

Success Story:

Sparta Area School District

Sparta, WI

Wisconsin District Uses Live Online Speech Therapy to Reduce Speech-Language Pathologist Caseloads and Boost Early Intervention Efforts

The Challenge

The Sparta Area School District, located in western Wisconsin, prides itself on its dedicated staff and their efforts in providing the best possible learning environment for their students. However, like many districts nationwide, Sparta ASD had a shortage of SLPs after an SLP left the district, and a growing number of students in need of speech-language therapy and early intervention efforts such as Response to Intervention (RtI). RtI is an early intervention approach that aims to identify and address a student's learning issues as early as possible, before they need an IEP and a long stint in special education.

To remain compliant with IDEA, the district's three remaining SLPS would need to absorb the extra caseload until a replacement could be found. Sparta ASD faced a serious challenge in finding a replacement because other districts in the area faced the same SLP shortage.

According to research done by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), oversized caseloads can lead to increased SLP attrition and lower student outcomes. A high caseload is typically considered to be greater than 40 students but this definition also depends on the severity of disorders on the SLP's caseload and their other workload duties such as RtI. For Sparta ASD, without the help of PresenceLearning, the lack of access to qualified SLPs would have impeded their educational mission, especially to reach younger students with earlier interventions.

Choosing PresenceLearning

Sparta ASD was first introduced to the idea of online speech therapy after reading an article about PresenceLearning in an educational trade magazine. After doing some research, Peggy Jadack, Director of Pupil Services at Sparta Area School District and principal of High Point Charter School, reached out to the district's principals about using online speech therapy.

"We had a pure need for a fourth SLP, so being able to implement PresenceLearning quickly was certainly one of the decision factors, said Jadack. "However, I wanted to debrief the district principals on my PresenceLearning research before moving forward. They were most likely going to be the people to field calls from parents, so I wanted to make sure everyone was on board with this new venture."

(continued...)



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Peggy Jadack,
Director of Pupil Services at
Sparta Area School District

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To solve Sparta ASD's need for a fourth SLP, PresenceLearning was able to set up and schedule therapy sessions for students by mid-September to ensure that the district SLPs were relieved of their large caseloads and students were receiving the support they needed to succeed.

Benefits & Outcomes

After bringing in the PresenceLearning SLP, the district SLPs' caseloads were maintained at between 40 and 50 students.

Now in addition to providing speech therapy for special needs students, the district focuses on early intervention in order to reduce or completely eliminate the amount of therapy a student might need in the future.

"The goal of our Rtl services is to catch delays early so students can test out of, or completely avoid, entering special education," said Jadack. "With the growth in the number of students coming into the district who qualify for special education, our Rtl program is more important than ever and PresenceLearning is providing the flexibility and help we need to implement our Rtl strategies."

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