



Riser Middle School Exceeds Target Performance Goal

AT-RISK STUDENTS FIND MATH SUCCESS WITH USE OF COMPASSLEARNING ODYSSEY®

School Facts

Riser Middle School

Ouachita Parish School System
Monroe/West Monroe, LA

Students	469
Free/Reduced Lunches87%
English Language Learners	1%
White54%
African-American	43%
Other3%

Implementation

6th–8th grades; Odyssey Math; Remedial, Intervention, and Whole-Class Implementation

Riser Middle School faced mounting challenges: a large student body, varied test scores, and increasing pressure to improve. Results so far have been impressive. “In just two years with Odyssey, Riser went from a state accountability label of Minimal Academic Growth to one of Exemplary Academic Growth,” explains curriculum coordinator Dr. Carrie Ferguson.

Challenge

How to counter steadily decreasing math scores

Ouachita Parish School System in Monroe and West Monroe, Louisiana, is one of the larger districts in the state, with a total enrollment of more than 19,000 students. The district faces a number of challenges, including a large population of low-income and at-risk students.

District administrators in Ouachita confronted a familiar problem seen in schools throughout the country: how to turn back the tide of steadily declining middle school math scores. “Particularly at our most at-risk middle schools, we were seeing dramatic drops in math,” said Dr. Carrie Ferguson, curriculum coordinator for Riser Middle School. On the previous year’s assessment, Riser Middle School’s performance score fell by 4.6 points, and the school was just points away from being both sanctioned under the Louisiana Accountability Program and forced into the state-mandated school improvement program. “A lot of our students were scoring unsatisfactory,” said Dr. Ferguson. “In our state, if they don’t score at the ‘basic’ level by the eighth grade, they’re not allowed to go on to high school.” Further, schools district-wide struggled to keep up with tightening state standards. “Our state keeps raising the bar for accountability,” Dr. Ferguson added. “Whenever that happens, it takes us two or three years to start achieving at that level.”

According to Dr. Ferguson, past efforts to provide remedial attention to at-risk students had been disorganized and ineffective. Ouachita offers elective lab classes, where students who performed poorly on the previous year’s assessment are given additional teacher attention. However, with no standardized remedial curriculum, efforts were not being maximized. “One school might be using one [software] and another might be using a different program and another might be using whatever the regular teachers are using. There was no real continuity across our ten middle schools,” said Dr. Ferguson.

“We’re committed to using CompassLearning Odyssey for the long haul.”

Solution

Differentiated instruction and consistent usage of Odyssey Math

After a brief testing period in the spring of 2007, the district piloted CompassLearning Odyssey in its remedial math program at Riser Middle School. A major concern at the school has been the wide range of academic achievement levels. “We have some middle school students that are working on the fourth grade level and others performing well above grade level,” said Dr. Ferguson. Odyssey Math was attractive because of its ability to diagnose students’ strengths and weaknesses and prescribe individualized paths of instruction. “We liked that students would be able to work at their own pace and their own level,” adds Dr. Ferguson.

Dr. Ferguson recalls the relative ease with which teachers were able to learn the software. In addition, math lab teachers found the continuity they had previously been lacking. “Teachers liked it because it gave them a focus,” said Dr. Ferguson. “It wasn’t just randomly picking out activities. We set expectations about what students were supposed to be doing every day. It gave the teachers structure.” And, Dr. Ferguson says, the reaction of students has been equally positive. “Students love it because it’s on the computer. They like the technical end of it — it’s fun. No teacher is harping on them because they know the teacher can check their work at any time.”

Approximately 60 students are enrolled in the remedial math classes at Riser and use the software for about one hour every day. In addition, mainstream math classes occasionally use Odyssey during regular classroom time for close to one hour per session, twice each month.

When recounting her experience implementing Odyssey, Dr. Ferguson offered one piece of advice for other schools: “Start with a small group and implement it with those first. After they have bought into it and reached successes, then implement it on a larger scale. That was one of the key things for us. Our advantage was being able to start on a small scale — rather than forcing all teachers to get on board immediately. It’s taking those incremental steps and then watching it grow.” She also recognizes the contributions of Riser Middle School Principal Donnie Dampier and Ouachita Parish Middle School Director Dr. Don Coker. “Both have been instrumental to the success of the implementation,” says Dr. Ferguson.

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Photography by Dr. Carrie Ferguson



Results

Significantly improved accountability ratings and expanded implementation throughout the district

When Riser Middle received its 2008–2009 performance scores from the state accountability test, the school had not only reached its target goal but also exceeded that goal by more than five points. “Our school had been one of the lowest-performing middle schools,” Dr. Ferguson said. “This year, our middle school math scores held their

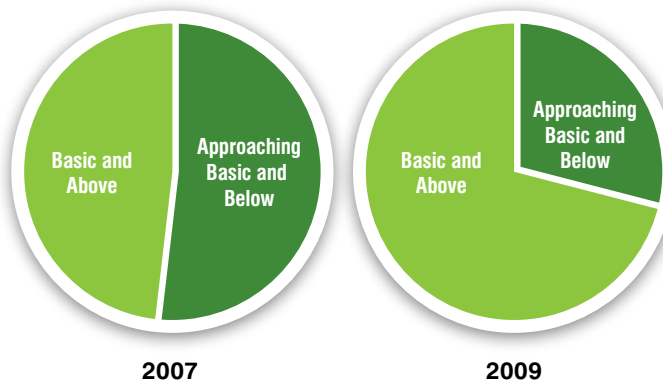
own against the other schools.” In just two years with Odyssey, Riser went from a state accountability level of Minimal Academic Growth to one of Exemplary Academic Growth and saw its performance score increase from 78.8 in 2006 to 89.8 in 2009. The percentage of eighth-grade students who received a rating of “basic” or above, the rating necessary to advance to high school, has increased dramatically. And, perhaps more importantly, students are beginning to feel more confident about their academic potential. “Our kids are experiencing personal growth — in self-confidence and esteem. Working with Odyssey, they are finding success and building

confidence — and that’s translating over to their other classes. To me, that’s just as important as gains on a test.”

Impressed by the increased scores of Riser’s students, Ouachita Parish has expanded its use of Odyssey. “We went from using it at two middle schools to ten. And from there, we’ve gone to eight elementary schools. Our goal now is for teachers to be able to use it across the curriculum — math, science, social studies, language arts — everything,” says Dr. Ferguson. “We’d like to find a room that holds more computers. That way, we could reach more kids every hour.”

Ouachita Parish plans to continue its partnership with CompassLearning and to invest in whiteboard technology to be used alongside Odyssey in whole-class instruction. And, while students, teachers, and administrators love the product, it’s Odyssey’s ability to differentiate instruction for every student that has made a real and measurable difference at Riser Middle School and throughout the district.

Eighth-Grade LEAP Score Ratings



Since the introduction of Odyssey, the percentage of eighth-grade students receiving a rating of “basic” or above has increased dramatically.