



# Teamwork Helps District Build Primary Intervention Program

Pittsburgh, PA

**W**hen administrators at Pittsburgh Public School District began considering how they would implement technology in their classrooms, they knew that the people behind the products they chose would be as important as the products themselves. In 2000, the district opted to work with CompassLearning® to introduce a technology-based math and reading/language arts element to a handful of middle schools. Over the next several years, the reputation of CompassLearning's products and people grew, and in 2004 the district opted to use Odyssey® in all of its middle school grades.

## Partners in Excellence for All

It was before the 2007–2008 school year that the district decided to conduct a yearlong pilot of Odyssey K–5 Reading/Language Arts. District officials wanted to focus primarily on building the district's Extended After-School (EAP) and Intervention programs. Building and implementing the pilot was a challenge because of various new district initiatives. One of those was Pittsburgh's *Excellence for All* reform — the foremost initiative the CompassLearning team needed to address.

A tremendous amount of teamwork between district officials and CompassLearning salespeople, Educational Consultants (ECs), and technical engineers affirmed that Odyssey was a sound program that benefitted teachers and students alike and partnered well with the *Excellence for All* reform. The team

demonstrated how Odyssey met academic objectives by correlating the K–12 Math and Reading/Language Arts curriculum to the eligible content of the PA Anchors. They also outlined how Odyssey's reporting features helped teachers use data-driven decision-making to improve student achievement.

## Racing Against the Clock

Because of the new initiatives underway as part of *Excellence for All*, the Odyssey pilot was approved later than most district-wide pilot programs. A majority of the teachers' in-service dates for the school year were already scheduled, reducing the ECs' time to deliver critical professional development training. Fortunately, CompassLearning's positive reputation helped solve that issue. "We were able to use the positive relationships we built during the previous math implementation to leverage teacher buy-in—we publicized our past successes through those contacts. Positive word spread fast and was a great springboard for acceptance in the elementary schools," says CompassLearning project manager Jim Jones who, with Annette Manilla and Todd Hoffman, formed the Educational Consulting group that worked with the district on the pilot, along with salespeople Sharon Krall and Stacy Spencer Peters. The team went to extremes to make sure that educators' needs were met, including meeting with teachers after work hours and on weekends.

The knowledge that long-range planning was a part of *Excellence for All* kept the team focused on delivering quality professional development services. "The CompassLearning

consultant [Annette Manilla] has been willing to schedule any time, including Saturdays, to meet with EAP staff. She has been excellent and willing to support us in every way,” says Carol Yamrozi, curriculum coach and EAP coordinator at Pittsburgh Allegheny Elementary.

Professional development was only part of the picture. The technical part of the implementation was also challenging due to the district changes, but CompassLearning system engineer Ken Goblinger worked diligently and cooperatively on the technical side with the districts’ technical team for an almost seamless beginning to the pilot.

### Setting Goals

A key step in the Pittsburgh implementation was defining exactly what the district expected of Odyssey: How would the teachers use it? What data would be gathered to determine the solution’s efficacy? What would be done with any data that was collected? A series of discussions between district administrators and the CompassLearning team established the parameters for Odyssey use, the skills students would be expected to master, and how data generated in Odyssey would be used to drive future instruction.

The CompassLearning consulting team worked hard to align Odyssey primary content to the current K–5 screening tests, assessments, and curricula, creating an after-school and intervention program that supported and extended classroom instruction for students needing extra help. Students also took the 4Sight assessment, which helps predict student math and reading performance on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). The CompassLearning team aligned Odyssey content to that test, enabling teachers to use the resulting data to drive instruction and differentiate their teaching to reach all of the students in their classrooms.

Teachers loved it. Not only did the consultants’ work lighten the teachers’ workload, but it also enabled teachers to reach students at different levels in their classrooms. “Students now receive instruction specifically tailored to their instructional weakness. This is critical to advancing student achievement and adds another layer of differentiation to current instruction,” says Ellen Connelly, EAP Coordinator at Pittsburgh’s Mifflin Elementary School.

### Data-Driven Instruction

As the school year came closer to an end, the sales team and educational consulting team were called on again. The district was interested in purchasing not only K–5 Reading/Language

Arts, but also K–5 Math. But to do that, they needed to prove that teachers were, in fact, using assessment data to drive instruction during EAP sessions. The sales team and ECs met over a number of weeks to develop a report that analyzed the number of activities students completed, the number of assignments created, average score, time on task, and number of students who worked with Odyssey during EAP, as well as other information, broken down by school and grade. When it was done, the report clearly illustrated that teachers were looking at the data and creating assignments accordingly—data-driven instruction was no longer just a goal but a reality in the district.

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### Promise on the Horizon

As a result of the successful K–5 pilot—and the strong relationship between the district’s educators and CompassLearning—the district chose to adopt Odyssey as a Tier 2 Response to Intervention instructional software for both mathematics and reading/language arts. Going forward, the district will also use the new Odyssey High School during support sessions for supplemental and remedial instruction, as well as for preparing students for the PSSA in both content areas. Furthermore, building principals have the option to use Odyssey during small-group differentiated instruction. Odyssey provides another excellent tool for the district’s new energy and drive to improve student achievement for *The Pittsburgh Promise*, a community fund that provides thousands of dollars in scholarships to Pittsburgh Public School graduates. The partnership includes three 171-day years of professional development, version updates, and on-site technical service for the enterprise delivery.

The Pittsburgh team is looking forward to continuing their work with the school district. They credit the success of the pilot and the expanded program to strong foundations: cooperation and communication. Salesperson Stacy Spencer Peters sums it up: “It was a total team effort. We maximized our ability by constantly talking and meeting at a minute’s notice. The whole team worked as true professionals and met district requests ahead of time more often than on time.”



*Excellence for All* is a Pittsburgh Public School District reform that aims to move all children forward across all levels of achievement.

