

Some good news stories about Direct Instruction

Dr Kerry Hempenstall, RMIT

Workshop materials, articles and links may be viewed or downloaded from Kerry's webpage at:
http://www.rmit.edu.au/staff/kerry_hempenstall

Direct Instruction may not be rocket science but it is effective

KEVIN DONNELLY 18 August 2012 [The Australian](#)

Teachers should be teachers, not facilitators, when it comes to educating schoolchildren

NOEL Pearson may not be an educationalist by training but when it comes to his advocacy of Direct Instruction and knowledge about what best works in the classroom, he outshines most academics in teacher training institutes and universities.

Since the late 1960s and early 70s, beginning teachers have been taught that more formal, structured and teacher-directed models of classroom interaction are outdated and ineffective.

In the jargon much loved by academics, teachers are called on to be facilitators and guides by the side. Whether associated with what was known as child-centred learning, or its more recent cousin, personalised learning, the assumption is that children must take control and direct their own learning.

Open classrooms, children working in groups, teachers no longer standing at the front of the room and lots of noise and activity are all manifestations of this progressive and new-age model of classroom interaction.

Memorisation and rote learning are condemned as drill and kill, whole language, where beginning readers are told to look and guess and phonics and phonemic awareness go out the window, reigns supreme and mental arithmetic and reciting poetry are obsolete.

There's only one problem: what has become the current orthodoxy in teacher education is the least-effective and most costly in terms of energy and time. Best illustrated by a US study titled Project Follow Through that evaluated various models ranging from child-centred to teacher-directed, the most successful method of teaching is Direct Instruction.

The more traditional approach involves carefully structured, highly focused lessons where teachers are in control, where children are given a clear and succinct idea of what needs to be mastered and where there is immediate feedback.

When detailing the results of Project Follow Through, the [Australian Council for Educational Research's](#) Rhonda Farkota writes: "Student-directed learning had consistently more negative outcomes than those achieved in traditional education on all measures of basic skills, cognitive development, and self-esteem."

The [University of Melbourne's](#) John Hattie, in his analysis of what most influences student learning, also places Direct Instruction highly. Hattie notes that the prevailing fashion in teacher education departments is to undervalue Direct Instruction in favour of more politically correct options such as personalised learning.

John Sweller, an academic at the University of NSW specialising in how children best learn, also supports Direct Instruction when he writes: "Information should always be presented in direct rather than indirect form. This principle applies equally to all educational contexts but flies in the face of much educational theory of the last few decades".

That Direct Instruction is so successful stands to reason. Children, especially boys, need a structured, orderly environment where there are clear guidelines about what needs to be accomplished and where there is immediate feedback.

In order to be creative and to master higher-order skills, children first need to learn the basics so that they become automatic. Repetition and rote learning are necessary, especially in areas such as reading, where those children who have been taught to look and guess quickly become frustrated.

Open classrooms, where children have the freedom to move around, direct their own learning and teachers act as guides by the side, are ineffective, noisy and create an environment where busy work is often confused with constructive and essential learning.

That Australia's teacher training academics largely ignore the research proving the benefits of Direct Instruction should not surprise. Many, such as the Queensland University of Technology's Allan Luke, have made a career out of the new pedagogies and they have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

It's also the case, given the cultural Left's control of teacher education, that academics favour what they consider to be a more empowering and liberating model of classroom interaction where teachers, instead of being authority figures, are reduced to being one learner among many. As noted by Jennifer Buckingham when detailing why the education establishment refuses to acknowledge the central role of a phonics and phonemic awareness model of teaching early reading, many educators prefer misguided theory to evidence-based research.

One of the defining characteristics of Julia Gillard's education revolution is its statist, one-size-fits-all approach in areas such as a national curriculum and national teacher certification and training. Increasingly, such initiatives are linked to funding and, as a result, schools will have no choice but to implement head office dictates.

One hopes that Pearson and the Cape York Aboriginal Academy at Aurukun have the ability and resources to escape such a fate and to continue embracing Direct Instruction. Their students deserve no less.

News

Remote school shifts gears for brighter future BY MICHAEL GORDON AURUKUN

11 August 2012 [The Age](#) 2

THE last time Tony Abbott visited Aurukun, a remote indigenous community on the west coast of Cape York, a young and angry girl pulled a kitchen knife on him when he arrived late one morning at her home as volunteer truancy officer to inquire why she wasn't at school.

"We were standing in the courtyard of the house and suddenly she picked up a knife and rushed in my general direction," the Opposition Leader recalled yesterday. "It was all over in a couple of seconds and she passed a couple of feet from me, but it was pretty disconcerting."

Mr Abbott volunteered in the role for 10 days in 2009, and says his first thought after the episode was for his offside. "And I thought to myself: 'You've got to take your hat off to these guys. It's often pretty challenging work'."

Yesterday, he returned to a school transformed and a community that is safer and happier thanks to welfare reforms and the closing of the tavern — but still has some distance to go. Abbott arrived with a posse of business figures to volunteer for what Noel Pearson calls "sweat equity" — a working bee at the school. James Packer was a late scratching, along with Ryan Stokes and Andrew Forrest. "But he made a very substantial donation," Abbott said.

Among those who did arrive for a mix between Backyard Blitz and The Renovators in the north Queensland heat were [Wesfarmers' Richard Goyder](#), ANZ's [Graham Hodges](#), [Rio Tinto's](#) David Peever and retailer Gerry Harvey.

Abbott's sense of excitement and satisfaction was palpable. "This could not be more different to what it was three years ago. Three years ago, the kids couldn't sit still for longer than 10 seconds, almost none of them could read a simple story and the classroom was a hubbub of distractions."

The transformation of the school is the product of a partnership between the [Queensland education department](#) and the Pearson-inspired Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy, with a form of teaching known as "direct instruction" delivering staggering results.

School principal Patrick Mallett says school attendance is up from around 38 per cent in 2009 to be in the 70s and that a majority of students are either approaching or exceeding national benchmarks.

The key is not just an emphasis on scripted lessons and consistency, but being able to pinpoint where a child is in his or her literacy and numeracy development and make adjustments to maximise progress.

"To be at the coalface where daily we see children's lives transformed is an absolute privilege," says Mr Mallett, 48.

The transformation isn't confined to the classroom. Back in 2005, I visited Aurukun with the then Treasurer Peter Costello and witnessed elders including Rebecca Wolmby and Martha Koowarta plead for welfare reforms to force parents to take responsibility. A trial of income management reforms began three years later, followed by the closure of the tavern.

Mrs Wolmby, 78, is now a director of the community's justice group and a volunteer in an after-school program called Culture Club. She says there are still problems with sly-groggers who bring alcohol into the community, and with gambling, and with the lack of jobs. But things are much, much better. Her worst fear is that the tough stand on alcohol will be relaxed.

"If they put the tavern back, they'll be fighting all the way home." Her fervent hope is that the transformation continues.

Leading a local learning revolution By MICHAEL GORDON NATIONAL EDITOR AURUKUN
13 August 2012 [The Age](#) 4

NICOLE Peeler considered herself a well-travelled Victorian, but she had never heard of Aurukun when she set off with her partner to explore the east coast of Australia after qualifying as a teacher from Ballarat University in 2010.

An ad for a boat with an Aurukun address on a noticeboard at Weipa, in far north Queensland, prompted an internet search that revealed the town was home to a small indigenous community on the west coast of Cape York — and it had a school.

Ms Peeler applied for a job as a casual, with the aim of staying for a term and earning enough money to extend their holiday. Now, she and her partner, Bryce Coxall, 25, a case manager, are into their third year at the school and have no idea when they will leave.

Both are part of a gentle revolution that is transforming some of Queensland's most underperforming schools into hubs of learning, with the result that some of the state's most remote schools, in alcohol-free communities with minimal services, are increasingly sought after by teachers wanting to make their mark.

"I love my job, I love the children and I want to make a difference to their lives," Ms Peeler, 24, told *The Age* yesterday. "Even though I've only been here just over two years, I can see the changes — changes I never thought I'd see in my time here."

She isn't alone. Executive principal Cindy Hales says just three of the school's 20 teachers have asked to be transferred at the end of their two-year terms. The rest are staying on.

Among them is Naomi Gibb, 26, from Brisbane, who showcased the school's "direct instruction" method of teaching to a swag of CEOs who took part in a working bee at the school at the weekend at the invitation of Opposition Leader Tony Abbott.

To say all were impressed would be an understatement. "I was inspired by the energy and enthusiasm of the teachers and delighted by the reading skills and comprehension of all the children," said [Rio Tinto's](#) managing director, David Peever.

So successful was the weekend that Mr Abbott announced after opening the refurbished library that such events would take place every year should he become prime minister.

Central to the method are scripted lessons in a highly structured and intensely monitored program, with teachers assigned the role of bringing each script to life. "That's what we do as teachers — we take this script and we make it our own and engage with the children," says Ms Gibb.

Aurukun is a community with a troubled past that still faces challenges of alcohol brought in by "sly-groggers", underemployment and episodes of dysfunction, which might explain why the parents of both teachers had some reservations until they visited last month. "Now my mum wants to come and work here and so does my dad," says Ms Gibb. Ms Peeler's parents had the same reaction.

June 14, 2012

We have a school in Zambia, and I have always wanted to share what we are doing there with the list but never seem to find the time - you inspired me today to share so we can share the global impact DI is having and say THANK YOU to Zig and all the others who are making this possible!

One of my sisters (Kathy Headlee) has a nonprofit organization called Mothers Without Borders, and they have been working for 15 years or so in different places. Their primary work site for the past 5 years is the development of a Children's Resource Center near Lusaka, Zambia, which is basically an 80 acre farm, with native Zambian couples acting as parents to orphaned children. Getting the food, clothing, shelter thing down took a few years.

About 3 years ago we started training some of the staff in DI programs and began a small school. We named it African Preparatory Academy (we wanted the name to be very similar to American Preparatory Academy which is our schools' names here in the states). African Prep has grown now to 106 students in the day school, with another 75 students who come to "community school" from 1-4 in the afternoons.

The day school kids are comprised of the kids living at the center (about 30) and kids that walk in from the surrounding villages (can take up to 2 hours each way) and they have a full day school with Reading Mastery (double dose - 2 classes per day), Language for Learning, Connecting Math Concepts (2 classes per day), Mastering Math Facts, Gardening (they have to water their gardens daily), Zambian Core (History), Hirsch's Core Knowledge Science, and Study Time (homework support, more gardening). The day school runs from 8-5 daily except for the long walkers who have to leave at 4 to get home before dark.

The community school is for kids who walk in from surrounding villages (again, the walking can take up to 2 hours each way), and these are the students who can't speak English well enough to participate all day. They spend a year doing Language for Learning through Level D, writing numerals and just doing the very basics. We hope to add them into the school when they get those basics in. These students are actually ages 6-30. The community ed program runs Monday-Thursday. Parents can come Tuesdays and Thursdays to class, and one day a week they come 2 hours early to work in the gardens to pay for their schooling. We have heard and read about the idea that it is best to teach reading in the native tongue first, then do the ESL training, but since we have no way to accomplish that, we are just forging ahead doing what we can do and so far it is amazingly successful!

We have grown to have 7 DI trained teachers who are Zambian and who teach fulltime. Another of my sisters, Laura Campbell, (who co-runs our American Prep schools with me) travels to Zambia every quarter to train, support, guide, etc. The first year we had a fulltime teacher from the states that we trained and sent over to get it started, but for the past year the school has been entirely run by Zambian teachers and a Zambian administrator, with our support every three months in coaching, training and supplies. We take supplies over 3-4 times a year.

We video our kids here doing a course, and show it to the kids and teachers there and they LOVE it! Then we video the African kids in their lessons and show it to our kids here. When our kids saw and heard the Zambian kids drumming on their desks while they recited Mastering Math Facts, they were so excited and asked "can we do that?" We said "of course!" - but they aren't very good at it, we must admit!

DI is an excellent program for international students who need to learn English, to read English, learn math, and anything else! It sets up their brain for learning, the procedures help them organize and become effective learners. And these kids have literally NO distractions (besides keeping their food supply coming!) like our kids do so their schooling becomes what they do and really focus on.

I have attached a couple of pictures, one of a class and one of the teaching staff with Laura Campbell. We love DI. Heartfelt thanks to those who have worked so hard to make this powerful learning program available. It is changing lives in an incredibly significant way.

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The School District of Philadelphia Celebrates Student Accomplishments With Direct Instruction

Nationally-renowned special education expert and McGraw-Hill Education author joins teachers and parents to discuss successful implementation strategies and student gains in nation's eighth largest school district

PHILADELPHIA, May 31, 2012 /PRNewswire/ -- For over three years, McGraw-Hill Education's Direct Instruction and Intervention programs have given thousands of special education students in the School District of Philadelphia an opportunity to experience academic success in reading, language arts and math. These successes have been applauded and recognized by nationally-renowned special education professor and author, Nancy Marchand-Martella, who will be attending a special Teacher/Student Celebration event at the School District of Philadelphia Central Administration Building on Saturday, June 2, 2012, to discuss the proven impact of Direct Instruction on student performance, and strategies for its successful implementation.

McGraw-Hill Education's *Corrective Reading* and *Reading Mastery* programs -- which were first introduced to the district in September 2009 with the goal of closing the achievement gap among students through extended learning -- support Direct Instruction's explicit, intensive and research-proven instructional teaching method that relies on common instructional planning, frequent assessment and consistent classroom routines and engagement to boost student skill mastery in reading, spelling and language arts.

This Saturday, Marchand-Martella -- with over 25 years of experience working with at risk-populations and has contributed to nearly 130 publications -- will keynote the event, discussing how she has used the Direct Instruction model to deliver consistently high levels of student achievement, especially when used with early intervention, response to intervention (RtI) and targeted skill instruction methods.

"We're excited to be a part of the Teacher/Student Celebration event to further demonstrate our commitment to improving the performance of students who are in need of intervention -- a top priority that begins with developing strong basic skills," said Jeff Livingston, senior vice president of the McGraw-Hill Education College and Career Readiness Learning Solutions Center. "We've found that students respond best to a highly-structured curriculum that provides explicit direction and sets clear expectations. Direct Instruction has positively impacted student performance on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, and more importantly, has transformed them into confident capable learners ready to meet the demands of both college and future careers."

At the event, about 100 parents, students, teachers and administrators will also have the opportunity to watch videos of teachers and children using McGraw-Hill Education's Direct Instruction programs in the classroom. The event will take place at 8:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. at the School District of Philadelphia Central Administration Building, 440 North Broad Street in Philadelphia.

For more information about the proven impact of *Direct Instruction* visit: <http://www.mheresearch.com/#>

Source: [PR Newswire \(http://s.tt/1d57F\)](http://s.tt/1d57F)

TWENTIETH JUDICIAL DISTRICT PROBATION DEPARTMENT
Sharon Sandoval, Probation Supervisor 1777 6th Street Boulder, CO 80302

To Whom It May Concern: April 12, 2012

I am writing this letter in support of Dreamcatcher Direct Instruction Centers. For the past six months, we have developed a strong working relationship with this company to provide educational assistance to some of our most challenging youth.

The youth we have on probation often present with a variety of issues: substance use/addiction, anger problems, mental health issues, trauma history, etc. It seems that regardless of their presenting problems, most of our youth have demonstrated a pattern of failure in their education and have no desire to engage in school. In the fall of 2011, we began selecting teens to be taught one to one with Dreamcatcher teachers in order to improve their basic academic skills. Initial tests determine their skill levels and an individualized educational plan is created to meet their needs. The curriculum, Direct Instruction, has had a tremendous and positive impact on our kids on probation.

I have seen some absolutely amazing outcomes in this short of a period of time! We referred one youth that had been a homeless methamphetamine addict for years and had not been in school for over 4 years. The staff of Dreamcatcher did their magic, working with him individually on a daily basis. He recently received his GED (in the top 15%) and has applied to local colleges. As a result of the Direct Instruction program, he now has a sense of success and exudes confidence in his abilities. This has been the case with most of the kids we refer to Dreamcatcher. The quality of the education and the passion and commitment of the staff have changed many lives.

Our department has been very impressed and excited at the outcomes we see in the youth that are fortunate enough to participate. Unfortunately, our funding is quickly dwindling, resulting in our inability to utilize the program for the rest of the fiscal year. But our intention is to continue to utilize this amazing program in 2013 as we know that it works!

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or clarification.

Sincerely,

Sharon Sandoval, Probation Supervisor

Description of Kenya Project

Cindi's HOPE is a girls' rescue center for sexually or physically abused and abandoned girls in Kenya. Cindi's HOPE also provides on-site schooling for the girls and the community. There are currently 40 students. The mission is to provide a secure environment where girls receive physical, emotional and spiritual healing, along with a proper education to help them succeed in life. This is the point at which I became involved.

