



Better Special Education Student Services, **Better SIS Integration**



AT A GLANCE

Challenge:

In-house special education system was aging and difficult to maintain; disparate systems didn't integrate and communicate; challenging for stakeholders to collaborate easily on shared student and staff documents; student specialized equipment was difficult to track and the SEA process lacked transparency for all stakeholders

Decision:

PowerSchool Special Education

Results:

Improved student support; enhanced accountability, accuracy and accessibility; enhanced department collaboration and connectivity; seamless integration with student information system

Managing Special Education services requires a robust software solution that gives students and staff resources needed to enhance the K-12 education experience. York Region District School Board needed a modern special education software solution that would give its students and staff these essential resources and tools. And, it had to integrate with its existing student information system.

The stakes were high: 19,000 special education students, 1,100 Special Education Teachers, Regulated Healthcare Professionals and additional staff would rely on the solution. After a thorough research, review, and vetting process, the Board chose PowerSchool Special Education (formerly TIENET™).

“PowerSchool Special Education brings together systems that weren’t connected at a local level and meets the needs of the entire department. This is bringing it all together into one powerful application to share data back and forth. It has eliminated redundancies and made things much more efficient,” says Russ Coles, Senior Manager - Enterprise Applications, York Region District School Board.

Overview

Ontario's York Region District School Board is a large, diverse district serving 125,000 students spread out over 1,700 square kilometers throughout the province.

The board serves 19,000 students with Special Education needs with a collaborative, inter-disciplinary team

model that includes Student Services Coordinators, Regulated Healthcare Professionals (including Psychological Services, Speech-Language Pathology Services, Physiotherapy/Occupational Therapy Services, School Social Work Services), Itinerant Teachers, Intervention Support Workers, Work Experience

Program Coordinators, Special Education teachers, Consultants and Administrators.

THE CHALLENGE

York Region District School Board's existing software system for managing special education needs was aging. Developed in-house, the system served the board's needs for a time, but a growing student and stakeholder population were pushing the system beyond its limits and exposing inefficiencies.

"It worked for a while but eventually got to a point that it needed to be updated to meet our growing needs," says Carla Weller, Regional Special Education Consultant, Team Lead – SSNet. "The previous system did not integrate well with our other systems. There was a lot of duplication of data entry; staff were adding information into our Special Education System but it would not carry over into other applications. We didn't have one stop for data to be housed."

A key example of exposed inefficiencies can be seen in the Board's Special Equipment Amount (SEA) claims process, which provides special education students with essential resources such as laptops or tablets with Assistive Technology software or physical equipment such as walkers, sensory equipment, or equipment for the students with vision and hearing impairments. York Region's old system required a lengthy, arduous process of submitting requests, multiple stakeholder approvals, and finally ordering and delivery (taking up to one year). In many instances, approvals were stalled and the process was delayed because there was confusion over who was the next approver, resulting in a student waiting unnecessarily to receive equipment.

"It was very labor-intensive and often paper driven," Weller says. "It was consuming our users in terms of hours. They were finding it overwhelming."

Now that York Region District School Board is using PowerSchool, however, that process has been revolutionized for the ultimate benefit of students. "We now have a tool to track equipment, deploy, redeploy and reassign as needed. It's been implemented with huge success. Our board's in a great place and our staff are thrilled with the outcome," says Kim Tanaka, former Principal of Student Services. "PowerSchool Special Education is helping students get their Special Equipment Amount (SEA) claims processed efficiently and resources into their hands quickly. A process that was once up to 12 months has been reduced to as little as a

few weeks."

"Our in-house system served about 60 percent of needs required, but it was getting old, and needed replacing," says Coles. "We had another piece that we used that was also antiquated and needed updating, plus other systems, including Excel spreadsheets. We felt that if we were going to reengineer our in-house system, it would take a lot of time and resources. It was old in the backend from a technical aspect. It would have had to be completely rebuilt."

Nancy Elgie, a YRDSB Trustee, explains, "Because of our size, it had become increasingly important to have something in place to support consistency in our system. Departments supporting students with Special Education needs were using many small department-specific applications. It was challenging for them to access important student information necessary to do their work efficiently."

