot of time searching, frequently coming up empty. If we couldn't find an SLP, we couldn't meet the IEP requirement, and we'd have to say to parents, 'Sorry, we just can't take your child.' It was painful, but we had no choice."

Choosing PresenceLearning

Happily, the pain has subsided since WAVA began using PresenceLearning live online therapy services in the fall of 2010. "I'd been working closely with a consultant SLP, investigating alternatives to traditional delivery methods," Hirschmann recalls. On the suggestion of WAVA's parent company program partner, K12, Inc., she looked into PresenceLearning's live online speech therapy services. "They had exactly the kind of offering we were searching for, and I was very impressed with their professionalism."

Benefits

Online Format Works for a Variety of Language Disorders

Hirschmann decided to put PresenceLearning to the test, selecting students with a range of IEP requirements, from simple articulation to pragmatic language skills. "We wanted to try PresenceLearning in a variety of scenarios, and then assess customer satisfaction and student progress compared to traditional therapy," Hirschmann says. The results were gratifying: "It was great. Set-up was easy. The kids made excellent progress, and parent satisfaction was very high. They loved the fact that they could do it from home, without having to interrupt learning by taking the kids to off-site therapy sessions."



"I've been very impressed during our IEP meetings with the PresenceLearning SLPs—they've done great data collection and know the kids really well."

Kristin Hirschmann
Special Services
Program Director

Dedicated SLPs Connect With Kids and Involve Parents as Well

There were other benefits for parents as well. "They felt really good about the PresenceLearning SLPs and the interactions they observed," Hirschmann says. "And by observing the sessions, many of them say that they've picked up new strategies for reinforcing learning. A lot of our parents are very involved in their kids' education, and they felt reaffirmed in what they were doing." Families report that the kids were also enthusiastic: "They love being online and like the direct visual interaction with SLPs," made possible by PresenceLearning's live videoconferencing features.

Outcomes

A Successful Virtual School Expands its Reach

In its first year, WAVA moved about half its speech therapy students to the PresenceLearning platform. Encouraged by the successes so far, WAVA's planning on adding more students next year. They also plan to bring younger kids on board. "We were reluctant to try it with our kindergartners until we felt really confident in it," says Hirschmann. "Now we're going to include them in the program, too."

Now More Students Can Take Advantage of the WAVA Option

PresenceLearning has had major benefits for WAVA and taken a big weight off Hirschmann's shoulders. "It's relieved my stress about finding speech therapy services, and it's saving me a lot of time," she says. It also means more students can enroll in WAVA. "It doesn't matter where the student lives, PresenceLearning can provide services in virtual way. It's more proof that 'virtual' works, and that's very exciting."

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