

Success Story:

Dodge City Unified School District 443

Dodge City, KS

District Experiences Award-winning Results Using Online Therapy

The Challenge

Like many school districts nationwide, Dodge City Unified School District 443, a district of nearly 7,000 students in Dodge City, KS, was faced with the challenge of providing consistent, high quality speech-language pathology (SLP) services for students with special needs. After one of its full-time SLPs passed away mid-school year and nearly half of the district's other SLPs were only able to work part-time, the district had an immediate need to bring in help to serve its students.

"We were having difficulty hiring additional SLPs and our existing on-the-ground SLPs were already experiencing high caseloads across the board," said John Maples, assistant director of Southwest Kansas Area Cooperative District 613 (SKACD), which comprises Dodge City and helps provide the district with resources and special education services. "We couldn't keep up with the pace we were at and needed to find a solution."

Turning to Online Therapy

Shirley Goldsberry, the cooperative's other assistant director, who was also a former SLP, was looking at alternatives to meet the district's need when she came across online speech therapy. After looking at PresenceLearning and another provider, SKACD chose to pilot PresenceLearning because of its overall benefits, value, and functionality.

"The pilot was a very positive experience," said Maples. "While our SLPs were initially curious how it was going to play out, the pilot proved to be a win-win for both them and our students alike – the SLPs immediately experienced lighter caseloads and students were excited to participate in the sessions. This solidified our decision to partner with PresenceLearning and implement online therapy in two of the district's elementary schools."

Dodge City began using PresenceLearning with approximately 35 students at the start of the 2014-15 school year. As with in-person therapy, the online SLPs worked with students on the different Functional Communication Measures (FCMs), which include spoken language production, spoken language comprehension and speech sound production, that students required.



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Results

Through the use of PresenceLearning, the district's students exceeded national benchmarks for progress and Dodge City was named a PresenceLearning Award of Excellence winner. This distinction is given to the top performing districts across the nation based on the percentage of students at the district who improved one level or more in spoken language production and spoken language comprehension on the FCMs scales during the 2014-15 school year.

On top of these quantifiable results, the district's use of online therapy to supplement its in-person offerings continued to receive widespread approval by the SLPs, students, and parents. "It was really embraced by all involved," said Maples. "Students in particular were so engaged and loved the online experience, sessions with their virtual SLPs, and all of the interactive games and activities."

This school year, Dodge City will more than double the amount of students who receive therapy via PresenceLearning. "Our plan is to use PresenceLearning with approximately 75 students in the district," said Maples. "Because of the success we've seen at the elementary level, we'll also be rolling it out in our middle schools."

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