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SOLUTION

In an effort to streamline the special education processes and paperwork, YRDSB collected requirements – both current and what they wanted to do moving forward – from every department in the board that supported students with special education needs.

"We started out with a vision of what we wanted. We had an understanding that our solution needed to be accessible to staff and families across devices, linked to our student information system, electronic, streamlined, and efficient," says Susan Logue, Superintendent of Student Services.

York Region DSB conducted an RFP process that focused first on functionality. After extensive research and review, the board narrowed its choices to a few, which included PowerSchool Special Education (formerly TIENET™) at the top of the list. The Board spoke to two of the solution's large reference accounts, Nova Scotia and New York City. The feedback from both reference accounts was positive in terms of the ongoing support provided by the vendor and the existing functionality of the application.

PowerSchool Special Education manages compliance, intervention, and all Special Education services for schools, districts and boards of all sizes. Created by educators for educators, the web-based, easy-to-use, fully customizable solution provides schools with a comprehensive case management system. It efficiently tracks all clinical services to ensure the delivery of the IEP, alignment to state and provincial goals related to



YORK REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD'S STUDENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT IS DEDICATED TO:

- Providing students with special needs Individual Education Plans (IEPs) focused on improved student learning
- Appropriate accommodations and modifications
- Learning communities that promote respect for differences, diversity and inclusivity
- Extensive resource staff to support the development of quality programs and provision of services for exceptional pupils
- Collaborative planning between Special Education and classroom staff

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— Carla Weller, Regional Special Education Consultant, Team Lead – SSNet

the IEP, and the development of accommodations plans as needed.

"The biggest difference between the vendors we looked at was that PowerSchool Special Education had solutions already in place for what we needed. Other vendors said they could build us something, but didn't have the solution already in place," says Helen Westlake, Business Analyst at York Region DSB, who was instrumental in leading efforts to find the right solution.

"We chose PowerSchool Special Education because it met our needs, was scalable, flexible, efficient, secure, configurable, and offered ongoing support," says Weller. "The results have been amazing."

RESULTS

PowerSchool has provided the Board with a streamlined solution that promotes communication and collaboration, and is scalable to match expanding needs. The solution is optimized for mobile technology, making it easy to access and utilize from any location at the user's convenience.

"PowerSchool Special Education is the tool we had been waiting for," Weller says. "It puts critical student information in the hands of our educators and front-line staff in a secure and reliable application. We can now collaborate, share and develop student special education documents anywhere, anytime, in a safe and easy-to-use online environment. Our processes are streamlined and the built in document actions ensure staff complete work correctly, and the notifications that are generated help to ensure it all happens in a timely way."

IMPROVED STUDENT SUPPORT

With PowerSchool Special Education data management, staff have access to more information and are able to complete their work more easily and efficiently, leading to more time to support students.

"I think of any student who is at risk, documented in our PowerSchool Special Education application and the

support wrapped around that student is more efficient and more clear. All stakeholders know who is working with the student and what support has been given. PowerSchool Special Education is breaking down silos for us, everybody has the same information, and it translates into more responsive service for our students," says Weller.

"With SEA claims, for example, now the system is all online and streamlined," Weller explains. The same people are involved, but it's electronic and it cuts the waiting. There are no clogs with approvals getting hung up. You can open up the claim and see exactly who needs to sign off and keep the process moving. All of this important work is done in a safe and secure location. This saves so much time for everyone involved".

Examples of other York Region District School Board processes streamlined by PowerSchool Special Education that have resulted in more time for teachers to spend supporting students include:

- Managing In-School Team meetings and Inter-Disciplinary team referrals
- Referral and Consent to connect students with appropriate regulated healthcare professionals
- Report card data, which saves time by repopulating common data fields
- Creating and printing student documents in bulk
- Managing waiting lists for psychological assessments
- Developing, approving, deploying and tracking SEA claims

ACCOUNTABILITY, ACCURACY & ACCESSIBILITY

Similar to SEA claims, all student documents are clearly visible to all stakeholders with security and privileges to view them in PowerSchool Special Education. The Board appreciates the professional, digital

format that maintains consistency and accuracy and the knowledge that student documents are secure while providing transparency and accountability.

