



# Creating Conditions for Learning

## ONE DISTRICT'S INITIAL JOURNEY WITH COMP

### Our COMP Journey in East St. Louis School District 189

Tracee Wells

Certified COMP Trainer for Illinois,  
AVID District Director, Mentor Resident Leader  
Teacher & School Leader Department



Tracee Wells, Certified COMP Workshop Leader for  
East St. Louis School District 189  
*Article photos courtesy of Tracee Wells*

Welcome! This edition of the COMP newsletter introduces one district's journey to implement COMP district-wide. COMP Workshop Leader, Tracee Wells, shares the story of East St. Louis District 189's initial steps and productive outcomes as they strive to *Create Conditions for Learning*.



#### TRAINING OF TRAINERS

TOT - June 2018

Please join us for our Summer TOT here in Nashville, TN. This one week training starts June 25th, 2018. You can register by downloading and using the registration form provided below. If you should have any questions please contact Aaron Meier at:

If you are interested in pursuing COMP for your district or training additional COMP Workshop Leaders for your faculty, our COMP Training of Trainers at Vanderbilt University is scheduled for June 25-29, 2018. Registration information and additional details are provided at [www.comp.org](http://www.comp.org).

(For Tennessee educators, this training event is TASL approved.)

In 2015, I joined the staff at East St. Louis Senior High School as a 9th grade AVID Elective teacher and Coordinator. It was the first year for AVID in School District 189, a historically low-performing school in a city recognized more for high crime rates and star football and track athletes

than for its academic prowess. Most teachers were doing their best to educate and inspire despite many barriers to instruction.

For those who struggled to manage their students and classrooms, some offered words of encouragement or just a listening ear. Administrators often referred to the need to rely on what was learned in teacher prep programs to adjust and make changes. Nothing is wrong with that theory if you were a recent college graduate. But what happens if this isn't your first year out of college? What if this is your second career, like me? What if you are trying to figure out why the tried and true methods of the past don't seem to work with today's students?

These are the questions I asked myself and my colleagues. Because I was a women's college basketball coach in my first career, I treated my students and classroom much like my locker room and court: like family. We had real family talks, high expectations, encouraging and motivating moments, productive



## Our COMP Journey *con't* from p. 1

Tracee Wells, East St. Louis School District 189

struggles, hugs, tears, and established a true work ethic in our classroom. But not everyone has a background in athletics.

For my colleagues who were frustrated daily, I offered support. I asked where do teachers get training for things like classroom management here? In Tennessee, in my two years as a high school AVID and English teacher, I was immediately introduced to COMP training in my first year. It was the most meaningful professional development I had ever experienced. Real strategies, tactics, areas of focus, and real teacher talk that focused on what *teachers* do to impact success in a classroom.



Principals of East St. Louis School District 189 during their COMP Workshop

## COMP Theme: Make Visible Your Invisible Expectations

Asking sometimes obvious and sometimes unwanted questions is something I'm ok with. I found myself in a meeting with the East St. Louis Deputy Superintendent asking what was in place for struggling teachers in terms of classroom management. District 189 was actually in the process of researching that very concern. I asked if they were looking at COMP training for our District and explained the value it offered to me.

Eventually the question came up again about how to best help teachers. District 189 wanted more details, answers to many questions; presentations to the curriculum committee to thoroughly discuss benefits of bringing COMP to East St. Louis. Before presenting, I reached out to my COMP National Trainer, Dr. Doug Granier, in Nashville. He prepared me to discuss the benefits and supported my belief in COMP for our District. After a brief phone call and lots of notes, I was prepared to present to our curriculum committee. I was nervous. I was new. I just wanted to help our teachers to feel more confident in the classroom and to better prepare more students. After many questions, responses, and follow ups, I found myself in Nashville attending the Train the Trainer COMP Workshop the summer of 2017. I was now going to be able to bring the resources of COMP to my East St. Louis School District.

To start the 2017-2018 school year, a district-wide plan was devised. Train all 10 principals, building assistant principals, key District academic administrators, content specialists, and instructional coaches first. These are the people who have direct talks with teachers to address instructional needs daily. From there, the focus was to begin training teachers. The goal was to build a culture, promote a common language, and develop specific plans of attack for creating conditions for learning in our classrooms in East St. Louis. New teacher

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As with other cohorts, the principals agreed that COMP is valuable and should be made available to all educators in summer PD prior to the start of the school year. During their initial workshop days, principals collaborated, helped new principals, offered support to one another, and discussed more ways to make visible their expectations. Instead of focusing solely on their own buildings, they considered our entire District. How can we make even more things visible? I documented their collective concerns and presented them to the Deputy Superintendent.