Cindi contacted NIFDI's research department last summer asking for help and direction with implementing Corrective Reading with the older students. NIFDI's Director of Research referred her to me because my husband and I have experience opening a school in Liberia, West Africa, using DI curriculum. What started out as a few late night Skype conversations and an agreement to provide 3 sessions of program training via

Skype has turned into a long-term commitment to provide continued training and support. The implementation will be expanding next fall to reading, language and math instruction for all students.

The remarkable part about all of this is that there are now Kenyan teachers who, having never taught DI, are delivering effective instruction, and all of this being accomplished via Skype and Cindi, one very dedicated and passionate children's advocate. One other remarkable feat - note that our teacher has memorized the script from his lesson in Corrective Reading: Comp A. Click on the link below and see for yourself.

<http://youtu.be/BMa-aYHxoqo>

Teachers at Troutdale charter school win cash bonuses for student gains

Published: Monday, April 02, 2012, 4:56 PM Updated: Tuesday, April 03, 2012, 5:54 AM



By Betsy Hammond, The Oregonian

The Troutdale charter school increased student test scores on state tests more than any other elementary charter school in the country. Testing students week in and week out to make sure they understand lessons is at the core of the school's mission.

Teachers at [Reynolds Arthur Academy](#) in Troutdale spurred the biggest gains in individual students' reading and math scores of any elementary charter school in the nation the past two years. For that, a national charter group soon will hand each of them and their principal bonuses of \$4,000 or more.

Many teacher unions, including [the one in Oregon City that turned away millions of dollars in federally funded bonuses last fall](#), oppose rewarding teachers for raising student test scores.

But not Reynolds Arthur Academy's non-union teachers. They express only mild discomfort, if any, at having their professional effectiveness judged by how much their students improve on multiple-choice tests.

"I think it's a fair assessment," says fifth-grade teacher Mary Massey, who notes that schools and students in every state face pressure to do well on standardized state tests.

Whether and how to use student achievement gains to evaluate and reward teachers is one of the hottest topics in education these days. The Obama administration helped fuel the controversy by requiring some schools and states to institute test score-based bonuses for teachers to win millions of dollars in federal grants.

One such pot of money, called the [Teacher Incentive Fund](#), was eventually turned down in Oregon City but will fund the bonuses at Reynolds Arthur Academy. Sixty-six schools in seven Oregon districts also accepted the grants and are preparing to reward some of their faculty for student gains.

Still, the national obsession with test scores makes many educators squirm. A score is a crude snapshot of what a student knows and may reflect poverty, health or other conditions that schools can't control, they say.

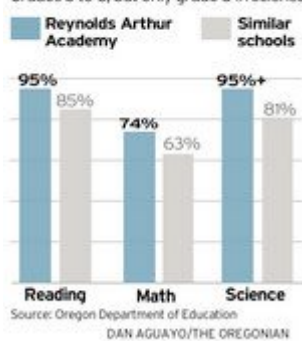
But Reynolds Arthur Academy teachers and students show no aversion to tests. Helping students do well on exams -- including state tests, but primarily the ones teachers give week in and week out to monitor learning -- is at the heart of Arthur Academies' mission.

Drill by drill

The Troutdale charter school uses a highly scripted teaching method developed decades ago at the University of Oregon and since fine-tuned. Teachers constantly measure how well students do -- and most of the time, all perform at least 90 percent of their math, spelling, reading and writing tasks correctly. [On 2011 state tests](#), for example, 95 percent of students met -- and nearly half exceeded -- reading standards.

2011 test scores

Grades 3 to 6, but only grade 5 in science



[View full size](#)

That's largely because the school uses explicit, well-tested step-by-step instruction with lots of oral repetition and a huge emphasis on reading, math, writing, vocabulary and spelling.

"Touch in your book and follow along," teacher Julie Leabo tells her second-graders during a weekly review. "What underlined word means hard to believe?"

"Amazing," the appointed student answers.

"Everybody, what word?" Leabo asks the class.

"Amazing!" 29 young voices respond.

When students don't master a concept as expected, teachers accept full responsibility and reteach the material until the student gets it.

Step by step, drill by drill, repetition by repetition, Massey, Leabo and the other teachers ensure that nearly all students master everything they're taught, even when it's demanding -- such as finding Turkey on a map (grade two), multiplying fractions (grade 4) or dissecting the poetry of Walt Whitman and knowing fine points of grammar (grade 5).

Given that teachers at this charter school and the five others in the Arthur Academy network accept that it's the teacher's job to make sure students learn, why wouldn't the students' improvement on tests be a fair way to evaluate -- and give cash awards -- to teachers?

Potential flaws

Yet the schools' retired founder and current board chairman, Charles Arthur, sees several potential flaws. Students with profound learning challenges, such as unfamiliarity with English or health problems, might not make large gains even with excellent teaching.

And because Oregon measures improvement starting only in fourth grade -- excluding gains made in the first four years of elementary school -- some of educators' most significant work isn't measured. Arthur Academy teachers make gigantic gains with students in kindergarten and first grade, Arthur says, so most students don't have room to make similar strides in grades three and four.

Finally, he sees teachers at his schools as working on the same team and does not wish to pit one against another.

Still, he is giddy that Reynolds Arthur Academy's success has been recognized and wouldn't think of asking teachers to turn down the bonuses.

Reynolds Arthur Academy

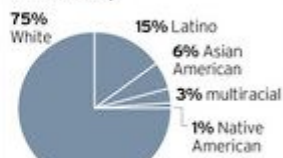
Opened: 2004

Enrolls: About 200 students in K-6

Low-income students: 38%

Open to: All students, but those in the Reynolds district get first priority

Ethnic makeup:



Source: Oregon Department of Education

DAN AGUIAYO/THE OREGONIAN

[View full size](#)

Neither would fourth-grade teacher Julie Maes, who thinks the reward recognizes exactly what she and her colleagues strive to accomplish.

"One of the things I like best about this school -- we teach rules, we teach procedures, so our kids find it easy," she says. "It's not just me, it's the whole academy. If there is an area our students aren't getting, we know what to do and we reteach it. We make sure our students learn, and I'm tickled pink" to get cash because test scores showed it's working.

Similar to the golden tickets she hands out and the pizza parties she holds when students do well, "the reward makes you want to work hard," she says.

Cheers for a test

In Maes' classroom, fun, compliments, smiles and silliness abound. But student achievement, as measured by classwork and quizzes many times a day, is paramount.

Today, students can't wait to read poems they've written, one praising Maes as a beautiful, excellent teacher, another rhyming roses with "ugly noses."

The students also drill on how to multiply fractions and where to place commas; they take timed tests on subtraction and long division; and they solve for angles that would confound some adults.

Chandler Hill, 10, describes the class as "fun." A spelling "game" in which the class divides in two and races to spell words is a favorite. Why is that fun? "Because we practice, and it sees how well we've learned."

[View full size](#) Michael Lloyd/The Oregonian Teacher Julie Maes high-fives her fourth-grade students for their work on a math exercise. Maes and other teachers at Reynolds Arthur Academy inject fun into the school's rigorous focus on testing, and students respond.

Indeed, when Maes announces that it's time for a spelling test, nearly every hand in the class rises and shakes back and forth -- the way Maes has taught them to give a silent cheer.

Cheering for a spelling test?

Gaby Abac, who flawlessly spells every word from "government" to "their," explains: "They practice a lot and they really want to see if they got 100 percent or if they improved."

Gaby was new to Arthur Academy as a third-grader and found the lessons hard at first, particularly in math. Now, she says, "it's so easy."

Reynolds Arthur Academy was chosen as the nation's Gold Gain School among elementary charters this year by [Effective Practice Incentive Community](#), a program of the national nonprofit principal training group New Leaders. The program aims to identify medium- and high-poverty charter schools creating the biggest student achievement gains, then figure out what to do to get great results and share those techniques.

To compare year-to-year gains among students taking different state tests, the group turned to the Princeton-based firm [Mathematica Policy Research](#), well known for its measurement expertise in education and health care.

In all, 88 charter schools in 25 states nominated themselves as high-gain elementary schools, including all six Arthur Academies. From them, Mathematica found Reynolds Arthur Academy made the biggest gains.

"We're super teachers because we have a super program," Massey says. "These kids learn things at a very advanced level. The way we teach has been tested over time, and we know it's going to produce mastery. And I love it. Every day, 100 percent. We check them every day -- show me -- and everything's right."

[-- Betsy Hammond](#)

Direct instruction teaching valuable lessons in Cape York

"The official results are not in but every indication from reforms in three Cape York communities suggests a breakthrough is finally occurring in remote indigenous schooling," writes Alan Tudge, federal member for Aston and former deputy director of the Cape York Institute.

Mr. Tudge recently visited schools in Cape York, Australia undergoing school reform, including the introduction of Direct Instruction. Tudge notes the overall atmosphere as "revolutionary" compared to just one year ago. He says the schools' progress is particularly remarkable in that children at Year 9 are often up to six and seven years behind, but following the implementation of reform strategies, attendance is improving and students are attentive and participating in instruction. Mr. Tudge comments that he expects performance on the National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy tests to increase, as well.

To read the full article by Alan Tudge, visit:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/direct-instruction-teaching-valuable-lessons-in-cape-york/story-e6frgd0x-1226173504241>.

On 8/11/11 2:53 PM, "Mary Damer" <redyarow@aol.com> wrote:

Just wanted to show you my little attempt at advocating for DI last yearbut raindrops do eventually bring oceans (If we don't look at it like that, it's overwhelming.) I think that in district PR with administrators is as important as more far-reaching advocacy. Both are desperately needed.

Background: Last year I coordinated the implementation of a K - 5 multi-tier reading program in two small special education charter schools in Ohio. Although the charter district had just bought Houghton Mifflin, a little over 80% of the students tested into Tier 3 and so we were primarily a DI implementation. I strongly believe that using local norms instead of national ones to reduce the percentage of kids getting the Tier 3 instruction they need is lowering the bar and in my mind unethical -- although I know it's being done in RTI programs all over the place. My main job was professional development and training the coaches through modeling and pd for them.

We used RM Classic or Corrective Reading depending on the student's age --- 90 minutes a day, double dosing as is recommended; L for L for the younger ones and any older students with autism and speech and language delays; 20 minutes for Bob Dixon's DI spelling programs if appropriate for the reading level. The compromise I had to make was using Houghton Mifflin for comprehension and vocabulary for 30 minutes a day, but anyone in Tier 3 had the frustration-grade-level text read to them.

One school had the strongest reading coach I've ever worked with and followed the multi-tier program and DI instruction with as good of fidelity as you can get during a first year implementation. The other school didn't have a coach til after the year started, had a new principal, and low fidelity for a first year. AIMSweb end-of-year scores reflected those levels of fidelity , and I just heard that the first school made improvements on the Ohio State test while the second one didn't. I wasn't sure if anyone would make progress on the Ohio state test the first year , because most of the students have been kicked out of at least one if not more schools and were significantly behind in reading usually with between two - four identified areas of disability. Prior to our program, Fountas and Pinnell literacy collaborative was loosely used. I'm still trying to get my hands on the Ohio State test scores.....with busy administrators in AUGust and unpublished test results as of yet, this always happens. BTW, the school with high fidelity reported that teachers noticed and commented on

the improved resilience and attention that students exhibited taking the state reading test even when it was frustrating . The staff felt that learning how to wait for turns and follow signals had helped students developed self-control over the course of the year.

Our little bit of PR last year: One of the teachers, who ironically was teaching HM, but with enhanced lesson plans that make it much more like DI and who had the rest of her students in a DI group taught in the room by a para became a DI enthusiast. She commented to me that she was so afraid that the program would be like every other fad during her teaching....here today, gone tomorrow. SO I recommended that she write the office administrators and let them know of her feelings, since usually they only hear from disgruntled teachers who do not want to teach DI. Those teachers are always the vocal ones and I've seen the damage they can do. Thus she wrote the following letter:

As the end of the second quarter comes to an end, I have once again sat down to reflect on our new reading program. Ms. Meyer and I are amazed daily as we see the students progressing. Many of our students, who we once considered non - readers, are now reading and using the decoding strategies they have learned in their DI instruction. I can honestly say, that after being around for eight years, this is the first time I have seen so much growth. Not only that, but we have documentation to show the growth the students have made. Furthermore, I believe that the many of the skills and strategies that we have learned from Mary Damer have carried over to other academic subject areas. After only two quarters of using the program negative student behaviors are down and student success is on the rise. Daily I hear the students talking amongst themselves boasting about how many words a minute they can read.

Yesterday Ms. Meyer was almost brought to tears by a parent who was praising our wonderful DI program. He son attended four other schools in the last four years. He could not read. Thanks to the DI program and Ms. Meyer's hard work, Dillon is now reading. His mother is overjoyed and amazed with his progress. This is just one example of how happy the parents are with the program.

The students, Ms. Meyer, and I would like to invite anyone into our classroom to observe how well this program is working out. We also would like to thank you for providing the materials to us to make a difference in the lives of the children in our classroom. A big thanks for bringing in Mary Damer!!!! She has taught Ms. Meyer and I so much about how to teach students to read.

If you're in the area, feel free to drop in and observe our students. They would love to show off their new reading skills.

Direct Instruction Reading- 8:45-9:45 DI Reading 1:10-1:40 Spelling 1:40 to 2:00 and Reading Comprehension 2:00 to 2:35

As a result of her letter, the head administrator visited the school for an entire day during February and saw classes that were sailing away as well as ones where ongoing intensive coaching was still needed. The visit made an impression, and changed some of her feelings about DI. Thus, the decision was made to write a grant to have three more of their sped charter schools adopt the program this year. Without the letter and subsequent visit, I'm not sure that that would have happened. (Ironically, several more schools would have adopted the program, but Wilson costs much less than DI and so it is being used in those other schools.) I was reminded so often of the voices of teachers who were happy with teaching DI whom the office administrators never heard.....with the voices of naysayers booming repeatedly.

Mary

The Root: Getting The Best Teaching Tools To Schools

by John McWhorter <http://www.npr.org/2010/11/16/131353348/the-root-getting-the-best-teaching-tools-to-schools>

For some, teaching children to read can be a challenge, but others insist that the best teaching methods already exist.

November 16, 2010

John McWhorter is a regular contributor to The Root. He is the author of Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold History of English.

Last week the media dutifully reported the typically [depressing news](#) about black boys' scholarly chops from the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) survey. More than three times as many white fourth-grade boys as black ones read proficiently or better. By eighth grade, white boys are doing almost four times as well as black ones in math.

Numbers, though, cannot always speak to us as clearly as words: The most depressing result in the survey is that inner-city black boys generally do worse in the aggregate than white boys with learning disabilities.

There has been the usual hand-wringing about what this news means for the prospects of a generation, and so on. It's a ["national calamity," according to the Rev. Al Sharpton](#). But overall, there has been only so much hand-wringing, and it's partly because these NAEP reports so rarely tell us much new. After decades of discussing a black-white gap in reading and math scores that has not narrowed meaningfully since the '80s, one should be pardoned for wondering if there is much more left to say.

We are to think that black kids will continue to lag behind Scarsdale Sarah and Port Washington Peter until they get to go with them to well-appointed, lushly funded suburban schools. But especially because that doesn't exactly seem to be on the horizon, it's easy to think that these NAEP scores are just the way it's going to have to be indefinitely, like global warming. Or you might chalk it up to the fact that, as articles on the survey have noted, black kids are less likely to have health care, or two parents.

The tragedy is that the discussion about black kids in school — boys as well as girls — takes place as if there were some great mystery about how to teach children from disadvantaged homes how to read. An entire plangent and circular conversation drifts eternally over a problem that, at least in the case of reading, was solved way back during the Nixon administration.

Back then, in the early '70s, Siegfried Engelmann led a government-sponsored investigation called [Project Follow Through](#). It compared nine teaching methods and tracked their results among 75,000 children from kindergarten through third grade. It found that the Direct Instruction (DI) method of teaching reading — based on sounding out words rather than learning them whole (phonics), and on a tightly scripted format emphasizing repetition and student participation — was vastly more effective than any of the others. And for poor kids. Including black ones.

A half-day preschool program in Illinois that Engelmann and his associates founded showed that DI can teach even 4-year-olds to understand sounds, syllables and rhyming. The students entered kindergarten reading at a second-grade level, with their mean IQ jumping 25 points. No fewer than nine other sites nationwide yielded results of that caliber. In other words, Project Follow Through nailed it — period. And yet most of us are more likely to know the name of [Sammy Davis Jr.'s second wife](#) than to have heard of this miraculous instantiation of sheer common sense.

