



District Shares Long, Successful History with CompassLearning®

Consistent Performance & Hands-On Training Lead to Nine Years of Success Big Spring School District, Pennsylvania

It was the late 1990s when administrators in Big Spring School District in south-central Pennsylvania saw that the future of successful learning lay in technology. Keeping long-term goals and future growth in mind, they invested in CompassLearning software to supplement students' class work and keep them motivated and engaged. Since then, Big Spring School District has broadened its use of CompassLearning products, upgraded to Odyssey®, and taken advantage of the many opportunities for effective, personalized learning.

District officials started the 2000–2001 school year with a CompassLearning Classic pilot program that was limited to fifth-grade math. Students took the electronic pretest and throughout the school year completed the learning paths the management system created for them. The next year, the program was expanded to include students in third, fourth, and fifth grades.

The students' CompassLearning activities in the learning paths matched the content they were learning in the classroom, giving them extra practice in key skills and presenting concepts in a different way.

It was around this time that district administrators decided to reprioritize the curriculum with the goal of preparing students for the mathematics portion of the state test, the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). Deb Reid, Instructional Technology Support for Big Spring, created prescriptive learning paths in CompassLearning Classic that matched curriculum maps the district's Math Curriculum Committee had developed. The students' CompassLearning activities in the learning paths matched the content they were learning in the classroom, giving them extra practice in key skills and presenting concepts in a different way.

Before the 2005–2006 school year started, the district upgraded to Odyssey and Reid continued to tailor Odyssey assignments to correlate with state-mandated coursework. Teachers appreciated the fact that the results of Odyssey assessments, in conjunction with PSSA results, made it easy

to spot each student's strengths and weaknesses. "The reports were used to drive instruction," says Reid. Teachers used them to determine where classroom instruction wasn't working or where a new student was lacking in prerequisites.

A major factor in Big Spring's comfort and success with Odyssey is the availability of annual Professional Development training. For veteran teachers, these sessions enable them to build on their expertise and explore advanced functionality; newcomers to the district get a hands-on introduction to the software with a CompassLearning expert in the room to answer questions. The annual training is for all teachers who use CompassLearning software and gives them a common language that they can use to communicate ideas to each other.

Reid also cites the dedication of CompassLearning Educational Consultant Michael Kuhn as vital to Odyssey's success in their district. She says, "The teachers really like him, and he has been integral in the planning process. He comes in and works with the assistant superintendent and curriculum director, confirms their goals for each year, and then works toward the set goals." He's involved in everything from helping teachers create assignments in Odyssey to sitting down with principals to discuss ways to achieve their long-term objectives building-wide. In fact, Kuhn helped Big Spring principals create the guidelines for student use of Odyssey before the 2007–2008 school year, including time required on Odyssey per week, the balance of language arts and math activities, and means of tracking student progress regularly.

Kuhn makes himself available to train Big Spring educators on whatever skills they request. "During the 2007–2008 school year, Michael worked with groups of teachers to model the use of Odyssey in large groups using the SMART Board™ [interactive whiteboard], and then taught them how to follow up with small groups," says Reid. Big Spring teachers have found Odyssey to be particularly effective in large-group instruction using an interactive whiteboard, while student progress reports help teachers differentiate instruction and teach specific concepts to smaller groups. If an educator has a question pertaining to an Odyssey solution, whether

it concerns a technical issue or a question about the best way to present a concept to a class of English language learners, Kuhn is there to take the call.

Clearly, the longevity of Big Spring's relationship with CompassLearning is a testament to the district's satisfaction with CompassLearning's software and services. But the true test of Odyssey's appeal comes from the people who work in it every day: teachers and students. Reid

reports that some teachers were skeptical when they saw that Odyssey took a new approach to traditional educational concepts, fearing that students would be confused. "But over time, they realized that the students all learn in different ways," she says. "And if they don't grasp it the way the teacher taught it, and then they see [the concept] in a different way, sometimes that makes all the difference." Students enjoy it as well: "It's very interactive and they really get involved with it. The principals even say they hear the kids in the lunchroom singing the songs from the program," says Reid.

Big Spring is currently piloting Odyssey in some of its primary classrooms and in the 2008–2009 school year will expand the program to all primary classes. The fifth-grade classes will pilot Odyssey Writer, and there are plans on the horizon to add Odyssey to the district's response-to-intervention and summer school curricula. By implementing the program across multiple grades and content areas, Big Spring School District is creating a complete, versatile technology solution that integrates seamlessly with diverse content and standards and continues to benefit teachers and students.

"[Kuhn] comes in and works with the assistant superintendent and curriculum director, confirms their goals for each year, and then works toward the set goals."

— Deb Reid

A major factor in Big Spring's comfort and success with Odyssey is the availability of annual Professional Development training.

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.

