



Follett Aspen empowers Student Life Center to provide life-changing services.

MARIETTA STUDENT LIFE CENTER
MARIETTA CITY SCHOOLS
MARIETTA | GEORGIA

ABOUT THE MARIETTA STUDENT LIFE CENTER

The mission and vision of the Marietta City Schools District (MCSD) in Georgia is simply “to serve every student and every need,” which can be a tall order given the level of poverty and homelessness in the area. Regardless, MCSD is committed to ensuring that every child has the support they need to succeed and that life’s challenges do not obstruct learning.

In 2015, the district identified the need for a place during which high school students could get the support they need during the crucial years where vulnerable students may drop out or become involved in destructive behaviors. It would be more than a place where students learn academically. It would also be a place where the real-world barriers that often derail success could be directly addressed every day for every student.

To meet this need, over 20 local and state agencies partnered with MCSD and former Director Rona Roberts to create the Marietta Student Life Center (MSLC). Located on the high school campus, the center serves all students and families in the district and provides in-school services related to housing, job skill development, job placement for students and families, college admission support services, targeted tutoring, a food pantry, life skills training, and family and student counseling.

The Center also provides extended services to students and their families, including emergency funds for temporary housing, transportation, meals, and a place for teen moms to meet and access free baby clothes. In addition, at-risk students receive behavioral support in areas like anger management and conflict resolution, as well as help with social-emotional issues, such as anxiety, stress, and depression.

The goal is to help each child have a better chance of succeeding and moving onto college and careers. The Center’s mission is to support the entire family – no questions asked.

“The Marietta Student Life Center actively removes barriers to success to ensure that every student cannot only thrive, but graduate college- and career-ready.”

CASEY CAGLE

Former Lieutenant Governor
Georgia

THE CHALLENGE

While the mission of the Marietta Student Life Center was sound and its services had already changed countless lives, in 2017 Roberts realized that to more effectively and securely organize and track student data and progress, the MSLC needed a student information system (SIS) that could do far more than track grades, absences, lunch fees, and tardy slips.

“I looked closely at where we were and where we needed to be,” Roberts explained. “To facilitate the extensive collaboration and coordination needed among school staff and child- and family-centered community partners, and to handle the security issues and the complexity of the wraparound services we provided, we needed a SIS that did not yet exist.

“The system I envisioned would not just be protected by a firewall,” she continued. “It would offer complete safety and security when it comes to a student’s social-emotional needs. And with this system, we would have immediate access to all the pieces that make that student ours, so we can give them the care they need to help them succeed.”



THE SOLUTION

Relying on the existing partnership between Follett and the MCSD, Roberts and her team requested collaboration with the Follett Aspen® Student Information System software engineers to create a customized system.

“Using input from school counselors and school administrators, my team outlined protocols for student referrals to the MSLC,” Roberts said. “We discussed and agreed on the workflow and touchpoints in the referral process. Each staff member identified a touchpoint in the process and signed off on the protocol draft, and it was shared with the developers to create a customized MSLC platform in Aspen that was unique to us.”

Over the next eight months, the MSLC team worked closely with Follett to develop the capacity within Aspen that perfectly met their needs. They needed to easily document student access to wraparound services and reduce or eliminate bottlenecks in communication when providing those services. It was especially important to focus on the pieces that strengthened ties among school personnel, parents, and community service providers. This created an integrated support network for students and reinforced the team’s shared commitment to common goals.

Throughout the planning and implementation process, Roberts found the Follett Customer Service team to be superior. “Our local tech support works well with the Aspen tech support team to help us solve any problems we may encounter,” Roberts said. “Above all, I was so grateful that Follett would and could do this. Follett listened to our needs and got it just right.”

A member of the MSLC team added, “The Aspen developers were so awesome. It was as if they knew the center. As they worked through the requirements, they became a student, a parent, and a teacher so they could fine-tune the user experience.”

THE RESULTS

The MSLC Platform in Aspen is now an invaluable tool to the school district that enables a student, parent, teacher, administrator, counselor, or school system employee to refer a student whose behavior indicates the need for a supportive response rather than a disciplinary consequence.



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RONA ROBERTS

Former Director
Marietta City Schools District
(MCSD)



“On a macro level, the information gathered from MSLC referrals shows how we respond to students’ voices in terms of response time, the number of students referred, the number of students accessing services, and team member case ownership and resolution,” Roberts said. “On a micro level, we are able to gather information on individual students by assessing needs, care coordination, evaluation, and referrals for options and services.”

As a result of the attention to detail in developing the customized Aspen platform, all students – even those who might have fallen through the cracks in a traditional environment – receive the individualized support they need to develop the skills, career readiness, and confidence necessary to succeed in college and beyond.

“Using the MSLC features in Aspen, multiple staff members are now able to view the whole student by accessing robust data that include academic performance, attendance, discipline, 504/IEP, and social-emotional learning support,” Roberts added. “Thanks to the software engineers at Follett, all our top priorities were built into the MSLC platform in Aspen: powerful student record management, seamless communication, cloud-based data management, high-level security, and more. We couldn’t be happier.”

Students involved with the MSLC are a testament to its success. “The Life Center provides family, support, love, and an understanding of community,” Harveste (a student, class of 2019) said. “They say that ‘It takes a village to raise a child,’ and the Marietta Student Life Center embodies just that.”



Sean, another student, shared his classmate’s opinion of the center’s value: “At the MSLC, people listened to my story without judging me. They provided me with therapists and other resources to help me deal with my problems and provided classes that helped me with the SAT and the ACT. This center has helped me through so many obstacles in my life.”

As the center continues to thrive and grow, it relies more heavily on Aspen to illustrate its needs and services, and the data used to support programs. However, as Roberts shared, “The best part of our customized Aspen is knowing we’re able to support every student and every family. As we grow and change, so does Aspen. It’s an invaluable tool we can’t live without, and it makes our center better every day.”