Decade after decade, DI has continued to kick serious butt all across this great land. Houston, Baltimore, Milwaukee — you name it; I am unaware of anywhere it hasn't worked, and it's hard to even choose one example as a demonstration. In 2001, students in the mostly black Richmond district in Virginia were scoring abysmally in reading. With a DI-style program, just four years later, three-quarters of black students passed the third-grade reading test. Meanwhile, over in wealthy Fairfax County, where DI was scorned, the minority of black students taking that test — despite ample funding — were passing it at the rate of merely 59 percent.

Even sadder is that conventional teacher-training programs at education schools keep alive the canard that teaching poor kids to read is an elusive, complex affair requiring a peculiarly intense form of superhuman dedication and an ineffable brand of personal connection with young people. The poor child, the popular wisdom tells us, needs freedom to move about the classroom, or Ebonics, or less soda, or more leafy green vegetables, or any number of things other than being taught how to sound out words and read. Distracted by

the hardships in their home lives, surely they cannot be reached by just having the facts laid out for them the way lawyers' kids can be reached.

But what seems plausible to ed schools is not, as DI's endless successes have shown beyond a shadow of a doubt. What this means is that if we want to make a difference for black boys, such that NAEP surveys will look different in 10 years, we must take the reins ourselves. In a better America, schools that do not use DI to teach kids from poor households should be seen as vaguely criminal. People should point them out as they drive by them, like crack houses.

So Sharpton suggests that "pre-K programs should be expanded." Indeed — and they should be required to start kids out with DI methods. "Teachers should be truly held accountable," Sharpton continues. Yes — and teaching with DI should become the measure of effective teaching. Note also: DI wouldn't require us to wait until that great day when all teachers are stellar. DI is designed, with its set scripting, to be teacher-proof.

"We dare not fail," Sharpton announces.

Right — but fail we will, if we do not start demanding that our local school boards use methods of teaching reading that actually work.

A Culture of "We"

AFT's Great Public Schools, on behalf of Louisa May Alcott Elementary School, Ohio

Story posted December 9, 2010

Results:

In both 2009 and 2010, Alcott's students outperformed their peers in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. In 2010, Alcott's fifth-graders outperformed their peers across the state in reading, math and science

Louisa May Alcott serves a challenging population: 100 percent of students are economically disadvantaged and about a third are designated as special education. Students often enroll with emotional and social problems, difficult family issues and low academic achievement. But thanks to an outstanding faculty and staff, these hurdles are by no means insurmountable. On the 2009 state assessment, Alcott students outperformed Cleveland students in general: 77 percent scored proficient in reading, compared with 49 percent districtwide. Similarly, 75 percent of Alcott students were proficient in math, compared with 41 percent of students who were proficient districtwide. The results for special needs students were just as impressive in both math and reading, Alcott students significantly outperformed their peers districtwide.

Regional superintendent Cliff Hayes Jr. has lauded the leadership of the school, noting its culture of ¹ Alcott principal Eileen Stull is known for consensus building and collaboration, as well as her open-door policy for continued conversations about curriculum and instruction. Yet Stull is hesitant to take credit; she attributes the school's success to students' families and her staff. She says, Honestly, I have the most fabulous teachers here. Parents appreciate the community atmosphere, saying that Stull seems to know each child's name. Additionally, she has a reputation for picking up truant students, showing up on parents' doorsteps for light conversations, and traveling across the state to pick up instructional materials to save on shipping costs.

We have a very warm, nurturing staff, says music teacher Kay Hazlett. We work together as a team. Hazlett says that like the principal, teachers know every child by name.

Students at the school take classes in art, music, physical education and library/media, which many schools around the country have cut due to state budget shortfalls. But a couple years ago, the head of the Cleveland school district mandated that every child receive instruction in these areas, Hazlett says. I believe he feels that by having all four areas along with academics, it's going to produce a well-rounded child.

At a Glance

Location: Cleveland, Ohio

District: Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Union: Cleveland Teachers Union

Grades: K-5

School Type: Magnet

Enrollment: 236

Free and Reduced-Price Lunch: 100%

Hazlett teaches a general music class to all students.

Those who are interested can sign up for choir and band, which she also leads. Choir takes place during a planning period for grade-level teachers, but Hazlett pulls students out of their academic classes for band lessons. Students participate in band with the understanding they keep up with their work, she says. Hazlett works with grade-level teachers to make sure this pull-out program is not interfering with these children's academic success. After all, academics come first, she says. Teachers often stay after school or arrive early to tutor students who need extra support.

The school uses an intense reading program, Direct Instruction, in which students are divided into small groups based on individual ability. Teachers and instructional aides then work in these small groups with a highly detailed curriculum, and they collaborate both within and across grade levels to further student success. Several retired nuns work with struggling students one on one. This small-group and individual focus extends to special education students, who work with an additional instructor in their inclusion classes. This instructor focuses solely on special education students' needs.

Despite their success, Stull and her faculty are not yet satisfied. They have announced a new goal: raising Alcott's Performance Index to 102.2 from 95.1. The increase would earn the school an excellent designation by the state, and Alcott would join only nine other Cleveland schools, out of a total of 144, that have received this distinction.

Teaching by rote finds fresh legs in Baltimore

30 April 2009 <http://www.preventionaction.org/what-works/teaching-rote-passes-baltimore-reading-test/1188>

Research inside the Baltimore public school system has put fresh wind in the sails of Direct Instruction, a teaching program developed back in the 1960s, by showing that pupils in schools where it was implemented performed significantly better in reading tests.

The research team from the National Institute of Direct Instruction examined results for over 40,000 six- and seven-year-old children from 119 schools.

Collected over a period of six years the data showed an improvement across the board, but children in schools using Direct Instruction (DI) performed significantly better (effect size 0.63), they report. The study also found that support from the program originators helped to increase impact. Of the 16 schools that implemented DI, 11 received technical support from the national body for the duration of the study. Pupils at these schools scored even better (effect size 0.82).

Low achievement in reading across the city system prompted the implementation of various reading programs across Baltimore.

Some DI schools received support direct from the National Institute; others went ahead without support or used different providers. These variations made further experiment possible.

The children were tested annually throughout the longitudinal study using the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) – a widely used measure for children of this age group and one supported by national norm data.

Designed by Professor Siegfried Engelmann at the University of Oregon, Direct Instruction is a teaching model grounded in tightly planned lessons, using small learning increments and carefully defined teaching tasks.

It is based on the theory that clear, evenly-paced instruction will eliminate misinterpretation and so quicken the pace of learning. Teachers using DI must stick closely to the script; students are regularly tested and regrouped according to their progress.

So strictly must teachers adhere to the plan that DI has been disparaged as a 'teacher proof' curriculum.

In the Baltimore, it was implemented only in literacy classes, but it can form the backbone of school-wide restructuring. Complete School Reform (CSR) focuses on reorganizing and revitalizing entire schools rather than on the piecemeal implementation of specialized and potentially uncoordinated programs.

The Best Evidence Encyclopedia lists Direct Instruction as a "top-rated" program for complete school reform. Nearly 50 evaluations of the model have been carried out. Although only two have used experimental designs, most have at least collected data for a control group. Meta-analysis has shown it to produce an overall effect size of 0.21.

References

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DI-Announce:

Here's a second article from Nebraska -- a summary of the DI implementation from the perspective of the Superintendent of Gering Public Schools.

The video he refers to is available on the NIFDI web site: <http://www.nifdi.org/> It is a terrific video--I highly recommend it if you haven't seen it yet!

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<http://www.starherald.com/articles/2009/04/29/lifestyles/focus/doc49f7cf145437e598773278.prt>

Direct Instruction reading program gaining statewide attention

By: Don Hague, Gering Public Schools Superintendent Published: Wednesday, April 29, 2009 1:17 AM CDT

The Direct Instruction Reading Program implemented five years ago has improved the language arts skills for our students. Statewide, numerous other school districts have implemented the program in their schools. This past week, Governor Heineman and members of the state board of education visited our elementary schools to observe the program. This was a return visit for the Governor as he observed the program on Feb. 2, 2009, and visited with students, staff and our leadership team to get a better understanding of exactly how the program works. The Governor read about the program in an article published in the Nebraska Council of School Administrators magazine earlier this fall. He viewed the video, "Closing the Performance Gap: The Gering Story" produced last year detailing the program.

Our student performance data speaks for itself as we continue to improve. Staff and students are all proud of what we are accomplishing. As all students move into our junior high and high school classes, they will continue to be able to do more challenging work because of the improved skills they have acquired. The current fourth grade class began Direct Instruction when they entered kindergarten.

One of the major reasons for the success of this program is the district's commitment (our Board of Education, principals, reading coaches, teachers, para educators and students) for the past five years. All too often when we implement a program and there is not immediate success or we do not maintain focus on the program, it is dropped and a new program is started. This is often referred to as the "flavor-of-the-month" type of school improvement which never produces the desired results. The Direct Instruction Reading Program was implemented after quality staff training and we continue to provide staff with in-service training each year to improve their skills.

The number of staff members from various schools who have visited our program represent a significant portion of the elementary schools in the state. Many districts have implemented the program, and they are experiencing improved student performance. Andrea Boden has served as the director of this program from the beginning. She will be leaving our district at the end of this school year. She has done an outstanding job of implementing the program and developing capacity in our staff that will assure the future success of the program. Andrea will be working for University of Nebraska continuing to assist school districts in the role of Response to Intervention Project Manager.

Gering Public Schools will continue to serve as a model program by providing reading and language arts skills to all students beginning at an early age. They learn to read and then read to learn for the rest of their lives. We are very proud of our accomplishments, as you should be as a parent, grandparent or community member. Our students are leaving our elementary schools with reading skills that allow them to be successful.

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Dear DI-Announce:

On Monday, Nebraska Governor Heineman paid a second visit to the DI elementary schools in Gering in the northwest part of the state. This time he brought the Commissioner of Education and four state ed board members to see them.

Local news account below!

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http://www.starherald.com/articles/2009/04/28/news/local_news/doc49f689cb689a6295977133.prt

Governor, state education praise Gering reading program

By: ROGER HOLSINGER, Assistant Editor Published: Tuesday, April 28, 2009 12:41 AM CDT Gov. Dave Heineman was back in Gering Public Schools on Monday, and this time he brought some friends.

State Education Commissioner Roger Breed and board members Kandy Imes, Jim Scheer, Rebecca Valdez and Kerry Winterer joined the governor as part of a tour of the schools and to see first-hand the success of the district's Direct Instruction reading program.

The group spent much of the morning visiting with teachers and reading coaches with stops at Geil, Northfield and Lincoln Elementary schools.

Heineman first heard about the program in February and said he was very impressed and invited members of the state education board and the commissioner to come out and see “an example of a reading program that works.”

Heineman said there are other successful programs, but what he wanted to share with the group is the process to close the academic achievement gap.

“You can read about it (the reading program), you can even watch a video, but when you actually see Nebraska students participating, what a difference that makes,” Heineman said.

He added that there are academic achievement gaps throughout many schools in the state and that Gering has addressed those issues.

“I wanted to show them an example of how you can do it with Reading First. The key is, if you’re a school district with an academic achievement gap, you need to do something to address that, starting by thinking outside the box. Gering is an example, a model for other school districts to look at,” Heineman said.

He said he is hopeful that more school districts throughout the state would look at implementing a similar program.

Breed said he enjoyed visiting the three elementary school buildings “to see students and teachers engaged” in the learning process.

“For me, that was the most compelling aspect of what we witnessed in each classroom. You have hard-working teachers that are getting kids to work hard, and I think that makes all the difference,” he said.

Breed said implementing a new reading program might sound easy, but it isn’t.

He said when it comes to properly educating students, improvements can be made if school districts are willing to try.

“What set this district apart is that they had the will to make the changes necessary to give it a try,” he said.

After the tours of the schools, the group sat down and visited with school board members, teachers, administrators and reading coaches for a somewhat candid discussion of the reading program.

Assessment Director Andrea Boden told the group that the decision to change the reading program in the fall of 2004 when DI met the district’s criteria to focus on the achievement level of the students. She said prior to the program, many students were not reading at grade level.

While the program has seen success, convincing teachers and parents of its potential was a challenge, said Boden. She said many questioned the change and were against the idea.

“Some of those who were most critical of it are now some of the most supportive in the community,” she said.

Boden said many teachers didn’t like the accountability issues involved but said once the program was implemented and the results came in, teachers began to support it.

She said that in addition to Gering, 24 other school districts have implemented full use of DI, including Alliance, Bridgeport, Garden County, Crete and Schuyler. Another 28 have implemented partial programs.

Boden said another key to the success of the program is that students are not categorized by race or social-economic status. She said prior to the implementation of DI, some students were not given the same opportunities as other students, so their reading skills dropped.

School building principals and the reading coaches are also key components in the success of the program. The coaches go through extensive training and the principals do walk-throughs in the classroom.

Superintendent Don Hague said the program was funded through a five-year Reading First grant and that while the funds are running out, the program is a priority for the district.

“We want to make sure that this program stays in Gering,” Hague said. “There must be accountability in education, and that’s what is being done in Gering Public Schools.

“There is no doubt that when you walk into one of our classrooms that our children are engaged and learning,” he said.

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Governor looks at reading program

http://www.starherald.com/articles/2009/02/04/news/local_news/doc4989144436757307921926.txt

By: Jim Headley, Gering Courier Published: Wednesday, February 4, 2009 11:58 PM CST

Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman spent Tuesday morning learning about Gering Public School’s Direct Instruction reading program.

It would be an understatement to express that the governor was impressed with the program.

The governor toured Gering’s Geil, Northfield and Lincoln elementary schools Tuesday morning before sitting down with the school district’s management team for a working lunch.

“If the Huskers were in the bottom 10 every year, we would be going through the roof. If we can win the national championship on the football field and the volleyball court, why can’t we do it in the classroom?” Heineman asked the district’s management team at the district’s Central Office.

Gering’s third-graders, who were performing at grade level, were at 33 percent before DI. Today, those passing levels are at more than 80 percent in just five years.

Many in the Nebraska Department of Education believe those involved in the DI program are “renegades.”

Heineman asked management team members about parent involvement and how teachers learn the “renegade” reading system. Team members told him new teachers go through a four-day-long pre-service training program and are monitored and assisted through the year with additional training.

The school district had company-furnished trainers available for teachers during the first four years of the DI program. Now the district has staff trainers in place.

“What would happen if next time I speak to all the board members, administrators and teachers if I tell them that they ought to do this (the DI program)?” Heineman asked.

After the laughter died down, one of the team members responded, “Run!”

Team members told the governor they met a lot of resistance concerning the DI program. They added that after people examined the dramatically improved testing and reading scores of students, most of that resistance died down.

“Teachers were used to being in private practice, doing whatever they wanted to do,” one team member told the governor.

Heineman said he’s been very focused on the academic performance of students across the state for a long time.

“What I really wanted to find out today is if this can work here, tell me if the Hispanic kid in south Omaha or African-American kid in north Omaha is any different than the kids you are teaching. No, I can’t believe that they are. If you’re succeeding, I want to make sure our kids are ready to compete in what I call the 21st Century Knowledge-Based Technology-Driven free market economy. I would like to share that success story with the state. If Gering is succeeding in reading, why not share that with the whole state?” Heineman said.

The governor said he likes the results of the DI program and he plans to bring more people from the state Department of Education and the University of Nebraska to the Gering Schools in order to give the DI program stronger support across the state.

“A couple of things I saw today that impressed me — number one was the attention span and the focus of the kids. They were engaged. They were paying attention. And eagerness to learn. If a youngster missed a word, you would immediately go back and correct it. Let them read it over and then their confidence is going to build,” Heineman said, adding he didn’t sense that any of the students felt poorly when they made a mistake. “They were there to learn.”

Heineman said the students were so focused that even a visit from the governor didn’t seem to disturb them.

The governor related the repetitive DI program to sports.

“How do you run the play better? You run it over and over and over again. Somehow we think we can’t do that academically,” he said.

After meeting with the district’s management team for 90 minutes, Heineman said he was reluctant to leave.

“I have to go back to Lincoln. I’d rather stay here all day. Every child can learn if we provide the right motivation — that’s our job. I did not see any of your kids today who were not actively involved. I have to get a few people on a plane and have them come out here,” Heineman said adding that reading test scores should not vary based on ethnic lines. “All we have to do is look at the president of the United States if we have any doubt whatsoever.”

Photo by Jim Headley/Gering Courier Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman watches kindergartners in Mickie Janecek’s class read at Northfield Elementary School in Gering on Tuesday. The governor was personally examining the success of Gering’s Direct Instruction reading program for himself.

