

Success Story:

California Virtual Academies (CAVA)

Chronic SLP Shortage Alleviated with Improved Outcomes and Lowered Costs

The Challenge

California Virtual Academies (CAVA) operates publicly funded online charter schools, serving roughly 13,000 K-12 students across the state. Founded in 2002, CAVA has grown adept at delivering curricula to a diverse and widely dispersed student body beyond the walls of a typical school. But delivering legally mandated speech therapy services to students has always posed special problems. It's been a real struggle," says Angie Guterres, CAVA's provider coordinator for special services.

Choosing PresenceLearning

Guterres contracts and manages CAVA's special education providers, including speech therapists for roughly 425 CAVA students. In the past, that meant finding locally based speech language pathologists (SLPs) who could work with students in person. Unfortunately, many of those students live in areas where SLPs are scarce or even non-existent.

Guterres was spending long hours searching for therapists, sometimes without success. "We have a student in rural Northern California," she remembers. "I worked diligently for an entire year—dozens of hours—to find him an SLP but there were no speech therapists within a reasonable driving distance to provide regular services." Even in cases where local providers could be found, transportation problems sometimes prevented parents from getting their kids to therapists' offices. In other cases, CAVA had to pay SLPs hundreds of dollars per day for therapists to drive long distances. "It was incredibly frustrating and expensive," she says.

After years of difficulty, Guterres learned of PresenceLearning's live online speech therapy services in 2010. At first she had doubts. "We were new to telepractice and weren't sure it could meet our IEP requirements. So I read articles from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and spoke to the California Department of Education. I found out that telepractice is both approved and proven," she says. "I also did some math, and estimated that we could save nearly \$500 per student annually."

Benefits

Smooth, Turn-Key Implementation

CAVA began phasing in PresenceLearning services in the fall of 2010. Deployment was surprisingly easy, according to Guterres. CAVA's families already had computers and Internet connections, provided as part of CAVA's services, and PresenceLearning supplied accessories—web cameras and audio headsets—where needed. "Things went really smoothly, Guterres says. "PresenceLearning has great tech support, and when issues came up, they handled them immediately."



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Angie Guterres
California Virtual Academies,
Provider Coordinator for
Special Services

Everyone Loves the Online Format for Speech Therapy Sessions

She's equally enthusiastic about the quality of therapy: "It's been fantastic. The response from our special ed teachers has been very positive." The same goes for parents and students: "They love the therapists, and the computer-based platform makes a world of difference because it's so visual and interactive."

Outcomes

Opens Up Unprecedented Access to Speech Therapy Services

By letting SLPs work with kids wherever and whenever needed, PresenceLearning has enabled some CAVA students to get speech services for the first time. And the student in Northern California mentioned earlier? "Not only is he receiving services, but we've been able to make up for the years of therapy he missed," says Guterres.

Significant Savings of Money and Time

One hundred and ten CAVA students began using PresenceLearning during the 2010-2011 school year. "We started with new students and others who didn't already have therapists," says Guterres. She estimates that CAVA has already saved tens of thousands of dollars in the first year. Encouraged by the success so far, CAVA plans to shift more kids to PresenceLearning in the coming year. Guterres estimates that 250-300 students will be using the service by the end of the 2011-2012 school year, with a proportional improvement in cost savings.

And then there are the time savings: "I love it—it's made my life so much easier and freed up so many hours," says Guterres. "I just send a spreadsheet listing the students' therapy needs, and PresenceLearning does the rest. I would recommend it to other schools in a heartbeat. I'd say, 'Stop what you're doing and use PresenceLearning.'"

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