

## Sample Case Study

### Appleton School District

#### District Background

LOCATION: Appleton, IL

ENROLLMENT: 19,123

FACILITIES: 25

STAFF: 1750

#### Forward School Solutions Used

- Special Education Management
- English Language Learner (ELL) Program Management
- 504 Program Management

#### The Challenge

Appleton School District is a dynamic learning organization committed to excellence for each student and every program. Not far from Chicago, Appleton is a rapidly growing district with enrollment increasing by well over 1,000 students annually. New schools are planned and built every year to keep up with projected expansion.

With such explosive growth, meeting the needs of all special education students can be challenging. In her role as a special education coordinator, Anne Markham's primary responsibility is compliance. Keeping up with the paperwork and making sure all student records are in order used to be incredibly time-consuming. The technology the district relied on for special education compliance just couldn't keep up with the increasing influx of students. ELL, 504 and RTI were all tracked on paper, with each department using its own unique system. Knowing there had to be a solution available, Anne started the search for a provider that could meet their unique needs.

#### The Solution

**“Where some districts just need to plan for now, we have to plan for this growth that we're going to have over the next 10 years. We had to come up with a program that was going to be able to keep up with the growth.”—Anne Markham, Coordinator of Special Education**

The district decided that switching to an electronic paperless system would solve the problem. After searching for solutions, Anne and her team were convinced that Forward School Solutions Special Education Management could provide a reliable online system and would be a good fit for them. From the time they first implemented the new program, it took almost two years to complete the process of uploading assessments, evaluations and records that had been filed in student folders. To say the special education staff is thrilled to have all the documentation they need for every student at their fingertips would be an understatement!

## The Results

Reliable service and easy access to records have changed the way Appleton ISD handles compliance.

After making the decision to go with Forward School Solutions Special Education Management and store their records electronically, Anne needed assurance that the system wouldn't go down, leaving them with no access to their programs. Forward School Solutions proved to have a reliable system of backup servers. The only time service was interrupted it turned out to be the result of a fiber-optic line that had been cut 300 miles away. Forward School Solutions immediately notified the district about the problem and kept the staff updated until the situation was resolved.

**“That was a huge component right there. We had already purchased the program, but that was reinforcement that we did the right thing.”—Anne Markham**

## The paper chase is over

Once the input process was completed and demographics were pulled in from the student information system, district staff could simply update records online as needed. Electronic documents for students who are English language learners or on a 504 plan are all stored in the same system. In the past, it often took up to an hour to search for folders that may have been kept at different locations and gather all the documents needed for a meeting. With Forward School Solutions Special Education Management, now it takes just minutes.

**“Clerks on each campus that schedule IEP meetings now have access to everybody who belongs to that student, so when they open that student's file online, they can quickly look and see, does this student have any related services? Does he have special transportation? Is he at his home campus? All of that is right there, and they're able to pull that information and schedule the meeting.” —Anne Markham**

## Compliance management is more accurate and efficient

Having the documentation in a single system makes the compliance process much easier and more accurate, and the special ed staff feel confident that services and interventions are aligned to meet the needs of every student. Instead of having to go through each document in a student's folder, coordinators for Special Education, ELL and 504 quickly spot-check student records online. Not only that, but when a staff member needs additional training, it's easy to review documentation and provide immediate feedback.

**“If I’m working with a staff member that I’ve had to do some additional training with and I want to make sure they’re following through with my recommendations, then I’m able to pull all that information up here at my desk and review it.”—Anne Markham**

Training is a critical component of ensuring that students receive the services they need and making sure that the district is compliant with state and federal requirements. With regularly scheduled team meetings, district leaders provide information about new procedures or upcoming changes and address errors that show up frequently. With a continuous focus on consistency, the district is always prepared for compliance monitoring if a representative from the Illinois Department of Education happens to drop by.

## Benefits for teachers and students

**“We upload the accommodations, the goals, the behavior intervention plans as a PDF document, which is actually two clicks of a button, to our student information management system, and it will flag the teachers that they have new documentation. They go in, and they can open and view it, right there, for their student.” —Anne Markham**

Using Forward School Solutions Special Education Management saves time not only for district staff but also for busy teachers. Since paperwork has been virtually eliminated, they no longer need to pull folders out of a file cabinet to work on student records or put them back to secure them.

Case managers can quickly input data or check their students' records to make sure that all their teachers have viewed the relevant documents, and send reminders when needed.

When a new student qualifies for special education services, the special education transportation coordinator is notified through Forward School Solutions. Before the end of the school day, the classroom teacher already knows the bus number along with the pickup and drop-off schedule.

Student accommodations, goals and behavior intervention plans are uploaded to the district's student information system, allowing the general education teachers easy access to information that will help them support their students. Teachers not only know they have a student with special needs, but now they also have all the relevant details about that student so they're better able to support them.

Having access to Forward School Solutions Special Ed helps administrators when dealing with discipline, especially at the secondary level. As soon as a principal or assistant principal accesses a student's records, along with background information and history, they can see if a student has a behavior intervention plan. The special education support received by a student guides the decisions school administrators make for each child.

The group that truly benefits the most is the students themselves. Because the staff has immediate access to accommodations, behavior plans, assessments and evaluations, they can provide direct support. If a student is struggling, it just takes a moment for a teacher to review their records to find out what instructional strategies would be most effective.

## Improved workflow and communication

With increased efficiency and no paperwork, teachers and support staff have more time to spend on students. As they realize how much using the online program helps them do their jobs, staff morale continues to improve.

Having all student records in one place means that if a student has a learning disability and is also a second language learner, the committee has the information they need to determine how they can best meet that student's needs. If a student was on a 504 plan before qualifying for special education services, the history is in one place, making it much easier to track the progress the student has made over time.

If parents have questions or concerns or plan to attend a meeting, information about their child is readily available to them. Since most of Appleton School District parents prefer email communication, staff members use Forward School Solutions to securely email documents and forms to parents. When parents attend a meeting, they have access to their child's records right on their phones.

In the past it often took at least a week, and sometimes as long as 30 days, to get records when students moved from one school to another. Because over 800 Illinois districts are now using Forward School Solutions, records are transferred electronically in minutes. If a student with a severe disability or complicated history moves to a new school, teachers have all their background information and can start providing the required services the day the student arrives.

## Working together to prepare for tomorrow

Client support from Forward School Solutions gets an A++ from Anne Markham. From the initial setup of the Forward School Solutions Special Education Management system to day-to-day questions, responses to questions are quick, and problems are usually fixed within an hour. Strong two-way communication provides regular opportunities for district leaders to meet with Forward School Solutions representatives to learn about current updates along with new and exciting things going on.

Because so many Illinois districts use Forward School Solutions, user group meetings are held before each Illinois Special Education conference. Forward School Solutions reps take ideas back to the company and integrate them into programs to benefit all users. District administrators share questions and concerns and leave with new ideas, solutions and information that helps them run their programs more effectively.

As the district grows and enrollment increases, Appleton School District is already looking ahead. Adding other programs available through Forward School Solutions will support interventions for general education as well as special needs students. Appleton's partnership with Forward School Solutions will help to make the district's commitment to excellence for each student and every program a reality today and in the years to come.