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<http://www.tnr.com/politics/story.html?id=3a0cdac1-44a1-461b-b676-d829b9f1529d>

The New Republic Direct Answer

by John McWhorter A solution for the reading gap between black and white children was discovered four decades ago. So, why aren't we taking advantage of it? Post Date Wednesday, January 14, 2009

One does not expect to see New York's school Chancellor Joel Klein on the same stage as Reverend Al Sharpton. Klein is infamous for his emphasis on test scores and shutting down schools that fail to measure up. Not so long ago, Sharpton was in the barricades with Russell Simmons protesting mayor Michael Bloomberg and Klein's plan to cut New York City's education budget. Yet these days the two are teaming up for the Education Equality Project, which seeks to close the achievement gap between white and black kids in public schools.

And at the New York City Department of Education's kickoff in a series on the topic last week, Klein and Sharpton agreed on most issues. Sharpton, who in his "reformed" guise has decided that education is a key civil rights issue, actually spoke up for vouchers and mayoral control of the school board. The forum was a typical one on race and education, as ritualized as a religious service. First, an introducer recites the latest dropout statistics. Then, discussants and audience questioners flag the usual terms--Low Expectations, Parental Involvement, Vested Interests, Resources, Accountability--each greeted with knowing murmurs and applause.

A tacit assumption is always that the grievous intersection of these factors explains why poor children, especially black and Latino ones, tend to trail so far behind white ones in reading skills--a maddening gap that persists in National Assessment of Educational Progress reports year after year. Yet a solution for the reading gap was discovered four decades ago. Starting in the late 1960s, Siegfried Engelmann led a government-sponsored investigation, Project Follow Through, that compared nine teaching methods and tracked their results in more than 75,000 children from kindergarten through third grade. It found that the Direct Instruction (DI) method of teaching reading was vastly more effective than any of the others for (drum roll, please) poor kids, including black ones.

DI isn't exactly complicated: Students are taught to sound out words rather than told to get the hang of recognizing words whole, and they are taught according to scripted drills that emphasize repetition and frequent student participation. In a half-day preschool in Champaign-Urbana they founded, Engelmann and associates found that DI teaches four-year-olds to understand sounds, syllables, and rhyming. Its students went on to kindergarten reading at a second-grade level, with their mean IQ having jumped 25 points. In the 70s and 80s, similar results came from nine other sites nationwide, and since then, the evidence of DI's effectiveness has been overwhelming, raising students' reading scores in schools in Baltimore, Houston, Milwaukee, and other districts.

A search for an occasion where DI was instituted and failed to improve students' reading performance would be distinctly frustrating. Still, at this forum you would never have known Project Follow Through existed. Key moment: A teacher reminded us to keep "creativity" in mind as a teaching tool, with coos and scattered applause from the audience, and Sharpton milking it by chiming in. Indeed, schools of education have long been caught up in an idea that teaching poor kids to read requires something more than, well, teaching them how to sound out words. The poor child, the good-thinking wisdom tells us, needs tutti-frutti approaches bringing in music, rhythm, narrative, Ebonics, and so on. Distracted by the hardships in their home lives, surely they cannot be reached by just laying out the facts. That can only work for coddled children of doctors and lawyers. But the simple fact of how well DI has worked shows that "creativity" is not what poor kids need.

At the Champaign-Urbana preschool, the kids--poor kids, recall, and not many who were white--had a jolly old time with DI, especially when they found that it was (hey!) teaching them to read. In 2001, third-grade students in the mostly black Richmond district in Virginia were scoring abysmally in reading. But once a scientifically proven reading program similar to DI was brought in, by 2005, three-quarters of black students passed the third-grade reading test. Meanwhile, out in wealthy Fairfax County, where DI was scorned as usual, the black students taking that test--despite ample funding--were passing it at the rate of merely 59 percent. The saddest thing about the blithe neglect of Engelmann's findings is that they are the answer to the problems people at forums like these find so challenging. It's as if you're listening to people discuss the merits of moving a two-ton load of grain into a barn by spreading the ground between the load and the barn with cooking grease and heaving-ho. The solution's "creative," alright--but hasn't Engelmann already invented the wheel?

Arne Duncan, Barack Obama's appointed Secretary of Education, happens to be a signatory to Klein and Sharpton's Education Equality Project to bring "equity to an educational system that, 54 years since Brown v. Board of Education, continues to fail its highest-needs students." In Washington, Duncan might consider taking the blinders off and forcing America's urban school districts to teach poor kids to read with tools that we have known to work since the Nixon Administration. Otherwise, all we will have is the likes of the audience at the Klein-Sharpton event coming away thinking the event was "great" because Sharpton is a jolly presence and everyone got to clap upon hearing terms like Low Expectations and Resources. I submit that this is a distinctly thin basis upon which to translate our President-Elect's call for hope into action. John McWhorter is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and the author of *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold History of English*. © The New Republic 2009

November 19, 2008 The National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) is pleased to announce that three of our schools have been recognized by Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue and State Superintendent of Schools Cathy Cox for their exceptional gains on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT). Two of the schools, CW Hill Elementary and Fickett Elementary were named as "Platinum" schools, the highest level of recognition. The third school, Fain Elementary, was named as a "Bronze" school. All three schools are in the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) district. Read the entire district issued news release below or click here: (<http://www.atlanta.k12.ga.us/content/news/headlines/2008/111908Schools.pdf>) .

NEWS RELEASE November 19, 2008 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

26 APS schools singled out by Georgia for highest performance or most improvement ATLANTA - Twenty-six APS schools were singled out for recognition by Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue and State Schools Superintendent Kathy Cox Wednesday for their high achievement or improvement during the 2007-2008 school year.

Jackson, Brandon, Mary Lin, Sarah Smith and Morningside elementary schools, and Carver Early College High School, were named winners of the 2007-2008 "highest performance" award under the state's Single Statewide Accountability System.

Two APS middle schools - Parks and Inman -- and 18 elementary schools were recognized in the "greatest gains" category. The elementary schools cited were C. W. Hill, Capitol View, E. Rivers, East Lake, Peyton Forest, Fickett, West Manor, Gideons, Towns, M. Agnes Jones, Blalock, Miles, Scott, Finch, D. H. Stanton, Cleveland Avenue, Kimberly and Fain.

Those 26 APS schools were among 275 schools recognized statewide.

The four levels of recognition - platinum, gold, silver and bronze - are based on each school's performance on state curriculum exams and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Schools recognized for highest performance demonstrated the highest achievement on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCTs) or the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT). Those cited under "great gains" showed the most improvement in scores on the CRCTs and the GHSGT.

Highest Performance Platinum - Jackson Elementary Gold - Brandon Elementary Silver - Mary Lin Elementary, Sarah Smith Elementary and Carver Early College Bronze - Morningside Elementary Greatest Gains Platinum - Hill Elementary, Capitol View Elementary, Rivers Elementary, East Lake Elementary, Peyton Forest Elementary, West Manor Elementary and Fickett Elementary Gold - Gideons Elementary, Towns Elementary and Jones Elementary Silver - Blalock Elementary Bronze - Miles Elementary, Scott Elementary, Finch Elementary, D. H. Stanton Elementary, Cleveland Avenue Elementary, Kimberly Elementary, Fain Elementary, Parks Middle and Inman Middle.

Study calls DI a success By Brett Kelman Pacific Daily News

The more Direct Instruction students get, the better they score on the Stanford 10 test.

Yesterday, a team of independent evaluators presented their study of Direct Instruction in the Guam Public School System. Their findings are expected to help elementary school principals decide which curriculum they want to use next school year.

Jennifer Caros, an evaluator with School Evaluation and Instructional Research Associates, or SEIRA, presented a summary chart to the board.

The chart plotted Guam's students by grade and subject. It asked: "Are they progressing faster under Direct Instruction than the average student?" "Across the board, the general trend is that there are more yeses than noes," Caros said. "That being said, there are questions. Questions that could only be answered if you continue to monitor the students. ... But overall, is that encouraging? Very much so." Caros added that if students were exposed to higher quality Direct Instruction lessons -- called a "dose factor" -- they were more likely to improve more quickly in all subjects.

She said SEIRA calculated the "dose factor" through Direct Instruction's built-in accountability measures and record keeping. One of the strongest trends they found was that a higher dose of the program would result in faster progress.

Caros said the fact that Guam's students still are struggling in many subjects magnifies the improvements that SEIRA found. For students who are behind to make above-average progress, their headway must be truly remarkable, she said.

"Is DI contributing to accelerated growth rates for students? Yes," Caros said.

Earlier this year, the school system and school board rewrote the 2008-2013 District Action Plan to allow schools to transfer away from Direct Instruction to another curriculum program if they wished. The changes would have allowed schools to switch programs months before the evaluation was finished, but the school system couldn't act fast enough.

Principals are now deciding whether to use Direct Instruction, Success for All, or Pacific Resources for Education and Learning next year. GPSS Superintendent Nerissa Bretania-Shafer has said the evaluation results should be central to their decision.

Last night, Bretania-Shafer said SEIRA's findings found the most pronounced improvements in language and science.

Bretania-Shafer said this was interesting because Direct Instruction doesn't teach science directly and many doubters -- including herself -- have questioned if students were missing out in that subject.

"We were concerned, as a district, that science was not being addressed by DI," she said.

In October, the school system yanked the second reading block of Direct Instruction to allow students more time to study subjects including science and social studies.

Some board members questioned what they were hearing.

"I don't believe this," said board member Maria Gutierrez. "In the first grade and third grade they do not have science. How could this show there is an improvement?" Caros said the evaluation was based on data provided by the school system.

She said that science scores also could be an indicator of students' increased reading abilities.

Back to basics paying off

01:00 AM EDT on Wednesday, October 8, 2008

By Linda Borg

Journal Staff Writer

http://www.projo.com/education/content/MC_DIRECT_INSTRUCTION_10-08-08_TTBRCOF_v14.38fe926.html

PROVIDENCE — Last year, the district introduced a new phonics-based reading program and a number of elementary school teachers objected, saying the curriculum robbed teachers of their creativity and denied children the opportunity to read real literature.

The program, called direct instruction, is a highly scripted way of teaching reading to students who are performing below grade level. It is an updated version of phonics instruction, which starts by teaching students to sound out individual letters, followed by combinations of letters, then words, and so on. Proponents say that children will become better readers once they can decode sounds and letter groups.

This year, direct instruction is being offered in seven elementary schools, most of which have failed to make adequate yearly progress for several consecutive years under the federal No Child Left Behind law.

At two schools, Veazie Street and West Elementary, the program is being offered to all students, not only those reading below grade level.

The beauty of direct instruction, supporters say, is that it groups students by ability, not age, so struggling readers no longer become frustrated because they can't keep up and skilled readers aren't bored because they are grouped with children of similar ability.

At Veazie Street, students in the early grades "walk to read." For two hours a day, they leave their homeroom teacher and walk to a classroom where they are taught at their ability level. In a direct instruction classroom, grades are mixed. The child's actual grade doesn't matter; reading skills do.

In kindergarten through grade two, instruction is very scripted, but the curriculum becomes progressively more flexible as children advance through elementary school.

In Virginia Olivelli's kindergarten class for English as a Second Language students, some children arrive with very little formal language training. In other words, a child might know only two colors, three shapes and their first name. Compounding the problem, students might have limited vocabulary in their native language because books are not readily available at home.

"Their school language doesn't exist," Olivelli said. "Some children don't know how to follow directions; others don't know how to read from left to right."

Direct instruction takes none of these skills for granted. It starts with the most basic elements of language: the sounds of letters and letter combinations.

A teacher for 23 years, Olivelli said that she has never seen children leave kindergarten as well-prepared as they were at the end of last year, after only one year of direction instruction. Like many of her peers, Olivelli resisted the idea of teaching by using a lesson that leaves little to the teacher's imagination.

Last year, critics argued that direct instruction dumbed down reading instruction, playing to those students with the weakest skills. It took all the fun out of teaching, they said, turning teachers into little more than actors reading a script.

Fast forward a year. Several teachers at Veazie Street say that they are sold on the program, whose official title is the SRA **Reading Mastery** series. They say it takes the guesswork out of reading instruction by providing daily lesson plans that map every minute of instruction.

“This is what I’ve wanted my whole career,” Olivelli said. “We can tailor instruction to the needs of every child. And, if you’re a new teacher, the program is all there for you. Sure, an actor is handed a script but he can bring it to life.”

At grade four and above, students spend more time reading texts, although they are basal readers, not literature in the true sense of the word. In Lynn DiPippo’s fourth-grade class, students are reading a condensed version of Jack London’s classic, *The Call of the Wild*. Although the plot follows that of the novel, the narrative is simplified and the names of some of the characters have been changed.

After several children read out loud, DiPippo pauses and asks the class a series of questions designed to tease out if the class understands the story line.

When a child stumbles over a word, DiPippo adds it to “the goodbye list,” which means that the entire class will go over that word the following day.

“I’m absolutely sold on it,” DiPippo said. “These children need structure and this program gives them the structure they need.”

The majority of the district’s 40-plus elementary schools still use a program called balanced literacy, which emphasizes reading comprehension. Although this model uses phonics, it holds to the theory that students learn best by reading real literature.

But Veazie teachers said that balanced literacy isn’t well-suited to children who are struggling to decode words. According to DiPippo, with that approach, children couldn’t read stories on their own and quickly grew frustrated.

“I’ve never seen so much growth in my nine years of teaching,” said Tom Nolan, a third-grade teacher. “Last year, there were 12 third-graders reading at grade level. This year, that number has more than doubled. This is working for kids who have a hard time decoding words. We’re no longer reading over their heads.”

According to Nolan, direct instruction addresses the five core reading skills: phonemic awareness (sounding out the letters), phonics (breaking words into sounds), vocabulary, comprehension and reading fluency. Students master sounds before they master letters and they learn to break apart words before they learn to write them.

Although Nolan says this approach isn’t as much fun for the teacher, he said he realizes, “**This isn’t about me.**”

Last year, several teachers from Pleasant View Elementary School complained that the brightest students suffered under direct instruction because the teacher no longer could provide accelerated instruction. Critics also claimed that the assessment used to place students isn’t a reliable measure of what they know because the words in the test are spelled phonetically, which children find confusing.

But Veazie Street teachers said that students are frequently tested and those who are ready to move ahead are sent to a more demanding class. Moreover, a literacy coach helps teachers analyze test data, conducts professional training and co-teaches in the classroom.

For many teachers, the proof is in the pudding. Students are happier. They are learning the basics more quickly and moving on.

“The kids like the program,” DiPippo said. “They feel more confident. They like reading out loud now.”

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 24, 2008

NIFDI-SUPPORTED SOUTHERN ELEMENTARY NAMED A NATIONAL BLUE RIBBON SCHOOL FOR 2008

EUGENE, OR - Southern Elementary School in Blue Springs, Nebraska has been named a “dramatically improving” National Blue Ribbon School for 2008. Southern was one of 320 schools nationwide and one of only four public schools in Nebraska to be named as a Blue Ribbon School.

To be eligible for consideration as Blue Ribbon school under the “dramatically improving” category, schools must make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), as defined by their state, and at least forty percent of the student population must come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Additionally, the school must have raised all students’ performance markedly on state assessments for at least the last three years. Being named a “dramatically improving” Blue Ribbon School is proof that the school has made great strides towards closing the achievement gap.

Southern Elementary has been implementing Direct Instruction curricula in reading, language and spelling with support from the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) since 2006. Mrs. Denielle Trauernicht, Building Coordinator for the school’s DI implementation, says being named a Blue Ribbon School is an “honor for the school” and “validates everything we’ve been doing.” She stresses the importance NIFDI’s support has played in the school’s achievement. According to Mrs. Trauernicht, “The biggest key to being successful in our reading/language/spelling implementation is the frequent, consistent progress monitoring and weekly data analysis. We are able to intervene quickly when students begin to struggle, and are able to accelerate students where appropriate, as well.”

Mrs. Trauernicht and Southern Principal, Mr. Jerry Rempe, will be attending an awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. on October 20-21.

NIFDI provides weekly off-site data analysis and problem-solving conference calls as well as on-site support to schools implementing DI schoolwide. For more information about NIFDI services visit www.nifdi.org.

Contact:

Amy Johnston

National Institute for Direct Instruction

School leaps ahead in the rankings Britannianna elementary principal credits a controversial reading program for students' remarkable improvement

Janet Steffenhagen Vancouver Sun

Friday, May 02, 2008

<http://www.canada.com/vancouversun/story.html?id=81192388-1f43-4e31-a948-8cd3474f90f9&p=1>

CREDIT: Ian Lindsay, Vancouver Sun Reading is a priority and an area of improvement for students at Britannia elementary, where resource teacher Wendy Randall works with students from Grades 4 to 7.

A small inner-city school on Vancouver's east side has made a first appearance on the honour roll of the Fraser Institute report card on B.C. elementary schools.