The principals also asked for the training to be made available to other teachers, not just new ones, who could benefit from the details of COMP.

Our follow up session was extremely productive as the principals shared what they tried from their Classroom Commitment Forms. Every conversation seemed cathartic as they supported one another through their individual experiences. Although leaders were from early childhood, elementary, and secondary schools, all were able to discuss specific things needed to support their students and schools.



orientation started in August. We could also share COMP with new teachers in cohorts to provide them with tools to start and persist successfully in our District. Since then, we have

- Trained 18 new teachers as an initial cohort. One of the four premises of COMP was realized and teacher synergy began. An open forum allowed teachers to discuss anxieties about starting a first year of teaching. Discussions occurred about what exactly to share with students and ideas on how to organize the classroom space beyond just cute sayings on the wall. A community of support was created and a bond was formed with those new teachers. We created a list of burning questions they still needed answers to before the school year began in one week.
- Trained 10 instructional coaches, 4 content specialists, and one District administrator. This group came up with several ideas to align district and building procedures and expectations. COMP's Theme, "Make Visible Your Invisible Expectations," was coming to life in front of our eyes. Not only did the instructional coaches answer the list of questions for the first group, but also created a *Helpful Tips* list for new teachers.
- Hosted a COMP Awareness Session for 13 ELA teachers and 2 administrators. Teachers received 5 classroom activities they could implement that were helpful for the beginning of the school year to create positive classroom learning environments.
- Began a training cohort for 9 principals. Focusing on COMP's Theme, *Make Visible Your Invisible Expectations*, they discussed and created specific plans to clarify the expectations they have for their buildings.
- Began the training cohort requested by the principals for 18 teachers and 1 administrator. They made plans to improve the conditions they can control in their classrooms; revamped classroom goals, rules, and procedures; and effectively reset areas they wanted to improve.
- Hosted a 2<sup>nd</sup> COMP Awareness Session for 19 teachers. Together, we created a list of concerns in the classrooms and considered how we as teachers impact the weather in our classrooms. Many teachers requested to join the next available COMP sessions, even if the workshop would be held in the summer.
- Completed the follow-up with 8 of the 10 district principals. (*See sideline on page 2.*)

One size does not fit all. And our community context presents other challenges that some may not. Poverty and extreme need for trauma training and other necessary resources like additional social emotional supports make creating ideal conditions for learning a challenge within itself – but not impossible.

Overall, out of 432 certified District employees, so far 91 of them have participated in COMP through either a COMP Workshop or COMP Awareness Session. Not everyone in our District is aware of COMP and its benefits yet. But for those who are, a positive conversation has begun. An unspoken rule of not sharing your struggles has been broken for some. The mere conversation is proving to be helpful inside our COMP training sessions. Teachers are opening up in COMP Workshops, asking for and receiving support. They are trying new things in their classrooms. Their confidence is being restored a little at a time. As the benefits to students and educators are seen more clearly through administrator walk-throughs, teacher feedback and meetings, and student discussions, hopefully more COMP training sessions will be made available in our District.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share our District's journey to improved outcomes for students. Stay tuned for more. Our story isn't finished yet.



Participants in a COMP Workshop in East St. Louis District 189 sort goals, rules, and procedures cards.





session next door? The new teachers! On our break, I stepped out and asked the meeting's facilitator if we could come over and introduce ourselves as instructional coaches and she said yes! Coaches were excited; teachers were excited; connections (even if only matching names with faces) were made. New teachers knew who their points of contact were and the *Helpful Tips* document we'd created was added to their Google classroom for reference.

During the COMP Workshop for Instructional Coaches, the group mentioned how it would be great to meet the new teachers coming into their buildings before they came. Guess who was in a technology

### East St. Louis District 189 COMP Awareness Session

Together, we created a list of classroom concerns and considered how our teacher actions impact the weather in our classrooms. Many teachers requested to join the next available COMP sessions, even if the workshop would not be held until the summer.



[www.comp.org](http://www.comp.org)

The COMP Newsletter is edited by COMP Lead National Trainer, Inge R. Poole, Ph.D.



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Box 541 GPC  
Vanderbilt University  
Nashville TN 37203