How n2y's Polaris Improved the IEP Process for Stoner-Thomas School in Davidson County, NC

n2y's comprehensive IEP development solution, Polaris, supports compliance by assisting service providers in writing meaningful data-driven student service plans. Polaris empowers all members of the team to collaborate seamlessly in one online solution, ensuring compliance throughout the IEP process. Seamless integration across n2y solutions allows districts to demonstrate and maintain compliance while increasing teacher satisfaction and driving positive student outcomes.

Background

Davidson County Schools are in the Piedmont area of North Carolina near Winston-Salem. Stoner-Thomas School, one of 36 schools in Davidson County, specifically serves students with special needs. Currently, it has 96 students, ages 5 through 22. Stoner-Thomas School was approved by the state of North Carolina to participate in the North Carolina Alternative Schools' Accountability Model (ASAM), meaning additional accountability information is reported to the state as required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The Story of Stoner-Thomas School

Serving unique learners comes with its own distinct challenges, and Stoner-Thomas School works hard to ensure they meet the needs of each student as well as their teachers. As a school that serves only students with special needs, IEPs are the center of their collaborative culture and process.

The Challenge

Planning, writing, executing, and monitoring progress on IEPs was laborious and time-consuming at Stoner-Thomas School. Teachers needed a tool that would support them in writing IEPs that contained consistent, measurable goals based on student data and state learning standards. Stoner-Thomas needed a comprehensive IEP solution to 1) maintain and achieve compliance, and 2) improve teacher satisfaction.

"The biggest obstacle and risk to compliance were inconsistences with goal writing."

MAINTAIN AND ACHIEVE COMPLIANCE

For Rachael Cusick, Compliance Case Manager at Stoner-Thomas, it was a requirement that an IEP solution ensures IEP goals are based on student performance data. In addition, it was essential that those goals be SMART to ensure data could be easily collected. The goals also needed to be based on observable, measurable criteria. "The biggest obstacle and risk to compliance were inconsistencies with goal writing," said Rachael. Collaboration prior to the IEP meeting—which included all members of the IEP team, especially families—was crucial as well.

IMPROVE TEACHER SATISFACTION

"Special education teachers are busy and consistently receiving increased roles and responsibilities in our school," acknowledged Rachael. Retaining teachers starts with supporting them and ensuring their satisfaction in the classroom by guaranteeing they have the time to teach rather than focusing on the abundant paperwork.

Why Stoner-Thomas Evaluated n2y's Polaris

Stoner-Thomas was already using other n2y solutions in their classrooms. They use Unique Learning System as the primary curriculum for moderate to severe learners, News2you to provide meaningful connections between their students and the outside world, L³ Skills to promote lifelong learning with academic and skill-building games, and SymbolStix PRIME to assist with communication, engagement, and expression.

Rachael Cusick explained that "n2y solutions allow our teachers to work smarter, not harder." After careful review and evaluation, Polaris was added to support the school's IEP process.

The Solution

Polaris provided Stoner-Thomas with a solution for writing collaborative and compliant student plans. Teachers and service providers completed professional learning—Smart Start for Polaris and Polaris Essentials—prior to school-wide implementation, ensuring they were prepared and comfortable with the solution.

POLARIS PROVIDED:

- Data syncs with Unique Learning System for seamless integration of data to support IEP writing and progress monitoring

- Data collection tools that integrate with already established curriculum and routines

- Standards-aligned goals based on all 50 states' extended standards

- Guidance to ensure all goals were SMART, observable, and unique to each student

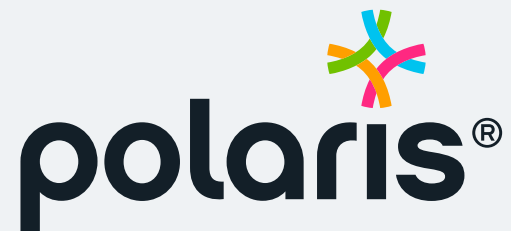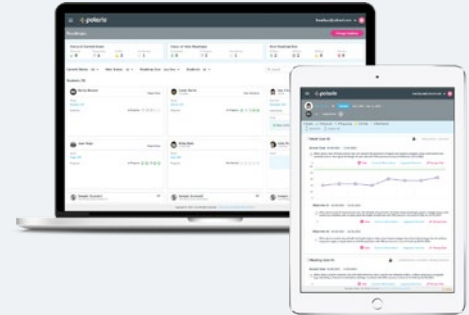- A collaborative space for the whole IEP team, including families

The Results

Rachael Cusick reports that "Polaris allows data collection and analysis to happen naturally in our routines." Regarding compliance, she states, "Polaris ensures our goals are data-based and SMART. It allows for genuine collaboration prior to the IEP meeting that includes all team members, including parents."

Teacher satisfaction has also increased since using Polaris at Stoner-Thomas. Ms. Cusick states, "Our teachers really love the collaborative data collection component [of Polaris], and it saves them time during data collection, specifically when writing present-level statements for IEPs."

The partnership between Stoner-Thomas and n2y continues to strengthen and has helped the school maintain and achieve compliance while providing a much-needed boost to teacher satisfaction.

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polaris®

Polaris is an online IEP development and progress monitoring solution for teachers and service providers to plan, write, execute, and report on IEPs for pre-K–transition students on general education or extended learning standards. Polaris provides IEP writing guidance, SMART goal recommendations, and easy-to-interpret data visualizations for high-impact and high-quality IEPs.

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