Britannia elementary isn't situated alongside the elite independent schools that earn perfect grades year after year, but arguably it has more to brag about than they do, with its score of 7.5 out of 10.

According to the report card, Britannia is the school that has shown the most improvement during the past five years, with a growing number of its students passing reading, writing and math tests that are delivered province-wide each year as the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA).

This year it scored 7.5 out of 10, which represents a steady climb from 2.8 several years ago. With that score, Britannia's ranking moved to 232 out of more than 1,000 elementary schools from a five-year average of 636.

Word that the school is improving didn't surprise Britannia principal Greg Barnes. He and his staff are well aware their students are doing a lot better academically than in previous years.

"We're a good school getting better," he said in an interview "We're proud of what we do."

Asked what his school has done to bring about such a change, Barnes said he couldn't point to a single initiative, but then did just that, noting the school has been, for several years, religiously using Reading Mastery, a direct-instruction, phonics-heavy program from the U.S. that is controversial in Canada.

"The last three years, we've taken it to heart," he said. "We do it every day, and the 11th commandment is, 'Thou shalt not interfere with Reading Mastery.' We're not always popular, we don't have complete agreement among everybody that this is the best thing to do, but our kids are reading a hot damn."

Reading Mastery is a tightly scripted program that teaches explicit phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary and comprehension. It is one of a few direct-instruction programs that have proven successful in some inner-city schools in Vancouver but are generally shunned by west-side educators who prefer other programs.

Barnes says it doesn't really matter which program a school embraces, as long as it chooses one and sticks to it.

Critics call Reading Mastery and other direct-instruction programs "drill and kill -- you read the story, answer the questions; read the story, answer the questions; read the story, answer the questions," Barnes noted.

But for some kids, that works, he added.

"Our kids really need structure. They really need the predictability, the routine and the structure. When they have that, they can succeed."

Every student in the school is engaged in Reading Mastery for almost two hours a day. Grouped by ability rather than age, students are led through the daily lesson by a teacher reading from a script.

After lunch, the student body moves to writing lessons -- again, in groups determined by ability, not age.

Barnes admits that the priority given to reading and writing takes a bite out of the day and leaves little time for other subjects such as social studies and science, but he said that's in keeping with an Education Ministry directive for schools to identify their shortcomings and fix them.

Teacher Wendy Randall became an early proponent of Reading Mastery at Britannia after observing a Grade 1 class at nearby Seymour elementary that was using the program. To her surprise, all the children could read.

"I came back and I was just on fire. I was saying, 'We've got to do this.' " Her colleagues were skeptical initially but after a one-year pilot, they voted unanimously to use it school-wide.

"I've worked in the inner-city for about 23 years . . . and it is the single most effective thing I have ever used," Randall said.

Vicky Vachon, a veteran teacher who now helps schools implement Reading Mastery, says direct instruction programs work well for all students. "People who don't know very much about them will say they're designed for kids with special education needs. That's absolutely false. They're not. The thing is, they're designed so well, they work for that population also."

Peter Cowley, author of the Fraser Institute report card, said Britannia isn't a school where success comes easily. Almost half the children are ESL, more than half are aboriginal and the parents' education is generally below average.

But its recent performance stands as an example to other schools serving vulnerable populations, and illustrates why Cowley believes his report card is valuable. It calls attention to schools that are finding better ways to serve their students and sets an example others can follow, he said.

His hope is that educators in similar schools will ask two questions: "How did Britannia do that?" and "Can we do something similar?"

jsteffenhagen@png.canwest.com © The Vancouver Sun 2008

The following story comes to you from the Great Bend Tribune of Central Kansas. Park Elementary School received support from NIFDI from fall of '02 until spring of '06.

Go to <http://www.gbtribune.com/story.php?sid=28477>

Note that 88 percent of their students met the state math standards and 91 percent of their students met the state reading standards. NIFDI can't take credit for the students' dance moves, though.

As with many other stories, you can make on-line comments. Already one person is spreading the usual malicious lies about DI in the comments section.

KE

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Students proud of test scores By DALE HOGG dhogg@gbtribune.com

Park Elementary School third-graders danced to traditional “party play” songs Thursday afternoon. Their faces beamed as they entertained members of the Unified School District 428 School Board.

Their music teacher Myrna Holthaus told the board, meeting at Park for its monthly luncheon gathering, the youngsters initially held reservations about holding each other’s hands for the dance moves. But they soon overcame them. “They love it,” she said.

The performance made a fitting opening for remarks by Park Principal Mike Young who is in his first year at the school. He addressed the school’s Direct Instruction curriculum. “When I got year, I had never heard of DI.”

The program features a very structured setting which divides students by ability levels instead of grade levels in key subjects. Teachers meet weekly to move children from one level to another to meet their needs “so the kids succeed,” Young said.

Direct Instruction, he said, has caused increases in math and reading state assessment scores. This, in turn, has caused students to take increased pride in their test taking. One student even posted their test scores on their forehead.

“When I arrived, I heard good and bad,” Young said. But, now he’s nearly convinced DI is the way to go. “It seems to be a good program.”

Looking at state math scores in 2002, before DI, and last year, the students meeting standards jumped from 25 percent to 39.2 percent. Those in the exemplary category went from 11.4 to 21.4.

In reading, exemplary went from 3.9 percent to 51.6.

This year, since the assessments are taken via computer, preliminary results are already available, and they look even better. In math, the state target was to have 73.4 percent of the students meeting standards or better and Park’s score is 88 percent. The reading goal was 75.6 percent, and Park reached 91.

“Park school does so well, other schools kind of use us as an example because of DI. DI is doing very well.”
Dear DI-Announce:

Yesterday the school board in Crete, Nebraska (not the Greek island) voted to adopt Reading Mastery as the district’s elementary school reading program. Corrective Reading has already been implemented in the middle school there starting last fall.

Below is the article from the Lincoln Journal Star followed by numerous comments -- both in favor and opposed to the adoption -- that were posted on the newspaper’s web site. There are two postings by a board member and postings by students of the prof at the Doane College in Crete who won’t let practicum students go to the schools during reading because they will use Reading Mastery.

The Gering schools that are mentioned are featured in a film accessible via the NIFDI web site (<http://www.nifdi.org>).

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From: <http://www.journalstar.com/articles/2008/04/15/news/nebraska/doc4804d7a3e0dec731286042.txt>

Crete adopts controversial reading program By CARA PESEK / Lincoln Journal Star Tuesday, Apr 15, 2008 - 07:48:18 pm CDT

CRETE — Kyle McGowan looked at the packed meeting room at Monday night's school board meeting and began with the good news.

"We're not here because we're worried about some basketball coach not doing their job," said McGowan, Crete Public Schools superintendent. "We're here about the most important thing, and that's reading."

Crete students tend to score well on writing tests, he said, with many of them reading at levels well above their grade levels. But more than 50 percent of third- through sixth-graders read below grade level, and about 33 percent of the district's students are English Language Learners.

So in 2005, the school board began looking at implementing a reading program to better serve the student body, McGowan said.

After two years of research and four hours of discussion Monday night, the board voted 5-1 in favor of adopting the \$360,000 Reading Mastery program.

Over the past few months, the program proposal has drawn both praise and criticism from parents and teachers throughout the district.

In the Reading Mastery program, children are placed in reading groups with other children at their reading levels, regardless of whether they're in the same grade.

For example, a third-grader with strong reading skills might be placed with a group of third- and fourth-graders reading at the fifth-grade level. A third-grader with below-average reading skills might be placed with a second-grade-level group, containing both second- and third-graders.

The advantage, said McGowan, is that the program has a place for both high and low achievers.

But some parents and teachers worry that the Reading Mastery program is so strictly scripted it leaves little room for teachers to improvise or be creative.

"Lack of flexibility is problem," said Julie Kozisek, a professor of education at Doane College in Crete.

For some students, she said, Reading Mastery would likely work well, but not for every child. That, combined with the inability of teachers to deviate from the script, gives her qualms.

Other, more flexible reading programs also group children by reading level, she said.

Sophomore education majors at Doane spend a year in the Crete Public Schools system assisting teachers and generally learning how to teach, but Kozisek said she won't allow her students to help in Reading Mastery classrooms. She urged the school board to explore other options.

McGowan invited three faculty members from Gering Public Schools, which implemented Reading Mastery in 2004, to speak during Monday night's meeting.

Andrea Boden, director of assessments at Gering High, told the 50 or so parents and teachers crowded into the meeting room that Reading Mastery had transformed the four Gering elementary schools, closing an achievement gap between white and ethnic minority students.

"Our achievement is higher than it has ever been," Boden said.

Boden answered question after question from the audience.

Yes, she said, students have plenty of time to learn about math and social studies and science, even though Reading Mastery takes up a lot of time. Yes, the program is effective with gifted students. No, not every teacher at Gering was thrilled about the program at first, but they've grown to accept it and even to like it.

Doug Drevo, a Crete parent and the husband of a second-grade teacher, asked the board why this information wasn't made available months ago.

He said he learned more at Monday night's meeting than at informational meetings or from discussions with his wife at home.

And he was concerned, he said, that some teachers who have resigned in recent months have done so because of the looming implementation of Reading Mastery.

Officially, he said, none resigned for that reason. Unofficially, he said, he suspects some did.

"You lost a lot of good teachers this year," said Drevo.

McGowan said he couldn't comment on why teachers resigned, except to say that none of the 13 teachers who retired or left the district this year listed Reading Mastery among their reasons for going. For the past few years, he said, the district has lost 13 or 14 teachers a year.

"Is our turnover somewhat consistent with what it has been in the past six or seven years? Yes."

Parent Amy Braunberger said when she heard the district was implementing Reading Mastery, she was so upset she cried.

She had heard the program was particularly problematic for gifted children, said Braunberger, whose third-grader reads above his grade level.

After researching it, she determined the program would be challenging for her son, which she views as a good thing.

And she wondered Monday night if the new challenge was what is upsetting parents and teachers.

"I wonder if maybe we have a fear of the unknown," she said.

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Teacher wrote on April 15, 2008 12:00 pm: " The issue that I would have with the program is about content. What is developmentally appropriate for a fifth grader to read is not necessarily appropriate for a second or third grader regardless of ability. Is the program structured so that all reading material is content appropriate?

Additionally, any curriculum that is scripted inhibits learning. Students and teachers cannot pursue an area of interest and the "teachable moments" are lost as is personality and the connections that need to be made between teachers and learners. "

Amy wrote on April 15, 2008 12:11 pm: " First, in response to "Teacher," I don't think they would give fifth graders something "inappropriate" to begin with. I wouldn't worry about content.

When I was a fourth grader (1995), they put me in an advanced level reading group with primarily fifth graders, and I really enjoyed it. I was challenged much more than in my fourth grade english class. I think that if tests show that it does nothing but increase test scores, what's all the commotion about? I say go for it! Even if it's a "little extra work" for the teachers, isn't their job to give students the best opportunities anyways? "

Nina wrote on April 15, 2008 12:17 pm: " Interesting concept - I would be willing to give it a trial run. The upside would be that for the gifted, it would allow them to advance more rapidly, and keep them from being bored by being forced to stay at grade level. For those performing below par, it would attach some stigma, to be put with younger students at a lower level. But if it eventually raises those kids to prime level, it might be worth it. Educators and parents should give the slower kids much encouragement and praise, so they don't feel "less than" others, which is probably already a problem with many of them. This sounds like a "wait and see" project, and I guess somebody has to be the guinea pigs. I wish them all the best. "

Crete Students Mother wrote on April 15, 2008 12:48 pm: " As a mother of children attending Crete Elementary I support the schools decision to go with this program. Although I have some doubts I have been very impressed with Crete Schools and their staff, and believe they are simply trying to better the kids by implementing this. "

Amanda Wright wrote on April 15, 2008 12:58 pm: " Julie Kozisek--is it more important for kids to learn how to read or for you to push your agenda? Also, very mature of you to not allow Doane students to teach in reading mastery classrooms thus denying CPS school students the opportunity to work with the awesome student teachers from Doane and denying Doane's future teachers the opportunity to learn how to teach a program they may well be required to use upon being hired. I'm a parent of a CPS middle schooler and elementary student. I'm all for this program and many other parents I've spoken with are, too. "

C wrote on April 15, 2008 12:59 pm: " Amy: I was in advanced reading courses throughout elementary, middle and high school. It is naive to think that all books are appropriate just because they are introduced to children via the school system. While attending the 7th grade, 2 different books were given to us as assignments. Both inappropriate for an early teen to be reading. It took my parents and several others voicing their concerns to the principal and superintendent to take them out of a 7th grade reading program. That said, I am not in opposition to free speech, and do not at all condone censorship in that regard. However, certain books are not appropriate for certain age groups. "

Matt wrote on April 15, 2008 12:59 pm: " The idea isn't a bad one, but this really opens the door for problems. What about a 5th grades, who is otherwise pretty smart, but has some reading difficulties. He'll be reading dick and jane books with the 2nd graders. That simply is not appropriate. Furthermore, an advanced 1st grade reader probably shouldn't be reading the Monkey's Paw. As another poster mentioned, there are some problems with appropriateness of content here.

I also agree with Nina that there may be a problem with stigma. A fifth grader having to read with first graders is going to be severely embarrassed. Now, I'm not all for "everyone winning" or "just make them feel good," but to me there are better ways to help a struggling reader improve.

The potential dangers and harms here just seem to outweigh the potential positives.

Maybe this could be limited by having things stratified a bit, so you don't have 5th graders mixing with 1st graders. "

Sandy wrote on April 15, 2008 1:09 pm: " I would encourage Crete to give this program a try. My grandchildren live out of state where they have a form of this program. It has really helped the children continue to learn at their pace and has worked out well. Maybe the program will have to be changed some, however it is surely worth a try. "

A Mom wrote on April 15, 2008 1:21 pm: " It's unfortunate that the Doane College professor has already decided not to send sophomore students to Crete Public Schools because of this program. A quick check of websites suggests that Direct Instruction/Reading Mastery is becoming an increasingly popular method of teaching children to read, and one would think that a college of education would want to give its students some exposure to that, even if there is a philosophical difference. I applaud the teachers and administrators in Crete for recognizing a potential problem and having the courage to want to try something new. "

Crete parent wrote on April 15, 2008 1:25 pm: " If there is a problem you have to change and try and fix it. Doing something is better than just staying on the same path that's not working. If they want this to work require teachers to stay after school at scheduled times and come early. This will not work if all teachers are not on board. We have good teachers but one bad apple does spoil the bunch. And we are feeding our kids some of those. Sports are important but I think they take precedence at our school over teaching in some cases. I have experienced my child getting good grades in a topic from one teacher to failing from another. At some fault to them but mostly the teachers lack willingness to teach first and coach second. The parents in our schools and teachers a like know who they are. Like I said if they don't all buy in IT WON'T WORK. And that requires a commitment some of our teachers don't have so I predict failure! "

Tammy wrote on April 15, 2008 1:35 pm: " I would hope that special education students would be waived from this program and allowed to continue with whatever plan they have in place. It would create a great stigma for a 5th grader to be placed in a third grade reading group. My daughter suffers from dyslexia, she has a prescribed reading program she follows. She is in third grade but reads at a mid-second grade level. Her self esteem already suffers. A program that would lump her with younger students, where she would still struggle mightily, would further make her feel "dumb". Motivation is already an issue with her, I can't imagine having to try and convince her that being in a group like this would be the best option for her. I don't disagree with the program in theory, but there must be steps taken to make sure that those that require special assistance are still able to obtain that. "

Laura Ebke wrote on April 15, 2008 1:39 pm: " As one of the Board Members who sat through that meeting, I find it unfortunate that the misinformation continues. Our Administrators made it very clear last night that we would not be having 5th and 1st graders mixing. The idea of having all of our staff teaching Reading Mastery will likely mean that the vast majority of third graders, for instance, will likely be taught by third grade teachers, with the possibility that some of them might be taught reading by 2nd or 4th grade teachers. We need to look at that particular period of the day, however, not as a promotion or demotion for a child from their regular grade level, but rather, simply, as their "reading class"--regardless of whose classroom it's in.

As for Dr. Kozisek's statement that she would not allow her practicum students to assist in Reading Mastery classrooms, that is truly unfortunate. Why would an institution of higher learning prohibit the next generation of teachers from being exposed to another method of reading--a method which one of the other commenters rightly notes may very well be one which they are asked to teach someday? Crete students will still learn, with or without the practicum students, but the students at the college will lose in this one, by not having an opportunity for a practicum within walking distance. The school district cannot, however, be expected to base our curriculum decisions on the wishes of the dominant reading ideology of Doane College--we have to do what we believe is best for the children that we are charged with educating. "

para-educator wrote on April 15, 2008 1:39 pm: " 1 grade level up or down is not as bad as having a 5th grader sent to interact with 2nd graders. This is not only demeaning to the 5th grader but also creates issues of exposing 2nd graders to issues they should have to deal with for a few years. This is a terrible decision on Crete Board of education's part. Did they adopt a program to deal with the psychological issues of this decision on these students???"

