



# SUCCESS STORY



## GRADUATION RATES RISE THANKS TO CREDIT RECOVERY & VIRTUAL ACADEMY

### Growing partnership between Natrona County School District and Odysseyware helps students thrive

It used to be a major challenge in Natrona County School District (NCSD) to guide the success of 13,000 students in 36 schools spread across rural Wyoming. No single learning environment could meet the needs of every child. But adopting an online curriculum that offered flexibility, course customization, and the ability to adapt to students' learning styles was a game changer for NCSD. Fulfilling the needs of thousands of students became less a challenge and more an opportunity for every student to taking their own path and achieve success. The implementation of Odysseyware did more than increase graduation rates for at-risk students; it improved retention rates, decreased disciplinary referrals, gave college-bound students an opportunity to get ahead in their education, and better prepared students for their future in college and chosen careers.

#### at a glance

#### Natrona County School District

36 Schools Across  
Rural Wyoming

**36** Schools

**23** Homebound Students

**160** Students enrolled in  
Odysseyware alternative  
program since 2013

**126** Students enrolled in  
Odysseyware within the  
Juvenile Detention Center  
since 2015

NATRONA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT



By keeping students enrolled, the  
district retained approximately  
\$150,000 in student funding.

**Odysseyware®**



**“In the last two years, we’ve had nearly 300 students who would not have graduated without Odysseyware courses.”**

—Tanya Sisneros, Virtual School Director for NCSD

**In 2008, Odysseyware was first introduced to the Transitions Learning Center (TLC), Natrona County Schools’ alternative high school that serves at-risk students in a nontraditional setting**

Teachers assigned TLC students Odysseyware courses that gave them the freedom to complete school at their own pace under teacher and parent supervision.

Today, Odysseyware is used in three high schools and the Juvenile Detention Center in Natrona County, and is also the learning system for middle school students with behavioral issues. The district has developed customized courses matching classroom curriculum, as well as a process to ensure that Odysseyware is a good fit for each student.

Since 2013, 160 high school and middle school students have been enrolled in Odysseyware courses, giving them a positive alternative in their education. Students in detention or serving in-school suspension use the platform to ensure they’re not falling behind in their learning while not in class. The district also makes Odysseyware available so students who have been expelled can earn credits toward graduation.

“Students in these high-risk situations are aware Odysseyware may be their last chance to graduate, so they are motivated to complete assignments and be on their best behavior,” said Sisneros. “The flexibility of smaller class sizes and individual-based work leads to less distractions and provides students with a learning environment conducive to their success.”

“The success of online options for students is amazing and growing at a rapid rate,” Tanya Sisneros, the virtual school director for NCSD said. “Right now there are 86 students enrolled in at least one Odysseyware course working toward graduation, and we only expect that number to increase.”



What started as a credit recovery solution in 2008 designed to serve at-risk and incarcerated students has grown into a partnership leading to the launch of Natrona Virtual Academy (NVA), an online high school available to any student, including special needs, gifted, and college-bound students.

## Online options for all, retained funding for Natrona County School District (NCSD)

Prior to the Natrona Virtual Academy's opening in 2014, an estimated 140 students left NCSD to enroll in virtual options outside the district, costing NCSD thousands of dollars a year in student funding. To increase student retention and to give students the choices they were looking for, the district created and launched NVA, offering full- and part-time options. In its first year, 22 students enrolled full time. By keeping these students enrolled, the district retained approximately \$150,000 in student funding.

NVA is available to all students, but is often used for special education, credit recovery, and gifted students with a desire to get ahead in their high school coursework and take advantage of Wyoming's BOCES program. The program allows students to take college courses at no cost. These students use a blended model, taking one or two high school courses online and college courses at the local community college in the same semester.

"More students are starting to realize the long-term advantages of taking college courses while in high school," said Sisneros. "We want to ensure each student has a schedule that works for them, and with Odysseyware and our virtual courses, we can easily create individualized learning paths for every student."

The virtual school also allows students to work and finish assignments at their own pace. Much like college does, online courses teach students to manage their own time and workload—and take personal responsibility for their education. The freedom to get ahead in coursework and graduate early if they so choose is their reward.

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**“We’ve found that online learning works for a lot of students who desire to work at their own pace and want to be more independent.”**

—Tanya Sisneros, Virtual School Director for NCSD

## **Course customization**

To better serve students needing personalized learning paths and flexibility in their schedules, the district uses a hybrid of Odysseyware and created content as the main curriculum for its virtual academy. Once a year, the district holds an annual workshop where lead teachers from each discipline collaboratively build “master courses” that combine Odysseyware classes with customized content. The goal is to create a guide so that teachers can easily follow required curricular standards.

“Our partnership with Odysseyware is unique and extremely beneficial. It is rare to have a valued partner grow and evolve with us as our needs change,” said Sisneros. “Every year we see different ways to use the platform, and we’re starting to realize its full potential.”

In the coming months, Natrona hopes to expand its virtual school options to allow even more students to take advantage of the flexible opportunity. They also hope to use Odysseyware to assist special education students with state and national tests. Adopting Odysseyware has provided many more options for all Natrona County students—including those in the virtual academy—and gives teachers the ability to customize any course to best fit the needs of their students.

NCSD is committed to providing optimum learning opportunities for every child. Adopting Odysseyware has provided many more options for NCSD students.