

Bartow County School System

Georgia

Performance Series®
Special Education Needs

Assessment Solutions

SCANTRON®

GEORGIA'S BARTOW COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM, NORTHWEST OF ATLANTA, HAS LONG BEEN A LEADER IN INCLUSION PRACTICES—INVOLVING SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS IN REGULAR CLASSES AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. WITH THE SCANTRON PERFORMANCE SERIES SOLUTION, BARTOW'S SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS NOW HAVE A TOOL THAT HELPS THEM FOCUS INSTRUCTION MORE EFFICIENTLY AND ALSO MAKES THEM MORE EFFECTIVE TEACHERS IN INCLUSION SETTINGS.

Challenge

- Determining special education students' strengths and weaknesses
- Special education teachers' schedules make it difficult to co-teach

"Special education is individualized education for boys and girls, based on their needs," says Greg Petersen, associate, Department of Student Support Services, for the 13,500-student K–12 district. "Our goal is to allow the special education students to participate in the general curriculum to the maximum extent possible—by providing appropriate accommodations and support." As a result, a majority of the county's special-needs students attend regular classes for most of the day. To maximize the effectiveness of instruction for all students, the district uses a co-teaching format in which the classroom teacher and the special education "inclusion" teacher collaborate on the lessons. For special education teachers, who may work in five or six different classrooms during a day, co-teaching can be particularly challenging. "They have to understand what's being taught in each class as well as the specific needs of their students in relation to that content," says Petersen. "In the past, some of the inclusion teachers have struggled with specific curriculum content areas outside of their knowledge base."

Solution

- Computer-adaptive, diagnostic test gives teachers baseline on students' strengths and weaknesses
- Accurately measure gains after each subsequent test

Determining exactly what students know—and don't know—is the first step in supporting their learning. In fall 2004, the district started using Performance Series, a web-based, computer-adaptive diagnostic test, to help with this assessment. "We tested 940 special education students in grades 2–8, getting baseline on their specific strengths and weaknesses," says Petersen. "When we test them again, we will be able to have accurate measures of gains." Although Performance Series allows teachers to make a variety of accommodations to meet students' needs, such as scheduling shorter test sessions, the district decided not to use this capability. "For the majority of students who were cognitively impaired, we made no special accommodations," he says. "We wanted to test the children just as they were."





Results

Performance Series has already provided Bartow's teachers with the basis for writing an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for each student—vital to IDEA compliance. "We have become very knowledgeable about the students we tested, finding out which objectives they have mastered and which ones they have not," says Petersen. "In the past, a major focus was on what the students could not do.

Now that we have accurate assessments of what they can do, it's easier to formulate goals and objectives so they can be successful." With specific information in hand, Bartow's special education teachers are turning to the

Scantron Skills Connection® solution, a web-based companion program of Performance Series. This standards-based bank of objectives and corresponding skill-specific study guides helps them fill in the gaps in their students' knowledge. "With Skills Connection, our teachers can go right to a standard and print a step-by-step study guide to use for instruction," says Lynn Robertson, the district's special education coordinator for middle and high schools. "These mini-lessons are a great resource. Because they're ready to use, teachers can be more efficient. And if teachers need to manipulate the text—to make the print larger, for example, or to use the material for creating a test— that's

easy enough to do." In addition to producing study guides for student use, the special education teachers are using Skills Connection to review content for themselves. "When inclusion teachers have an efficient way to refresh their subject-matter knowledge," Petersen says, "they immediately become more effective collaborators in the classroom." What's next? "We'd like to use Performance Series with remedial students in the upper grades," says Petersen. "Georgia's high schools now have exit exams. If we can target particular areas that are difficult, like science, we may be able to help some of these students graduate with the rest of their class."

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Greg Petersen, Associate,
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