

Success Story:

Muskegon Heights Public School Academy System

Muskegon Heights, MI

Charter School Students Get Back on Track Using Online Speech Therapy

The Challenge

In 2012, Muskegon Heights Public School Academy System (MHPSAS) in Muskegon Heights, Michigan was facing the serious consequences of long-term management problems. According to an analysis of the 2011 Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP), MHPSAS students tested far lower than other public school students in Muskegon County. For example, not a single MHPSAS eighth-grader passed the MEAP math section, and only five percent of fifth-graders passed (MLive.com, 2012). These low test scores, along with financial crises, led Michigan governor Rick Snyder to appoint an Emergency Manager, Donald Weatherspoon, who needed to make major decisions about the schools' future direction.

With MHPSAS in danger of being taken over by the Department of Education, Weatherspoon began looking for alternatives to help serve the district's students. After choosing a charter school company to run the district, Weatherspoon turned to other services in need of revamping, including support for students with special needs.

Choosing PresenceLearning

"Last school year, we intended to do on-site therapy," said Glenda Robinson-Scott, supervisor of special education at MHPSAS. "However, we were not able to find any qualified therapists in the area. Other schools in the county faced shortages, too, but it was even harder to find a qualified therapist willing to work with us."

After finding out about PresenceLearning, Robinson-Scott overcame her initial hesitations and discovered that MHPSAS could effectively fill its speech-language pathologist (SLP) vacancy by implementing online therapy for its students.

"While there was some skepticism at first about switching to online speech therapy, we have been truly impressed with what we've seen," said Robinson-Scott. "More so than ever, students are excited to go to their therapy sessions. The students remain engaged throughout the whole session because of the high level of interaction with their therapist from PresenceLearning."

(continued...)



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Glenda Robinson-Scott,
Supervisor of Special
Education at MHPSAS

PresenceLearning

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Benefits & Outcomes

MHPSAS is currently using online speech therapy with 60 students at its four schools—two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school.

“Middle school students are hard to engage,” said Robinson-Scott. “However, our PresenceLearning SLP has developed a strong rapport with the students. That does not always happen with the use of technology. Students who were reluctant to receive speech services, especially those students in middle and high school, now come willingly.”

“We have definitely seen some breakthroughs,” said Kirk Sanford, a paraprofessional at MHPSAS. “A normal session lasts 30 minutes, but students have actually asked for sessions to go longer. The overall excitement and enthusiasm from the students, especially at the middle and high school levels, is encouraging and says a lot about the power of PresenceLearning and online therapy.”

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