AB wrote on April 15, 2008 1:48 pm: " My private elementary school did something similar to this. They split the class into two sections according to reading level and gave each section an appropriate book to read. I was in the "higher" level, so I can't speak for those in the other level, but it was one of the best experiences I had in elementary school. Then three of us in that level went on to tutor a gifted group of students in lower grade. Had they left everyone together I, and those in my group and the lower grade level, would not have been challenged to learn. I went on to score a 36 on the reading comprehension section of the ACT and a 34 overall, so I think this is a great idea. "

Lucas wrote on April 15, 2008 1:57 pm: " Heaven forbid we actually teach students at the level they are at!! Oh my, they might feel embarrassed and study harder to move up! Oh, wait that's a good thing! "

tim wrote on April 15, 2008 2:34 pm: " this reading system is simply using the same concept as every school in the country. we divide the kids into grades not age. that enables the most effective use of teacher time and skills. one huge problem with the one room classroom was it was difficult for a single teacher to meet the wide range of needs of students from age 5 to 15. meeting those wide range of needs is still an issue with most teachers. this reading system make since. the crete administration and the committee should be commended for identifying the problem and taking a proactive approach to solving the problem. i'll look forward to seeing the results in 2-3 years on there reading report card. "

Prof wrote on April 15, 2008 2:56 pm: " I applaud the Crete school board for choosing the most evidenced based curriculum for improving reading skills in young children. Shame on Doane college for refusing to let their teachers learn from this excellant reading program. If they do not want their teachers to learn this valuable curriculum then I guess they will not be getting employed anytime soon after college. Also, there is no research to suggest that creativity and freedom in a reading curriculum improves basic reading skills. The structured script of reading mastery assures us that regardless of a teacher's creative skill, all students are being taught the same basic reading skills. "

Former Crete Student wrote on April 15, 2008 3:23 pm: " Though this might be good for kids who aren't challenged enough but this is an AWFUL idea... all you are doing is teaching struggling kids to hate reading because they feel they are shamed. How would you like to be that struggling 5th grader in with the 2nd graders. Shame on you Crete. Congrats on the smart choice by Doane not to participate in this program. "

Curious wrote on April 15, 2008 4:23 pm: " I am curious to know if this new reading program is needed due to the growing Hispanic population in the Crete area who might be "English as second language students." I found it interesting that Gering is using this program with success. After living in the Scottsbluff/Gering area for many years, they too, have a large Hispanic population. This post is in no way meant to be negative or racial, I was just wondering what the driving force was behind the switch – low state standard reading test scores or something else. "

irate taxpayer wrote on April 15, 2008 4:41 pm: " Funny, no one mentioned the price tag, \$300,000-\$350,000. I love how my district spends money. Some of the teachers are not using the current curriculum because the don't like it or aren't using it appropriately. This is an awfully expensive "trial run." Teachable moments are not scripted and what other classes are going to suffer when you have to use Reading Mastery 90 minutes a day. What will get cut? Teaching spelling is gone, what's next Art, Music or PE. The day will have to be longer or something will be cut. So where's the pay off? Whose getting it-not the students. "

Fred wrote on April 15, 2008 4:54 pm: " Let the fast kids advance. We spend all kinds of money on "special" programs for slower kids, but let the bright ones waste away. I hate to state the obvious, but cultivating the bright minds will help our society far more than hindering them. Perhaps even a program such as this doesn't do enough for the smart ones. Not everyone gets to be an brain surgeon when they grow up. We need fry cooks, too. "

Can you say? wrote on April 15, 2008 5:14 pm: " Can you say Micro-Teaching? It will never work. That is not to say it won't be done though. This program will in fact do nothing more than addle the system even more. The teaching system is already in place and has been for years. There is nothing to adapt to people. The only real unpreventable changes going on are how our children can learn. That is to say our children can learn from video, computers, internet, books on paper, etc. compared to just pencil and paper. This change that is constantly taking place is by default a better way of learning and things should be naturally approving. Why change the system? One might say there is no need to fix something that is not broke. I say it's broke, but only because we think it needs to be fixed. Give the students the opportunity and the content, presented in a fashion that meets today's advances but stop changing the actual system. The simplest is always better from a managing standpoint. Does anyone stop to think we are making things worse for the students by trying to improve? So one student in a class is bored and wants to move up ahead of the others. Neither my problem nor yours. Instead, take this brilliant mind away from the 20 others who could have benefitted by endless scenarios. Let a second grader be a second grader. This is the way of life which already shapes our

young minds and it should not be played with. "We can do anything if we put our minds to it....but do we want to?" "

Direct Instruction Satisfied wrote on April 15, 2008 5:51 pm: " Wow, it seems like those opposed to the reading program are worried about change. This change will be a good one for the school district and their students. Our district implemented the program at the start of the 2006-2007 school year. Every student in the district improved their reading skills and test scores the very first year. The improvement was so dramatic that the district entered in the Corrective reading program for the Junior High and High School students. I have two sons in the programs. My 12 yr. old son was in 5th grade when they started him in corrective reading. he went from reading at the mid year 3rd grade level at the second quarter of his 5th grade year to reading at the beginning of the 12th grade level when we had parent teachers conferences this past February. My oldest son was an 8th grader who read at the end of the 12th grade level. Even with his excellent reading skills, the tests showed that he needed extra help in comprehension. As a freshman now, he is reading at the post high school level and while he always had good grades, now he is at the top of his class earning straight A's. I hope the Crete district patrons give this program a chance. I can't wait to see what level our district students who started with this program in kindergarten, read at the 4th grade when they begin their state mandated testing assessments. Not only does this program teach reading mastery, it incorporates writing, language and even science lessons in the same teaching methods, reinforcing the subjects. What I've seen about teachers resisting the method, it may be that the teacher is not as strong a teacher in the reading area to begin with. It'll improve that teacher as it takes the guess work out of teaching and the way progress is measured for the students is already figured out. Please Crete patrons, give this program a chance. You won't be sorry your board made the decision. "

Taught in NE wrote on April 15, 2008 5:56 pm: " Any program that is implemented should include all of the "BIG 5" suggested by the National Reading Panel's report. Does Reading Mastery contain components that support phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension and fluency? Is it a research based program? Create should also remember that there is no magic bullet. It's not the program that fosters achievement, it's the teacher. "

Doane Student wrote on April 15, 2008 6:05 pm: " As one of those Doane Students that won't be going into the Crete Public School system because of this program, I feel like the "misinformation" as one of our beloved school board members put it, needs to be cleared up a little more. We will still be involved with the system just not during reading or language arts time. It should also be noted that Dr. Kozisek is also the president of the Nebraska State Reading Association, so she might know something about effective ways to teach reading and language arts. For her to be against this program must be a sign.

As far as this reading mastery program, no one mentioned that it will cost the board around \$240,000 more than the current reading program and doesn't even expose the children to an actual book until the second or sometimes the third part of the program. I also find it very hard to believe that a child will learn how to read by repeating a script. However, if the board is more worried about raising test scores that were already high to begin with, then that's their problem. For me personally, I would not sacrifice actual reading ability for test taking ability. Crete just became another casualty of the standards movement, and that's unfortunate.

"

Mrs wrote on April 15, 2008 7:00 pm: " What do you think all the sport activities in a school costs? Plus sports do not benefit or reach every student. Yes, the \$\$ needed to implement this program sounds like a lot, but remember -- EVERY CHILD will benefit. Children that struggle with reading struggle all their lives. Support your school system, the children and leave the \$\$ and budget decisions to the board you elected. They wouldn't have voted for it if the money isn't there. "

Mary Smith wrote on April 15, 2008 7:33 pm: " an earlier version of this method was called "the one room school." Sadly, many college student have not learned to read. Time spent teaching young people to read is worth the effort "

Laura Ebke wrote on April 15, 2008 7:46 pm: " To DOANE STUDENT: The misinformation that I was referring to was not Dr. Kozisek's statement (in the article) that she would not place Doane students in CPS-- I was referring to the misconception that we might place students MULTIPLE grade levels away from their peers.

I do not question Dr. Kozisek's credentials or her expertise, but of course any good academic researcher--in any field--acknowledges that there are often competing research programs, and that THE ONE WAY of approaching a problem can be seen differently by different people.

The facts are this: 58% of our PROFESSIONALS--Teachers of reading and our Administrators voted to recommend this program, knowing full well that they were choosing ONE program which would be used by everyone. Perhaps someone can clarify how we could have respected the professionalism of our teachers by forcing a solution that a majority of the professionals did not agree with. "

Rian wrote on April 15, 2008 8:17 pm: " I was also at the Crete meeting last night and listened to the debate on Reading Mastery. The language arts teachers have been involved in the textbook adoption process for over two years. They have looked at many programs, made visits to watch these programs in action, read mountains of research, met and discussed all the pros and cons about each selected series, and the majority came to the consensus that this was the program that best fit the needs of CPS students. I am offended that some people seem to feel that they are less than intelligent when it comes to selecting teaching materials. The teachers in Crete are among some of the best in the state and are quite capable of making these decisions.

I was disturbed to see the misinformation in the article in regards to having 3rd grade students in a 5th grade class and vice versa. I'm assuming the reporter had checked out at that moment or maybe was just drowned out by Dr. Kozisek's shouting about how she had "concerns." It was clearly stated that 3rd graders would NOT be placed in a 5th grade classroom. They may be put in an RM5 class which is not the same as a 5th grade class. They will be ability grouped with their peers.

CPS will miss the Doane students, but to whom is the disservice being dealt? Unfortunately it will be the teachers in training who will not be getting a complete view of the wider educational world. In that respect, Doane is sadly lacking in their education department. "

Ex-Crete-ian wrote on April 15, 2008 8:37 pm: " Ms. Ebke... even if test scores increase what expense does it come out? Are you going to increase funds for counselors as well? Perhaps you should. How will you address those students who face severe ridicule because they're in the "stupid" class (you KNOW this will happen). I hope you are willing to face the parent who has to console their crying child because you want higher test scores.

To the lone board member who saw the flaw in this decision, I commend you.

And I agree with the Doane student, though I do not know her professor she seems FAR more qualified to know what will work than school officials simply concerned with raising standardized test scores.

Best wishes providing the next generation with a reason to leave Crete as I did. "

Truth Decay wrote on April 15, 2008 8:37 pm: " Laura 'the facts are this' Ebke: Did the Crete grammar and math curriculum teach you that 58% is not what any academic would deem a strong recommendation?

And you're a BOARD MEMBER?

God be with you, children of Crete. "

Future Teacher wrote on April 15, 2008 8:55 pm: " As a student of Julie Kozisek's I first want to commend her for standing up for the students in this district. Having been a teacher and as the President of Nebraska

State Reading Association, it is my firm belief that she has the CRETE STUDENTS best interests in mind, not her own agenda. I want to challenge those who think this program is beneficial to find a teacher's manual for this program and read over a lesson. As you read this scripted lesson, I hope you realize that the teacher is no longer being paid to teach, they are now being paid to read. This program requires you to work strictly from the manual; you are expected to read these lines word for word without deviation. The whole point we teach reading through different methods is to ensure that we are reaching all the students. When you start to group all the students homogeneously and disregard their own personal reading level, you have stopped teaching to a class. You are now focusing on the students whose attention you can keep for 90 minuets. Those who cannot sit and be actively engaged for 90 minuets will be lost in the shuffle. As a college student and future teacher, I would not want to sit through 90 minuets of direct instruction. I hope the future students that will be going through Doane's Education Program, will see why Doane has decided to pull sophomore students out of Crete's reading block. The fact that they would watch a teacher READ a lesson rather than TEACH one is a big disappointment. And I pose this question to you how are these future teachers to learn how to plan an effective reading lesson, if all they have to do is read what is in front of them? Furthermore as a future teacher I have so many ideas that I would LOVE to implement into my classroom to make reading more enjoyable for my students. Most ideas, thanks to Julie, I know will help children learn as well as provide a fun, learning environment in which they can excel and become better readers, with the Reading Mastery Program I would not be allowed that freedom as a teacher. "

I agree with Doane Student wrote on April 15, 2008 8:58 pm: " I am not a student at Doane, but I agree completely with that student. Okay so 58% of the teachers were in favor of the reading program. My question is, what about the 42% that were not in favor of the reading program? That is a huge percentage if you ask me! "

board members spouse wrote on April 15, 2008 9:21 pm: " If you wish to see a video of the program in action please go to www.geringschools.net. To view the research behind the program google "oregon reading mastery" and follow the link. Items: If the current program was successful, there wouldn't be a new program. Going to a class with students one grade lower than you isn't what causes poor self-esteem, being unable to read outloud is. Real success leads to improved self-esteem. There was a great article about reading improvement in this AM's edition. Refusing to allow teaching students to participate in a teaching method because it is based on a different philosophy of teaching, seems narrow-minded and antithetical to the ideals of a liberal arts education. "

Hmmm... wrote on April 15, 2008 9:49 pm: " to "Board Members Spouse"... if this program was so fantastic more than one program in the whole state would be using it, don't you think?? "

Truth Decay wrote on April 15, 2008 9:54 pm: " Board members' spouses supporting bad decision making is a lot like Slick Willie coming to the aid of Hillary. Something smells rotten in Denmark. "

_____ Di-announce mailing list Di-announce@nifdi.org http://nifdi.org/mailman/listinfo/di-announce_nifdi.org

Dear DI-Announce:

Below is an article about the successful, NIFDI-supported, Direct Instruction implementation in southeast Nebraska. They "want more kids to want to go to college and more students be successful in college."

KE

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Wymore Arbor State <http://www.arborstate.com> WYMORE, NEBRASKA
FEBRUARY 27, 2008

WEDNESDAY,

http://www.arborstate.com/uploads/02_27_front.pdf

Success of reading program dependent on dedication of faculty and staff

The reading program at Southern Elementary is in its second year. In just two years, the school is recognizing noticeable results. The program has been so successful that other schools around the state have sent teams of instructors to Southern to observe how the program is working.

The program started last year and focused on the Kindergarten through Third Grade students. This year the program has been expanded to include students from Kindergarten through Sixth Grade.

Each day the students have two reading and language blocks - one in the morning of 90 minutes and another in the afternoon which varies on time depending on the reading group.

The students spend that time in their reading and language groups which are divided by reading level and not by grade level. This way each group is at the same learning level and students aren't struggling because they fall behind. It also helps the more advanced students because they stay focused because everyone in their group is at the same level.

Southern program coordinator Denielle Trauernicht said she has not seen any problems with mixing students from different grades and ages in the same groups.

"Actually I think the adults have more problem with that than the students do," said Trauernicht. "The kids thrive when they are successful. They are excited about their accomplishments and have more confidence in their abilities."

Another concern with the program in the beginning was that students were spending so much time on the reading program that other subjects may not get the classroom time they need.

Billie Overholser, the implementation manager from the National Institute for Direct Education, said that the reading and language program contains all components of the curriculum including math, science and social studies.

Nothing has been cut from the curriculum, the students still have the areas of general study which include Spanish, computers, physical education and music.

The reading and language program also includes components from other subjects such as science and social studies.

"Reading is reading but you can include other content areas," said Overholser. "It doesn't replace it (other subjects) but it does use the same concepts."

Overholser lives in Oregon and comes to Southern once a month to help with the Direct Instruction. This is paid for through a grant the school received last year.

Overholser has a long background in education as she has two masters degrees, in Education and Classroom Behavior. She has over 30 years of experience as an elementary instructor.

Overholser credits the success of the program to the dedication of the faculty, staff and administration. For the past two years the teachers and para educators have gone through training during the summer. During the school day they have learned to run on a strict schedule of starting and stopping times.

"It's amazing how successful the teachers make the students," added Overholser. "The teachers invest a lot of time and preparation in the program and they practice teaching on a weekly basis."

A small group of teachers act as the leadership team for the school. That group is made up of Stephanie Ware, John Denner, Sheri Yockel, Kane Hookstra and Christie TenKley.

Elementary Principal Jerry Rempe said that he's seen progress in the past couple of years in other areas that he feels has a direct correlation with the reading program. He said the students have shown better behavior and they are more attentive both inside and outside the classroom.

Some schools use similar models for their classrooms. Beatrice has the same type of program but uses a different model. The closest school in the state to use the same model is Loup City.

Ultimately the program cannot be accurately judged for several years as the students that have participated in the program move into junior and senior high school.

"We hope to see more kids be successful and more competitive in college," said Rempe. "We hope to increase the number of successes and not just the top kids in each class.

We want more kids to want to go to college and more students be successful in college."

