

CUSTOMER CONNECTIONS



SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE

- » Located in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
- » District includes 16 schools
- » Approximately 8,400 students
- » About 20 percent of enrolled children are students with disabilities

CHALLENGES

- District's special education program was not receiving all funds it was eligible to receive
- The district often requested deadline extensions because of its labor-intensive paperwork-driven processes
- District could not easily adapt to regulatory or reporting changes
- Needed an on-demand customizable solution

SOLUTION

- SunGard K-12 Education **IEPPLUS** Special Education System

BENEFITS

- Dramatically increased the amount of federal and state funding received for special education students
- Partnership delivers ongoing enhancements to meet continually changing government, district needs
- Now able to meet deadlines for funding and reporting
- Validation tool ensures data is complete at time of entry and meets IDEA regulations
- Simplifies development of Individual Education Plans

Harrisburg School District dramatically improves its reporting on special education students with IEPPLUS

In order to access its full allowance of state and federal funds to best meet the needs of its many special education students, Harrisburg School District needed a solution that eliminated redundant data-inputting, excessive paperwork and human error.

Without this technology in place, the urban Pennsylvania district was unable to tap the funds for which it was eligible, short-changing both students and faculty. The existing paper-based procedure required teachers to seek information manually, a time-consuming task for employees who preferred spending their hours educating rather than performing administrative tasks.

Well aware of the frequent changes in education reporting, Harrisburg School District also needed a true partnership with a software provider, seeking a developer that would "listen to requests, recommend changes and quickly act upon the district's needs," said Ellen Tierney, applications supervisor at Harrisburg.

IEPPLUS from SunGard K-12 Education met the district's requirements for a special education management solution and Harrisburg School District dramatically improved its reporting on special education students, directly resulting in more funds distributed to serve the student body.

Tradition of Excellence

Harrisburg selected **IEPPLUS** because of the district's past experience with SunGard K-12 Education, the software's features, and feedback from existing **IEPPLUS** clients, said Tierney. "We attended a presentation by SunGard and spoke to other school districts. [The districts using **IEPPLUS**] were very open and positive about their experiences with the software," she noted.

The software enables Harrisburg to link students' demographic information to services, placements, evaluations and test scores, among other measurements.

IEPPLUS also automates much of the Individual Education Plan creation, simplifying customization, streamlining and speeding the process, said Tierney.

"**IEPPLUS** allows employees to be more productive, especially at the facilitator and teacher levels. It gives them more time to work with the students."

ELLEN TIERNEY
Applications Supervisor,
Harrisburg School District, PA

"There are reports that are already built in to **IEPPLUS** and it's very customizable," she said. "That's one of the many things I love about **IEPPLUS**: its customization capabilities."

Past and Present

To qualify for special education funding, Harrisburg needed to provide the state with accurate and current information about its students. Prior to **IEPPLUS**, teachers had to locate data manually, input it into word processing software, and turn over supporting data to an administrator who would painstakingly check information page by page, said Tierney. The procedure was rife with potential errors, excessive hours and tedium, she said.

"When we went to **IEPPLUS**, the teachers didn't have to fill out paper forms anymore," Tierney said. "Instead, they completed the forms online, as needed for state reporting."

The administrator in charge of state reporting no longer needed to receive and read hundreds of pages of teachers' paper documents used to check data, commented Tierney. Instead, the administrator can run reports directly within **IEPPLUS**, using data already checked by the software. This saved time and dramatically improved the accuracy of Harrisburg's reporting on special education students, Tierney said.

WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS ARE SAYING

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Prior to using **IEPLUS**, the district struggled to accurately count the number of special education students. After implementing the system and rolling out the software to teachers, the district increased the count reported to the state; in this case 30% more special education students were entered in the system. "That directly equated into more money for the district," Tierney added. "Using **IEPLUS**, we were able to actually count the exact number of special education students and receive the appropriate funds for each child."

The software also enabled Harrisburg to meet deadlines. In the past, the district frequently was forced to request extensions because of the sheer volume of data pages involved per student.

"**IEPLUS** allows employees to be more productive, especially at the facilitator and teacher levels. It gives them more time to work with the students. In addition, we have more accurate data going to the government at the state and federal level," noted Tierney.

A Community Approach

As educational professionals are well aware, requirements change, sometimes quickly. Harrisburg School District relies extensively on SunGard K-12 Education's team to help it meet evolving data requests, said Tierney.

"Any time I get emails from the state saying, 'Here are the changes,' I just send it on to SunGard K-12 Education. They're very good at getting everything done," she said. SunGard K-12 Education is always good about meeting our new needs as quickly as possible."

Harrisburg School District also participates in a regular conference call among **IEPLUS** users and SunGard K-12 Education. "Technology is there to support. It makes everybody's job so much easier."

Harrisburg uses **IEPLUS'** Validator, a software utility that checks IEPs for completeness. The solution, which helps districts better-comply with IDEA regulations, integrates into the **IEPLUS** Plan Generator, used to streamline the IEP reviewing process for teachers and special education directors and facilitators. "Teachers are unable to submit their paperwork for review until they pass the required validation rules, so it saves time for facilitators and administrative staff," said Tierney. "Now they don't spend their time checking that certain areas of the form are filled out, and can instead spend time reviewing the content of the IEP."

"SunGard K-12 Education offers a wide variety of solutions and they're always coming out with more," Tierney said. "Our biggest challenge is using all the available features in order to continue meeting our goals and improving the funding our students receive."

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