



Starting Off Strong with Odyssey

Elementary School Sets the Bar High with First-Year Success Carlsbad, CA

It's a typical lunch hour at Poinsettia Elementary School: In the background, dozens of Poinsettia Panthers are laughing, shouting to each other, and making the most of a southern California day. On his cell phone, Principal Steve Ahle takes some time to reflect on his 27 years of educational administrative experience and the role that teachers, curriculum, and technology have played in his classroom.

It was evident to Ahle early in his career that the most effective educators would not only cover the state-mandated curriculum but also be able to appeal to a broad range of learning styles. Add to that the need to keep students at all skill levels within a classroom engaged in the material, and it was a tall order for any teacher to fill. He began using products from Prescription Learning, CompassLearning's predecessor,

in his classes, and upgraded with each product breakthrough. Ahle and the other teachers would use the product for pretests, formative testing, and summative testing, using as much data as they could gather to help them make decisions about how to proceed with each student.

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Ahle arrived at Pacific Rim Elementary in 1999, installed a small computer lab in the school, and continued to guide classroom instruction with data generated through CompassLearning products. During each of the eight years he was there, he watched students' Academic Performance Index (API) — a combination of standardized assessments whose results range from 200 to 1,000 — increase steadily. He left Pacific Rim for Poinsettia Elementary after the 2006–2007 school year but knows that students' APIs in his old school have continued to improve. Their most recent API was a solid 949, far exceeding the statewide goal of 800.

Poinsettia Elementary, which covers grades K–5 and opened before the 2007–2008 school year, is the district’s first wireless school. Ahle saw the new campus as an opportunity to weave technology seamlessly in with the rest of the curriculum, both during class time and outside school hours. “We had 68 people last year signing on during summertime,” says Ahle. “Instead of doing summer school, they were using labs that were correlated to our curriculum.” Initial results were very promising. The school’s API in its first year was 848 — high for a campus with 20 percent English language learners and 30 percent socio-economically disadvantaged students. In fact, at the beginning of Poinsettia’s first year, one-third of the students were from outside Carlsbad entirely. “Those kids came in with no data, no information. Odyssey has really allowed us to see what kids know. We can look at their growth patterns and see how we can get them to progress.”

During its first year, Poinsettia students showed 12 percent growth on assessments given at the beginning and end of the year. Some students tested out of their grade level completely. High levels of student interest in the Odyssey web-based program played a role in that. Ahle says that students’ interest in Odyssey’s media-based activities motivated them to work harder and put in more time.

All of the school’s 518 students have access to Odyssey in computer labs and in classrooms. Poinsettia’s Instructional Assistant Nick Covino, who runs the computer lab, has been instrumental in training teachers, collecting and analyzing data, and helping teachers monitor students’ progress through their learning paths. Ahle credits part of the school’s success with Odyssey to short, but frequent, sessions at the computer during school. Students in first through third grade use the CompassLearning lab twice a week for half an hour each time, working in math, English language arts, science, or English language development. Students in grades 4 and 5 go three times a week, and kindergarteners go once. “They used to go [to the lab] for an hour at a time, but we didn’t find it to be as effective,” says Ahle. The shorter sessions enable educators to focus on

specific concepts more intensively, and Odyssey’s reporting features tell teachers what to focus on with smaller groups of students. “They know what the kids need and can start dealing with their needs in the classroom.” Teachers use Odyssey data to do preview/reviews for the whole class, direct remediation activities at the students who need it, or create supplemental materials to accompany the classroom curriculum.

Because Odyssey is web based, students can work on their activities from home, as well as involve their parents more closely in what they’re learning. “I’m a firm believer that if we can extend the time that kids have during the day in a productive way, then parents can reinforce what their kids learn and we’ll see some very good progress.”

Teachers’ enthusiasm for Odyssey has translated to students’ excitement and success. “We’ve got kids who are used to not achieving a whole lot — they’re getting one-hundreds on their assignments and then see that up on the board. They feel great about that,” Ahle says. Teachers also like Odyssey because they can control students’ learning paths based on their observations, as well as coordinate Odyssey activities to complement a particular classroom lesson. As a result, students approach a single concept from many directions and are more likely to truly learn it.

Given Ahle’s past experience with CompassLearning, it’s not a leap to expect that Poinsettia’s students will continue to score well above the state requirements and improve every year. He and the school’s staff are always on the lookout for adjustments they can make to reach more students, streamline reporting processes, or stir up more enthusiasm. Says Ahle, “You have to find different ways to open up the windows and create avenues to make kids smarter.”

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CompassLearning is a leader in facilitating student success by collaborating with educators to create personalized learning experiences. Our innovative educational software solutions individualize instruction for each student based on his or her unique needs. Odyssey, our core product, influences student success because it is based on current and confirmed research about how students engage, think, and learn. Teachers and administrators benefit from our custom implementation, professional development, and customer support solutions.