May 30, 2007 guampdn.com Pacific Daily News

<http://www.guampdn.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070530/OPINION02/705300332/1014/NEWS17>

Carbullido students are reading well with DI

All the hubbub about Direct Instruction ought to instead be excitement about how good the program really is for our schoolchildren. We had the opportunity to watch Direct Instruction being taught recently at Carbullido Elementary School.

What we saw during our visit to several classrooms was attentive students who were thoroughly engaged in learning, second- and third-graders who were reading at a level two to three grades higher, students who were learning about science and anatomy during their reading classes, and extremely well-behaved children. Many of the children in the school are reading above their grade levels, and some who advance above the sixth-grade level are already reading novels.

But the amazing part of our morning visit occurred when we entered a kindergarten class, whose teacher happened to be absent that day. The kindergartners were doing silent reading when we entered. We turned to go, but the teacher's aide suggested that some of the children read for us. We asked a young girl to read a few pages in a book, which she did. While she was reading, the entire rest of the class lined up behind her for their turns to read. They were so eager to read more that we were telling them when their time was up, so the next reader could take a turn. Not to be deterred, they lined up again for another turn at reading to us.

It was so heartwarming to see these children doing so well and loving to read at such a young age. Congratulations to the teachers and children at Carbullido and the other schools that are doing so well with the Direct Instruction program. These kids were bursting at the seams to read and they were so happy to show us. We encourage others who care about education to ask principals to let them see the program in action. It gave us a good feeling about the futures of our children's educations.

MAYOR JESSE PALICAN VICE MAYOR JUNE BLAS Barrigada

Wednesday, March 28, 2007 Marianas Variety www.mvariety.com

URL: <http://www.mvariety.com/calendar/march/28/localpage/lnews52.htm>

Reyes cracks the whip on DI Program By Gerardo R. Partido Variety News Staff

GUAM Public School System Superintendent Luis Reyes has cracked the whip on the Direct Instruction, or DI, Program, ordering all division heads and school principals to ensure that the controversial program is implemented properly in schools.

In a memorandum released yesterday, Reyes said the DI Program has been clearly recognized as a research-based program and successes have been documented time and time again.

"Whether or not you support the program or decry the process of its adoption, it is a program that is being implemented in our school system and will continue to be implemented," Reyes said.

He added, "I expect that you will follow through with its requirements and ensure that all teachers are teaching the program with fidelity and that you are providing instructional leadership at the school site through reviewing student performance data and making decisions based on the data."

Practices prior to the implementation of DI were described by Reyes as "ineffective." He said the government and the education community channeled millions of dollars to the educational system hoping to improve the teaching and learning of students.

"There were no results. We cannot continue down this path," Reyes said.

Direct Instruction is a reform program implemented in the elementary schools. It is also being used as a corrective reading, language and math program in the middle schools.

According to Reyes, the DI Programs contain an empirically-based curriculum and an accountability system for those who teach and manage the program in the schools.

"The Reading First Center is required to report program progress and/or challenges to my office. The scope and requirements of the program are unprecedented in our school district. The historic low performance of our students district-wide is the reason for its adoption," Reyes said.

GPSS has been implementing the DI Program for four years now in the elementary schools and three years in the middle schools. Reyes said GPSS must overcome the challenges these last couple of years have presented and move in the direction of positively impacting student achievement.

"We are accountable for the progress of our students. It is the primary reason that we as a school system exist. I am sure we all want to establish an accountability system. The Direct Instruction Program affords this accountability," Reyes said.

Direct Instruction has drawn both praise and criticism from parents, teachers, and students.

The program, which focuses on basic subjects like math and reading, has been blamed for the elimination of other subjects like science and social studies. However, proponents have said that the DI Program has led to better learning and retention among the island's public school students.

Owen Engelmann, director of curricular resources of the National Institute for Direct Instruction, or NIFDI, has said that Direct Instruction is not being implemented properly in the island's schools.

NIFDI is a not-for-profit corporation that has a contract with GPSS to provide a training program for DI.

According to Engelmann, the lack of school aides, the lack of enforcement of the DI Programs, and the lack of cooperation by teachers and school administrators are just some of the problems hindering Direct Instruction.

In his memorandum, Reyes is now ordering GPSS officials to facilitate the support to the schools given by both NIFDI consultants and GPSS trained district coordinators.

"The recommendations of the NIFDI consultants and the district are expected to be adhered to and followed through in a timely manner. I want you to take note that I realize change is hard to accept. In fact, we have heard statements of castle-building and the like. This is due to the resistance to change. We must change. We have no other alternative. We must show positive results in justifying the millions of dollars, both local and federal, that are being expended by our system," Reyes warned.

He added that undermining the implementation of the DI Program by any individual or division will be subjected to the full attention of the Superintendent's Office.

Article published Dec 7, 2006 guampdn.com Pacific Daily News

URL: <http://guampdn.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061207/OPINION01/612070316/1014/NEWS17>

OUR VIEW Accept The Direct Instruction program is working for public school students

With a team from the U.S. Department of Education on island to check on the Guam Public School System's compliance in the spending of federal funds, the topic of Direct Instruction -- which is paid for using federal money -- is again being raised as an issue of concern.

Those who remain opposed to the Direct Instruction program say that it takes up too much of the school day, so other subjects can't be taught, and that it doesn't do anything for children who already read well. For these reasons, they want the program to be scrapped and replaced.

But here's the problem: Direct Instruction works. Students who have been learning under the program for years are better readers now. Their scores in standardized tests have trended upward every year.

So why would anyone want to get rid of a program that is showing such positive results for the majority of public school students?

The difficulties relating to Direct Instruction aren't in the program itself, but rather in the training and implementation aspects. Teachers must not only receive and understand but accept the training. Then, they must work with school administrators to ensure it's properly implemented.

The Direct Instruction program readily incorporates other subjects, such as social studies and science, and good teachers have used the program to provide a rounded education for their students.

If there is still any concern about the amount of time the program takes up, then extend the school day. Right now, elementary students go to school from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. That's just six hours time spent at school, and not all of it is instructional time after you take out the lunch break, time between classes, recess and homeroom. So extend the school day by an hour; if the amount of time for other subjects is truly an issue, don't get rid of the program.

And the reality is that even if Direct Instruction is replaced, a similar type of program will have to be installed because the vast majority of public school students test below grade level.

Those teachers, administrators and parents who continue to oppose Direct Instruction need to realize and accept that it is a viable program with positive results. If they fully embrace Direct Instruction, those positive results will spread further.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE August 9, 2006

DIRECT INSTRUCTION HELPS AUTISTIC CHILD COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS, PERFORM ON GRADE-LEVEL

Guilford County Schools Reach Exceptional Children Through Direct Instruction Programs

GREENSBORO, N.C. - Direct Instruction, a reading program from the leading educational publisher SRA/McGraw-Hill that is used in the Guilford County Schools, is helping an autistic student learn to read and better communicate with his parents.

Brooke Porter Juneau's son Riley attends Brooks Global Studies Magnet Elementary School within the district. Severe speech apraxia, compounded by autism, made verbal expression a challenge for him. Juneau explained that SRA's Direct Instruction program Reading Mastery has given Riley another way to communicate.

"This curriculum has opened the door for Riley to read and write. Using a keyboard appears to be the first truly comfortable way he has found to express himself. Reading the words Riley types with his keyboard tells us so much more than hearing them ever could," Juneau said. "Through the gift of his literacy, we have been able to learn so much about him - like just how bright he really is."

An Educational Transformation

This transformation is truly exceptional. When Riley was first diagnosed with a rare condition affecting his eye movements, autism, and speech apraxia, Juneau and her husband worried how he would get by in school.

"I remember how torn we felt when the time neared to decide on Riley's Kindergarten placement," Juneau explained. "Would he be able to follow the curriculum? How would he handle the structure? Would he be overwhelmed? Never in a million years did we imagine that, within weeks of beginning Kindergarten and his SRA Reading Mastery program, Riley would be writing his name perfectly, sounding out beginner books, and asking us how to spell everything. Not only was he getting it, he was loving it," she said.

Juneau added, "Riley's reading development ushered in a confidence we had never before seen in him. Almost two years later, Riley is a thriving first-grader who is right on par with the other kids in his inclusive classroom. With its structure, clarity, and flexible pacing, the Reading Mastery program has been an ideal match for Riley's learning style." "Reading Mastery has done more than just help our son become a confident and enthusiastic reader. It has enabled Riley to spend most of his school day in an inclusive regular education classroom, among his peers who love and embrace him," she said.

Program-wide Success

SRA Reading Mastery is just one of SRA's Direct Instruction programs used by the district's Exceptional Children department, lead by Betty Anne Chandler Chandler praises Adina Mandikos and Rona Jacobs, program administrators for Exceptional Children Instructional Support, for leading the way in using Direct Instruction programs in the special education classrooms.

Deborah Blackwell, a resource teacher at Gillespie Park Elementary School uses the SRA Direct Instruction program, Corrective Reading.

"I cannot speak highly enough of SRA's Corrective Reading. After two months, we had teachers saying they not only see progress in reading, but also in writing. Students themselves are praising their new ability to read," Blackwell said.

Blackwell added, the special education students have always enjoyed the resource program, but now students are running to get to class. "We can't find the words to express our gratitude," Blackwell continued. "Out of my 17 years teaching, I have not found another program for reading that can make such a difference."

About Guilford County Schools

Guilford County Schools is the third largest school district in North Carolina serving more than 68,800 students at 112 schools. With approximately 9,600 employees, the district's mission is to graduate responsible citizens prepared to succeed in higher education or the career of their choice. Guilford County Schools is a national leader in providing specialized schools and instructional programs designed to meet the educational needs of a culturally diverse citizenship. For more information, visit the district's Web site at www.gcsnc.com.

About Direct Instruction

Direct Instruction is a scripted teaching method based on more than 30 years of research and pioneered by Siegfried "Zig" Engelmann in the 1960s. Now it is used in classrooms of all types throughout the world, with students ranging from those with learning difficulties to very bright students. Direct Instruction's programs are based on two beliefs: All children can learn regardless of their learning histories, and all teachers can be successful when given effective materials and presentation techniques. These programs have been proven to work even when other programs fail. They provide a structured learning process that helps students learn "how to learn" while they build specific skills in reading, math, spelling, and language arts. Today, more than 1 million students in a third of the country's schools use a Direct Instruction program.

About SRA/McGraw-Hill

SRA/McGraw-Hill is the top provider of specialized research-based educational programs and professional development for the elementary market. Leading programs include Open Court Reading, Direct Instruction, and Real Math. SRA is part of McGraw-Hill Education, a leading global provider of instructional, assessment and reference solutions that empower professionals and students of all ages. It is a division of The McGraw-Hill Companies, a leading global information services provider meeting worldwide needs in the financial services, education and business information markets through leading brands such as Standard & Poor's, McGraw-Hill Education, BusinessWeek and J.D. Power and Associates. The Corporation has more than 290 offices in 38 countries. Sales in 2005 were \$6.0 billion. Additional information is available at <http://www.mheducation.com>. For more information on SRA/McGraw-Hill's products, call 1-888-SRA-4543 or visit SRAonline.com.

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Hopkins second-graders memorize math basics **Fast learners - A new program motivates and puts younger students ahead of the curve** Thursday, March 23, 2006 JANET GOETZE

Anyone who went beyond third grade remembers memorizing multiplication tables. Today, that's old stuff for some of Sari Hedges' second-graders.

Hedges' students and virtually all others at Hopkins Elementary School in Sherwood are using a program to memorize multiplication tables, as well as addition, subtraction and division facts. The program is called "Mastering Math Facts." Hedges and Kathy Hardman, a fourth-grade teacher, studied the system in a seminar about three years ago so they could introduce the ideas to other Hopkins teachers.

The program encourages students to memorize basic math answers, then recall them quickly, Hedges said. "That way they don't have to stop to think about basic math problems and they can go on to complete more challenging problems."

Advanced students learn to retain such facts as 9 divided by 3 equals 3, and 6 divided by 2 equals 3. Younger students can say quickly that 3 plus 8 equals 11, and 2 plus 6 equals 8. Hannah Jeans, 7, had one word for the program: "Cool."

In the program, each student strives to meet a self-established goal for completing a specific number of problems each day.

The program is divided into 26 levels, from A to Z. Each student starts working at Level A. When all the problems in that section are mastered, the student moves on to Level B, then C and so on. Most second-graders are working on addition, though some have moved on to subtraction. In a review section that Hedges devised, some students work on subtraction and addition problems at the same time. That's a little harder to do, Principal Nanci Sheeran said, but the mixed worksheets help students sharpen both skills.

The program seems to appeal to boys and girls equally, Hedges said. "I have seven students who are already in multiplication. That's rare for second-graders. Three of the seven are girls." One of her students, Kellen Croston, has progressed through Level Z, also rare for a second-grader. Croston, who plans to be a mathematician and work for NASA when he grows up, now joins fourth-graders for math class, though he continues practicing math skills in his second-grade class. "I like that it's challenging and that there are different goals," he said. "It's not all the same for all kids."

Shortly before noon each day, students in Hedges' class study math problems at the top of a page. At a signal from Hedges, they spend one minute quickly writing down answers to similar problems at the bottom of the page. When the time is up, they see whether they've completed the two or three rows of problems that each set as a goal.

On one recent day, when the teacher signaled that time was up, most students cheered their progress, waving their pages at one another, Hedges and class visitors to show how well they had done. Setting individual goals is important, Hedges said. Some second-graders write faster than others, and they will complete more problems during timed tests. But slower writers may be doing well at learning math facts. Their individual goals reflect their achievements, she said. Goals also keep students motivated, Hedges said. If motivation flags, she sends flash cards home for extra drills or asks a volunteer to work with a student.

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<http://guampdn.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060318/OPINION02/603180314/1014/OPINION>

Direct Instruction seems effective for teaching elementary students By Carl Peterson

Hot issues not only have a way of making people take sides. It often gets them moving in a direction to learn more in order to support their position. Take Direct Instruction, for instance. In the public discussion no one seemed to doubt that our children were reading better because of it, they seemingly had other less specific reasons to oppose it.

Site visit The education committee of the Guam Chamber of Commerce asked and was granted an opportunity to visit a school using Direct Instruction -- the thought being that if we were to have a position,

we had better make sure we understood what was actually being taught in the classroom. Our request was readily honored and off we went to Carbullido Elementary (recently).

We happened to arrive just as the island overall coordinator arrived. The first thing the principal and the school DI coordinator did was present the report for the previous week -- a stack of paper 1-1/2 inches thick covering every single class for the week, every subject and every student's progress for each day.

The first thing that was obvious was that a lesson "plan" wasn't used; DI actually measures results each day, for every single student. The documented record keeping and accountability was precise -- they knew exactly what the progress of every student was, their mastery of the content. What a concept!

The follow-through is eye-opening: If you miss a day, you must make it up and learn the lesson. The student doesn't fall through the cracks. If they don't pass a section, the teacher goes back and ensures they are brought up to standard.

Fascinating The classroom was fascinating. It was hard to believe our presence didn't faze them or that their attention span could last so long. Kinders were way ahead of the scheduled benchmarks; they were already working on Reading Mastery 2!

We watched them as they learned language skills, not through boring memorized rules but through stories.

We watched first-grader students reading at a third-grade level. The story unit they were reading integrated a number of science and social studies facts into the lesson. These children didn't see it as a science class, they were learning science in interesting story forms -- things about tadpoles, frogs, toads and their life cycles; instruments and tools of science like pulleys, levers, fulcrums and binoculars.

Fourth- and fifth-graders were reading level 5 -- only it was the story "Buck" by Jack London. They were learning geography and history -- the Yukon and the gold rush -- through the story. The teacher had on the board the content standards for these subjects that were being met through this integrated fashion. A very interesting concept.

Amazing progress We were actually dumbfounded. We realized that all one would have to do is go to the classroom and see the amazing progress these specially trained (and seemingly very competent) teachers are making. When asked, the staff said none of the policy board had been to any DI classroom at Carbullido.

And when you read that someone on the board said there was no information on classroom results, one would only have to look at one week's results and it should satisfy any request for information. It is comprehensive, it is complete, and it is accountability in the classroom.

Carl Peterson is a certified financial planner with a master's in financial services. He serves on the Education Committee of the Guam Chamber of Commerce.

<http://srv2.vanguardia.com.mx/hub.cfm/FuseAction.Detalle/Nota.502703/SecID.71/index.sal> By JULIA STEINY / THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL, DALLAS, TX. DIC 18, 2005 (THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS).-

Critics of charter schools have long complained that charters cherry-pick the easy kids and turn away those who need special education and special services. And indeed, if you compare the percentage of special education students in any state's charter schools with that in the regular districts, the data say the critics are right on the money.