"We once used pieces of paper that traveled to multiple people in the board, potentially getting lost and ultimately having a lack of ownership. But now have a one-stop data location with better accountability and better service for our students. Everyone knows the next step throughout any process. PowerSchool Special Education has clarified and streamlined our processes and all of our staff, including our Regulated Healthcare Professionals, are confident with the security of the application and knowing that processes are streamlined," says Wendy Swaine, Principal of Student Services.

As a fully web-based solution, PowerSchool Special Education gives users convenience and accessibility from any device or location. Stakeholders can easily run reports and access accurate student data which can be used for ONSIS reporting, tracking permitted EQAO accommodations, and asset management etc.

"The solution is truly an effective tool. It has really changed the way we are able to access information about students. There's a powerful reporting functionality which lets me see student information in my school at a click of



ABOUT POWERSCHOOL

PowerSchool is the #1 leading education technology platform for K-12, serving more than 24.5 million students, 43 million parents, and 68 million users in over 70 countries around the world. We provide the industry's first Unified Classroom experience with best-in-class, secure, and compliant online solutions, including: registration and school choice; student information systems; learning management and classroom collaboration; assessment; analytics; and special education management. We empower teachers and drive student growth through innovative digital classroom capabilities, and we engage families through real-time communications across any device.



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a button. I can see the composition of my special education population. I have access to safety plans, IEPs, and in-school team meetings and records. I can be up-to-date with information quickly and easily," says Rick Rosemin, YRDSB Administrator.

"Whether a student is in Georgina, or Woodbridge, or anywhere in this large region, special education resource teachers, administrators, regulated health professionals and eventually our parents can access information and develop programming for students in a timely way," says Ziraldo.

Westlake adds that from a school perspective, SSNet is not only giving stakeholders access to an application that is easy to use with anytime, anywhere access, but it gives them more information than before.

"We're feeding special education staff information to do their jobs better and they don't have to run down to the office now," she says. "We're also giving more access to more users. Before it was basically for just Special Education teachers and principals, but now it's available to a much more collaborative team."

DEPARTMENT COLLABORATION & CONNECTIVITY

With the addition of PowerSchool Special Education, York Region District School Board has experienced a positive cultural impact that is improving collaboration between staff, students, parents and other resources.

"There's been greater connectivity and more cultural understanding and integration of all of the collaborative work being done to support a child," says Logue. "We understand each other's discipline better and we see how the many individual disciplines all come together to serve a student."

INTEGRATION WITH STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

PowerSchool Special Education has integrated seamlessly with YRDSB's existing student information system (SIS) to improve processes, efficiency, and resource allocation. The two systems provide user interface integration and data integration between the SIS and PowerSchool Special Education.

"Another thing that has really helped with efficiency is that the system connects to our student information system. We no longer have to worry about incorrect

information being on documents. SSNet is making everything happen more efficiently and accurately. We now have common language between teachers and professional staff which makes it easier for parents to navigate our special education system if they move between schools in the York Region District School Board," says Rosemin.

"It's bidirectional back and forth," says Coles. "PowerSchool Special Education has a good connectivity tool that lets us import from our SIS, and our SIS has an interface so we can easily push data back into the SIS. With PowerSchool Special Education, we have all the information we need to go back and forth between the systems."

"If we're looking specifically at data connectivity, it has been an easy tool to use to get into PowerSchool Special Education and out of our SIS. There have been no conflicts in terms of data mapping back and forth," says Westlake.

Conclusion

While York Region District School Board's previous special education management system had managed to meet some of the Board's needs, investing in a growing future and better serving 19,000 students with Special Education needs proved to be a wise decision. Improved efficiencies, service, accuracy, accountability, and integration are just a few of the many benefits the board and its stakeholders have experienced.

"It's paid off well beyond what anyone thought," says Weller. "We had a vision of what we wanted in our new system and we knew that if we built it, it would happen. But it was just so amazing to actually watch it happen."

And board trustees agree. "Now we are supporting special education in York Region in a safe, secure and accessible way," says Corrie McBain, YRDSB Trustee.

"I believe that this tool truly will make a difference for all in doing the best we can to ensure our students reach their full potential," says Ziraldo.

"This has changed how special education is being managed in the York region. We have a secure application for all YRSBD staff and we are fostering collaboration through a team approach to support students with special education needs," says Elgie. "This is groundbreaking work."