

90% of Silver City Elementary Kindergarteners Enter 1st Grade Reading At or Above Grade Level

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Each year, approximately 1,000 students attend Silver City Elementary School (SCES) in rural North Georgia. In 2007, SCES noticed that an increasing number of students were entering third, fourth, and fifth grades reading significantly below grade level. The reading problems negatively affected the students' progress in all content areas. SCES obtained a small grant of \$1,500, which was used to purchase Corrective Reading Decoding, a Direct Instruction (DI) program. Two school counselors and one special education teacher implemented the program with three small groups during the school's Response to Intervention ("RTI") block. The three small groups consisted of third through fifth graders, and the students were grouped using placement test data alone—not by grade level. Therefore, students from multiple grade levels participated in each group. The students achieved measureable gains in reading due to this intervention: in one year, some students progressed from non-readers to fluent readers.

Due to the success of DI, SCES administrators committed to expand the program each year to help Silver City's at-risk population. Within three years, SCES added Reading Mastery, Spelling Mastery, Connecting Math Concepts, and Expressive Writing to its repertoire and used DI as its primary intervention for first through fifth grade. The interventions were effective, and the groups grew larger with the addition of students from general education classes who failed to make adequate progress in the core reading program. As a result, SCES explored the idea of implementing Reading Mastery as the core curriculum in kindergarten and First Grade, which would allow all students to receive instruction through this program. SCES administrators sought to be proactive - preventing students from falling behind - instead of being reactive.

However, SCES did not have the financial resources to fund this initiative. The school wrote multiple grants, but the grants were denied. During a professional development trip to the Association for Direct Instruction (ADI) conference, a team of SCES staff members discovered the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI). NIFDI graciously adopted Silver City as a research site and helped fund the program. The result has been the implementation of Reading Mastery and Language for Learning as a core program for kindergarten.

The NIFDI contract was signed in the summer, and the kindergarten teachers were told they were going to implement a program that is quite different than anything they had used in the past. They attended four days of NIFDI training in the summer before the school year began. To say the least, the team of teachers was apprehensive; however, they came to the training with an open-mind and positive attitude. After participating in the NIFDI training, and studying data presented by Lyn House, the NIFDI implementation manager, the team was willing to give 100% toward the implementation.

After the second quarter, some of the teachers shared with the building coordinator, Jordan Livermore, that they were still unsure of the program during the first couple of months. He was surprised by their comments; an outside observer would not have sensed teacher apprehension after witnessing the enthusiasm with which they presented the program. Teacher enthusiasm created student buy-in and success. Ultimately, the students' success in the storybooks and in

fluency checkouts surprised the teachers and eased their apprehension. All Silver City kindergarten students became strong, confident readers due to the implementation of Language for Learning and Reading Mastery.

The foundation for the success of this implementation is multifaceted. First, Lyn House, our NIFDI Implementation Manager, set high expectations and gave SCES the necessary support to meet those expectations. She provided a four-day initial training and came to the school seven times throughout the year to provide live coaching. In addition, NIFDI and SCES participated in weekly conference calls regarding student data, individual student needs and progress, and teacher concerns. Timely communication allowed obstacles and concerns to be addressed immediately. Lyn was a hands-on trainer who supported the teachers and students. Her actions showed that she genuinely cared about the students and teachers at Silver City.

Second, the school administrators committed to the implementation. The two reading blocks were protected time. School events such as assemblies, class parties, and picture days were scheduled around the two reading blocks to allow the program to be implemented consistently. School administrators ensured that the paraprofessionals were available during the reading blocks. When teachers expressed concerns regarding time for instruction of other content areas, administrators responded that students must be able to read in order to succeed across content areas. The teachers knew that the administrators supported the DI instructional time, which helped relieve teacher concerns.

Third, several SCES teachers dedicated time daily to working with the kindergarten team. On a daily basis, those three teachers—a special education teacher, a writing teacher, and a literacy coach—provided invaluable support for kindergarten teachers, paraprofessionals, and students. They encouraged the teachers and paraprofessionals, ensured the program was taught with fidelity, filled-in as trained substitutes, tested students, remediated students, read with students, and celebrated successes with students. Their daily support and encouragement ensured success for the implementation.

Fourth, and most importantly, the teachers and paraprofessionals went outside their comfort zones and were determined to make this initiative a success. They worked as a cohesive team to overcome obstacles and find solutions concerning Common Core and scheduling conflicts. Students were shared among teachers to meet the individual learning needs of each student. Lyn House was welcomed into each classroom with open arms, and her feedback was well-received. Teachers were willing to be videotaped and have their lessons analyzed by other professionals to provide the best education to each reading group. Due to NIFDI, SCES administrators, and the kindergarten team, 85 to 90% of kindergarteners will enter first grade reading on or above grade level. *This implementation proves that student achievement increases measurably when all parties work together and consider students' needs first.* The students at Silver City are extremely fortunate to have such dedicated educators invested in their education and best interests.

When reflecting on this year and the implementation of DI in our kindergarten classes, it is easy to see the overwhelming impact the program has had on student reading success. However, among the most inspiring outcomes have been the comments made by teachers, students, and parents and the changes in attitude among the very same. Included below are several quotes by students, teachers, and parents regarding the Direct Instruction implementation at Silver City Elementary School.

Teachers:

"I'm always open to teaching a program if it's going to help a child learn. With that in mind, I agreed to give DI a try. After the first two weeks or so, Jordan came to me and asked, 'What do you think?' I replied, 'I don't know yet; I need more time.' Shortly thereafter, I began to see and hear my students take off with reading and develop a self-confidence that wasn't there prior to the program. The excitement and electricity of reading that spread through my group was contagious. They loved when we had visitors so they could show off. Their classroom teachers were stopping me in the hallways to tell me how their reading levels had jumped. It truly was a great feeling for all (students, teachers, and parents). From that group experience, I am sold on the success of Direct Instruction."

"I was very excited about learning the new reading program. I love to try new things in the classroom, and I am very happy with the results we are getting. Some of these students came to us knowing next to nothing, and now they are reading! The students who came in reading already are reading more fluently and on a higher level than before. The language that these students are now able to use because of the advanced vocabulary that is taught is very impressive. This program really works!"

"On those rare occasions when I tell my children that we will miss DI, I always hear a collective groan from the group. They love DI, and they are always sad to miss it!"

"As a classroom teacher, I have seen many benefits to the DI implementation. However, the most impressive result has been the efficiency with which students are placed into appropriate groups within the first or second day of the school year. The time saved on placement issues and given to reading instruction is amazing."

Parent:

"I had a parent stop by my room one afternoon. She introduced herself and told me her son came to me for DI Reading. At the beginning of the year, she said that he would come home from school and tell her, 'I don't like to read in class because I can't read like everyone else.' She wasn't sure what was going to happen to her son if he couldn't read. It didn't take long after starting our DI groups before she noticed him bringing home a book and reading the book out loud to himself. Over spring break, she said he wanted to go and buy several Magic Tree House books and read them in the car on their way down to the beach. That afternoon visit she said, 'I don't know what you did, but thank you. He continues to love reading.' These are the kind of conversations that make me love my job!!"

Students:

"I like it because it's fun. We go on different levels in the book."

"It's good because it can help you to read."

"We get 'gooder' and 'gooder' We sound the word out and then we say it."

"Two thumbs up. I love trying to read, and I always practice. I love working with my friends."

"I feel good about reading because I like to read. My reading is beautiful now."

"I felt kind of uncomfortable and then when I got to know everyone, I felt not uncomfortable."

"I know how to read now."