

Careful Planning & Commitment Yield Outstanding Results for Carroll County School



Whitesburg Elementary implemented CompassLearning Odyssey in 2003 and by 2007 was outperforming all other schools in the county.

THE CHALLENGES THAT WHITESBURG Elementary School in Carroll County, GA faces are familiar to thousands of educators across the country: Many of the school's preK-5th grade students are on a free or reduced lunch program. There aren't enough computers in the classrooms. And the annual state test, which assesses students' knowledge of math, reading, and language arts skills, looms over teachers, administrators, and students alike. Add to that a set of ever-changing state standards, and the result is a set of obstacles that intimidates many educators.

"When we got Odyssey in 2003, we had been in 'Needs Improvement' on and off for five years," says Joyce Davis, principal of the 450-student school. "My superintendent called me and asked me if I'd like to pilot this software at my school." That's how Whitesburg

Elementary became the first school in the district to implement CompassLearning Odyssey software. Davis and her team knew that launching the implementation correctly and getting every teacher on board from the beginning were the keys to making the project work. They created a designated lab time of an hour each week so that all of the students in the school could spend time using Odyssey. They also made Odyssey available in regular classrooms to complement the curriculum, even though each classroom had only one or two computers. The goal: to improve student performance on Georgia's Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests, or CRCT.

Together with Curriculum Specialist Amanda Driver and other members of the teaching staff, Davis initially used Odyssey to strengthen weak areas. "We took our CRCT data and found our weaknesses, and

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then we went through Compass and addressed them,” says Driver. They also used Odyssey’s assessment tools to identify the specific skills students needed work on. The easy-to-use reporting features gave teachers at-a-glance information on how long each student was spending on a task and how well they were grasping each concept.

The hard work and planning paid off. “We began to make AYP [Adequate Yearly Progress] immediately after the first year of using Compass,” Davis says. She notes that getting every teacher on the same page and identifying the curriculum they needed to cover helped them pinpoint the things they needed to accomplish. Since then, the school has met or exceeded AYP each year. In 2007, Whitesburg Elementary outperformed all other city and county schools in third-grade reading and fifth-grade CRCT reading and math scores. Almost 95 percent of third-graders and 90 percent of fifth-graders met or exceeded expectations in reading, while about 97 percent of fifth-graders did the same in math.

These days, Davis and the teachers at Whitesburg Elementary are using Odyssey to establish baseline scores for all students and monitor progress throughout the year. They set up benchmarks every nine weeks so that they can highlight each student’s progress and identify problem areas early enough in the year to make a difference in the children’s education—long before the CRCT.

A large part of Odyssey’s popularity at Whitesburg Elementary is its ability to personalize instruction and reporting for the teacher or student. Teachers appreciate the customizable reporting processes. They can create a report that details the weekly progress of a single student, highlighting concepts the student has struggled with or mastered. Or they can look at the results for entire classes of students to identify trends that enable teachers to differentiate instruction. For example, if a handful of students in a classroom need reinforcement on a concept or skill, the teacher can do additional work with those students while the rest of the class works on other activities. Davis points out, “One thing I really like about Compass is the Learning Path it creates for

the child. I like to go into the lab and not see every child doing the same thing. It’s all geared to their needs; you can go in there on a given day and look at the screens and they’ll all be different.” Students who have mastered a concept proceed to the next activity while students who need additional practice can get it without affecting the pace of the class.

Students enjoy the colorful animation in the activities and tests. Animated characters help keep them interested in the material while visual representations of concepts such as fractions or word pronunciation help drive the concepts home. “Students don’t like a lot of repetition between what they’re doing in the classroom and what they’re doing on the computer. Our [CompassLearning] trainer helped us create variety there,” says Davis.

Customized training sessions have played an enormous role in Odyssey’s success in the classrooms of Whitesburg Elementary. CompassLearning Implementation Specialist Annie Webb ensures that teachers are always up to date on the Odyssey features they need the most. When Davis called her and told her that the students had been struggling in math, Webb created a specialized, focused training session dedicated to covering the specific topics the teachers needed to help their students prepare for the CRCT.

The combination of planning, regular use among the entire teaching staff, and training sessions personalized for the school has yielded results that the students and teachers at Whitesburg Elementary can take pride in. Says Principal Davis, “We’re really very proud of what we’ve done with our tests the last few years. We’ve shown so much improvement year to year.”

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.

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