

# Success Story:

## John Swett Unified School District

### Diverse Urban District Solves SLP Shortage and Saves Money

#### The Challenge

When it comes to educational technology, school superintendent Mike McLaughlin is definitely a proponent. He's helped drive successful computer-based and online programs in several California school districts over the past decade. So when he found out that PresenceLearning offered an innovative solution to a growing problem in his current district, he was definitely game to try it out.

McLaughlin is superintendent of the John Swett Unified School District, serving nearly 2000 students ranging from pre-schoolers to young adults in the East San Francisco Bay Area north of Berkeley. About 100 of those students need speech therapy. The problem is that, even in a metropolitan area like the San Francisco Bay, the pool of available speech language pathologists (SLPs) has been shrinking, while prices have been skyrocketing. "More and more speech practitioners have been moving to the hospital and medical industry, which is where the money is," says McLaughlin "It's getting really hard to find therapists to work with schools."

#### Choosing PresenceLearning

Unable to hire enough staff SLPs, the school district was forced rely heavily on private providers, and the costs had long since become onerous. In 2010, McLaughlin heard about PresenceLearning and its live online speech therapy services, and not a moment too soon. "We were really ready for an alternative," he says. "We just jumped in."

The district began phasing in PresenceLearning in the fall of 2010. "Deployment was really easy," McLaughlin recalls. The schools already had Internet-ready computers, and PresenceLearning provided the rest (audio headsets and webcams where needed, and staff training). "From all reports, the training was great," McLaughlin says.

#### Benefits & Outcomes

It didn't take long to see positive results. The students embraced the system from the beginning. "They love anything on computers," says McLaughlin. "I was more concerned about how parents would react to their kids getting therapy online, but they've been fine with it—I've heard no complaints."

During the first year of deployment, about 40 percent of the district's speech therapy students were moved to the PresenceLearning system. "We picked kids with a variety of needs: mostly articulation issues, but also some language processing issues," says Barbara Walker, John Swett's director of special education. "Students have been working well toward their IEP goals, and a number of them have exited successfully. The SLPs



*"It's a great product and it really works. I think online approaches like this are the future."*

**Michael McLaughlin**  
Superintendent,  
John Swett Unified  
School District

are very professional, and their way of working with the students is absolutely effective. They've also done well with our many English language learners." John Swett is one of the most demographically diverse school districts in the nation, ranked tenth in diversity by the New York Times.

Crucially for McLaughlin, PresenceLearning gave the school district much more control over costs, quality and scheduling. "With our previous provider, we had no visibility into the process," he says. "We were getting big bills we didn't understand. PresenceLearning is more like a partner, working closely with us to meet our requirements. We're seeing real financial benefits—it's saving the school district money." McLaughlin is so pleased with the results, he's planning to move more kids to PresenceLearning in the 2011-2012 school year. "It's a great service," he says. "I really think it's the future."

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