Nationally, special ed students are estimated to be about 11 percent of the overall public school population, but only 8 percent at the charters. Any child with an Individualized Education Plan, or IEP, is counted as a special education student, or, as the new buzz would have it, a student with disabilities.

Digging into Rhode Island's data, in *Information Works!* 2005, you find a pattern similar to the nation's. Every R.I. charter school has a significantly smaller percentage of children in special education than its host district. Seemingly, charters plain have an easier job. But the real story is just the opposite.

Indeed, special education is one area where the much-ballyhooed promise of charter-school innovation is actually yielding some solid, illustrative, replicable results. If anything, proportionally more parents with atypical kids are turning to charters for help.

Take Kingston Hill, in North Kingstown, for example. Principal Daniel Parker is himself a special educator with very strong feelings about what works best with all kids, of all kinds. Growing by a grade a year, this charter school's population is now K-4.

He says, "We have small-group instruction for reading and math, based on ability, every morning from Monday to Thursday, across the school. We use the Direct Instruction program, which is a tightly scripted program that teaching assistants can implement. The P.E. teacher has a group; I have a group; everyone takes a group. That's how we get the numbers so small. The hard part, actually, is the constant re-grouping."

The school assesses the students and responds quickly whenever they complain they want more or less challenge. As such, the groups are frequently being reconfigured, without regard to age or grade level, so that each child gets precisely what he or she needs to keep advancing. During the rest of the school day and Friday, the kids are grouped heterogeneously by grade, or by their own choice of project-based learning. Together they have field trips, activities, speakers, and a menu of mini-courses.

Normally, "scripted programs" -- a.k.a., teacher-proof curricula -- are not my idea of heaven. But Parker argues that programs such as Direct Instruction are as creative as a teacher makes them. Most importantly, according to him, "they work." The early grades focus on phonics and decoding. In time, fluency with both reading and math facts becomes the issue. But by the time most children are in the third grade, the scripted program becomes more of a guide, a reference to make sure the kids are where they need to be. Most older, more-advanced groups are reading and discussing books or working out complex math problems.

Parker says, "This strategy completely eliminates the need for resource [special education] services, because general education is all done in small groups. Everyone from the challenged kids to the advanced ones are working at their own pace. If they are working below standard, regardless of IEP, they have a program tailored to them. "This also reduces the number of kids with behavior issues. Our high structure works very well with attention deficit and hyperactive behaviors.

"When a child gets an IEP, it's not a school decision, but a team decision, with the parents. Some parents want the legality of an IEP; some look me in the face and say: 'My kid doesn't need special services.' When children come in from another school with an IEP, we generally keep it for at least a year, to monitor that they are making progress in our environment."

Interestingly, Principal David Bourne tells a somewhat different story about the Paul Cuffee Charter School in Providence. He can't believe the number of kids who come into his building who don't have IEPs from their home school.

Parents seek out Cuffee because their child was obviously not thriving where he was. Cuffee groups its classes heterogeneously at all times. So it depends heavily on resource teachers and extra help to make sure that every kid along a wide spectrum of abilities and disabilities is getting the right challenge and support.

District schools sometimes sequester special needs students -- especially those with behavior problems -- into self-contained classrooms, apart from the general population. The parents of certain students in the CVS Highlander classroom I visited in Providence for last week's column objected to what they felt was segregation and moved their children to Highlander's entirely inclusive model.

From my observation, those ex-self-contained students were far from cherry-picked, easy kids. Charters don't generally have self-contained classrooms for students with special needs; Rhode Island's charters have none. R.I. law forbids charters from asking applicants if the child has an IEP.

The lesson is that the very nature of charter schools -- small classes, strong schoolwide academic strategies, the flexibility to be responsive, and calm atmospheres -- tends to eliminate the need for certain kinds of IEPs. Those typically written by the regular districts for many behavior problems, for certain reading issues and for mild learning disabilities are often rendered unnecessary. To ensure calm respect and a polite atmosphere, charters commonly teach a social curriculum, something also much rarer at regular district schools.

To be fair, no charter can handle what we on the Providence School Board used to call the \$100,000 kid: the ones who need some combination of motorized transport equipment, computerized everything, a one-on-one aide, daily medical assistance and a specially configured classroom.

This coming fall, a small Rhode Island district will have \$120,000 more to spend because one medically complicated child will turn 21, and thus age out of the school district's responsibility. (That the state should be picking up the full tab for these kids is a subject for another day.)

Rhode Island has the highest percentage of special ed students in the country -- currently 19 percent. The inflexible environment of district schools, as compared with charters, allows problems to fester far too often. District-school parents have been known to fight like tigers to get their kids into special education, sometimes just to get them a little extra help.

Rhode Island charters put more of their resources into prevention than into remediation and cure, though that too is necessary sometimes. No R.I. charter schools are deemed "low-performing," whereas 42 district schools are.

Most importantly, charters by nature have more freedom to deploy their staff where staff is needed and to prioritize what they spend their money on. This flexibility makes credible their promise to address each child's individual needs. The lesson, then, is that all schools should have similar freedoms to improve results for the kids and to make the parents happier.

School reforms rate high; use is low Two teaching methods with ties to Oregon are applied in a fraction of schools Wednesday, December 14, 2005 STEVEN CARTER letters@news.oregonian.com Two elementary school reform programs with roots in Oregon show the best evidence of raising student achievement, a new study commissioned by the federal government shows, yet they are barely taught in Oregon classrooms.

The American Institutes for Research, an independent social-science research organization, found that Direct Instruction, founded by Siegfried Engelmann at the University of Oregon, and Success for All, created by Reed College graduates Robert Slavin and Nancy Madden, show strong evidence of raising achievement. Both programs are highly structured, stress phonics and basic skills, and require a standardized way of teaching. The two posted a better rating than 20 other school reform programs reviewed by researchers. The study was paid for by the U.S. Department of Education.

Nationwide, only 64 schools use the full Direct Instruction program, according to the study. No Oregon school uses the full program, although a few public and charter elementaries teach the reading component. There are more Success for All schools -- 1,400 -- but that's a drop in the bucket out of roughly 85,000 elementary schools across the country. Only 16 Oregon schools use Success for All or part of its program, said Cheryl Sattler of the Success for All Foundation in Baltimore.

Kurt Engelmann of the National Institute for Direct Instruction in Eugene said the two programs are little used because they require teachers to hew to specific techniques. Many teachers say the curriculum stifles their creativity and freedom in the classroom. For instance, Direct Instruction demands that teachers follow a script when teaching reading.

"The scripts have been written to convey the most important set of skills students need," said Engelmann, Siegfried's son and institute president. "There are many teachers who find that uncomfortable." Slavin said Success for All is up against big companies marketing competing programs. He said the federal government hasn't made research-proven reform programs a top priority.

Kirk Sherill, principal at Charles F. Tigard Elementary School in Tigard, predicts that mounting pressure from state and federal officials to raise achievement will force schools to turn to proven programs such as Success for All or Direct Instruction.

At 8:40 a.m. every day, all 600 Tigard Elementary students rise from their seats and go to their 90-minute reading classes. Tigard Elementary uses the Success for All reading program in kindergarten through third grade. Each student joins others who are reading at roughly the same level. Even fourth- and fifth-graders are grouped by their performance level for reading and writing, though the school does not use Success for All in the upper grades because teachers think it is too prescriptive, Sherill said.

Phonics and practice Debbie Reid, a first-grade teacher, has the 13 students in her group do silent reading for five minutes at the beginning of class. Then she switches to a quick-paced phonics lesson, giving students words orally, sounding out each syllable. The students respond orally. She glances frequently at her study guide, but her eyes and ears are mostly on her students to be sure each one is keeping up.

Then the students return to their desks to write words on paper. After that, it's another Success for All staple: partner reading. Pairs of students take turns reading to each other. The listener corrects the reader if he or she makes a mistake. At the end of the passage, they ask each other comprehension questions. Reid patrols the room listening to each student read and offers a critique of the session.

Reading scores have climbed steadily at Tigard Elementary since Success for All was introduced about seven years ago. In 1999, 78 percent of third-graders met the state reading benchmark. This year, more than 95 percent did. Progress was similar for fifth-graders.

The only Portland elementary school using Success for All is Vernon in Northeast Portland. It also has seen reading scores jump in the years since it introduced the reading program. This year, more than 95 percent of third- and fifth-graders met state reading benchmarks.

Teachers buy in Principal Joan Miller says Success for All works because teachers bought into the program and have seen the results. "I don't think that all schools could or should use it," she said. "And it won't be successful if it is forced on a school." In fact, both Success for All and Direct Instruction leaders recommend that at least 80 percent of teachers in a school should agree to their programs.

Lynda Hardwick, a veteran teacher at Meadow View School in Eugene, was against Direct Instruction when it was introduced to her school in 1999. "I was one of those teachers who thought it was worse than poison," she said. "I was sure that the little kindergartners could not do it." Hardwick and the other Meadow View teachers were trained in Direct Instruction seven years ago. After using it for a year, she said, she realized how powerful it was in teaching reading. She now teaches other teachers how to use it.

Achievement at the Bethel District school has gone from 70 percent of students meeting reading benchmarks in 2000 to 85 percent in 2005. Humboldt Elementary in Portland uses Direct Instruction for students who are struggling to read, about a third of the 260 students. Mary Peake, Humboldt's reading coach, said teachers choose whether they want to teach Direct Instruction. Humboldt, where 95 percent of students come from low-income families, once used Success for All, but Peake said she thought it was too fast-paced for some students. Eventually, Humboldt went to a combination of Direct Instruction and Open Court, another elementary reading program highly rated by Oregon educators. This year, 92 percent of Humboldt third-graders met reading benchmarks in a school where virtually all students come from poverty. But only 54 percent of fifth-graders met reading benchmarks.

Engelmann of the Direct Instruction institute said publicity from the new research institutes report could trigger new interest in his program and Success for All. "There are some great examples out there of success with these programs," he said. "And after all, it's about the kids, not the teachers." To see the complete national study, go to www.air.org/essi/default.aspx

I am happy to share with you a story of success. One of my students, a 24 year old woman who has been labeled with an IQ of 60 and who did not learn to read in 13 years of public school, is now reading at 85 to 103 words per minute on first readings after only 2 months of 2 1-hour sessions per week. English is a second language for this student, presenting further challenges. I have been using a combination of Direct Instruction (Reading Mastery) and Precision Teaching. She tells her family that she is "so" excited about being able to read and loves it. When pressed by her brother to answer comprehension questions, she knew the answers to every one. Her mother is delighted, for she cannot read English herself. My student's goal is to be able to read the stories in Teach Your Children Well. (She perceives them as more advanced.) It won't be long until she's blazing through them. Thank you all for your persistence, commitment and the gift of your experience. It makes a difference. Janet Dolan DOLAN LEARNING CENTER 18500 156TH Ave N.E. Suite 204 Woodinville, WA 98072

'Direct Instruction' Narrows Wisconsin's Achievement Gap *Phonics, repetition raise reading, math scores, especially among minorities, low-income students* Written By: Sean Parnell Published In: *School Reform News* Publication Date: October 1, 2005 Publisher: The Heartland Institute

A new report shows that "direct instruction" (DI), a teaching method relying heavily on phonics and repetition, has helped raise reading and math scores, particularly among minority and low-income students, in Milwaukee's public schools. The report, prepared by Prof. Sammis White of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, was released by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute (WPRI) in July. White's report examined the test results of 23,000 third- through fifth-grade students, comparing them based on how many years of DI they had received, their economic and ethnic backgrounds, and other factors. White found low-income students with five years of DI tracked between third and fourth grades increased their reading and math scores more than higher-income students did. Reading scores for low-income DI students rose by 4.2 percent, compared to 3.9 percent for higher-income students. Math score improvements were even more impressive, rising 6.6 percent for low-income DI students, compared to 4.7 percent for the others. White wrote, a "few-points distinction between students on several comparisons of test scores ... may seem immaterial, but they are not," pointing out that gains of .8 percent to 2.9 percent may represent a full year's progress for students. **Improvement Increases over Time** The study found the improved test scores were made mostly by students with several years of exposure to DI. Students who had been taught using DI in some grades but not others did not show the same gains. It also found students who received DI were generally poorer and more likely to be nonwhite. For example, fourth graders with five years of DI, who are more likely to be poor than those with no DI, averaged scores of 632 for reading and 619 for math on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts (WKCE) tests, only one point behind students with no DI in each subject. Given the fact that DI students are generally poorer and more likely to be minority than non-DI students, White believes this evidence shows great promise for closing the "achievement gap" between low-income and minority students and their peers. The study found low-income fifth graders with five years of DI averaged 660 for reading and 630 for math, better than the average score for all low-income fifth graders of 646 in reading and 626 in math. "The difference in reading is about equivalent to one half year of progress," White wrote, "and the 660 is again earned by a lower-income population, suggesting an even greater achievement." **Madison Sees Impressive Results** WPRI also released an account of DI used by one school in Madison that further bolsters the evidence showing the approach benefits students. Lapham Elementary School, a kindergarten-through-second grade school, decided in 1999 to abandon the Madison district's preferred reading program, known as "Balanced Literacy" and based on the theory that children can learn reading without explicit phonics training and practice, in favor of a phonics-rich program called "Direct Instruction: SRA Reading Mastery" for first graders. The results have been impressive, particularly for black students. By the time Lapham students reach third grade, their reading scores are near the top of the district. Before switching to DI, only 9 percent of black third graders at the school achieved at the "advanced" level for reading. By 2003, 38 percent were "advanced," compared with 9 percent of "advanced" black students district-wide that year. For low-income students, 32 percent were at the "advanced" level for

reading in 2003, up from 19 percent in 1998. Despite its success, DI's future at Lapham is in doubt. The principal who pushed for teachers to focus on phonics has left, and the new principal has made Balanced Literacy the school's reading program once again. Apparently responding to pressure from administrators in the Madison school district, two new first-grade classrooms were made "off-limits" to DI in 2004. **Research Supports DI Expansion** White recommends that the Milwaukee Public Schools expand use of DI in the classroom. Among other steps, he suggests giving teachers stipends to attend DI training seminars offered by the district, increasing funding for DI programs, and creating a Center for Direct Instruction at a local college or university to expose more teachers to the concept. He also calls for exposing more administrators and principals to DI, in order to overcome their reluctance to support phonics-rich reading programs. WPRI President James Miller agreed with White's findings. "Our recent study on Direct Instruction shows enormous potential for the education of poor, inner-city students," Miller said.

Sean Parnell (parnell@heartland.org) is vice president - external affairs for The Heartland Institute.

For more information ... The two Wisconsin Policy Research Institute reports are available online at <http://www.wpri.org/Reports/Volume18/Vol18no4.pdf> and <http://www.wpri.org/WIInterest/Vol14no2/Esp14.2.pdf>. See also: "High-Poverty Students Excel with Direct Instruction," *School Reform News*, December 2002, <http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artId=10753>, and "Direct Instruction: A Quiet Revolution in Milwaukee Public Schools," *Wisconsin Interest*, <http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artId=9145>.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and autism List - 30 Sep 2005 to 1 Oct 2005 (#2005-312) I'm probably way off the beaten path of the education system. I've experienced the 'overly involved, overly data minded parent' syndrome (I am that mom). Even small meetings for my son result in the director sitting at the table. I think I spent so much time working with state government, that they think I have some sort of power, and I let them think that (I have none).

But, I will let you know that I also teach in an urban district – low scores and countless crazy things going on. But the trend is toward Direct Instruction - math and reading. It's scripted, it's data oriented, it's worked for our kids for a long time. It works for all kids. DISTAR is what our schools are going back to. I have to continually pump up my middle school students about the program - they missed out on information and memorization and all those things that most kids, except the creative 'sponge-kids'(those that absorb knowledge and succeed anyway). Most kids don't get that without rote, repetitious type work. Education hasn't made kids memorize things for years. Education has wanted kids to 'solve' problems rather than memorize.

If this becomes a trend nationwide, our kids can learn alongside many others. Because besides autism, believe me, here are so many kids who can't pay attention, who can't problem solve. But these kids can repeat what the teacher says and keep repeating until they know the information. I spent many hours in workshops, for years, about reading and writing, and gosh when the direct instruction people come, I ask for copies of their beginning programs to use with my son. And then I watch it work for my students.

Education is often driven by the publishers and the current trend, so when teachers and administrators don't have a clue, don't blame them - they are a product of 15 different 'perfect programs', and too confused to make a decision. Just tell them what works for your kid, and then help them get the materials and training to do that program. I have worked 4 years for one district and probably have enough program and teacher manuals for countless reading programs and miracle programs. If I stacked them up, they would be 2 feet taller than I am. It's constant change - teach this - no, teach it this way, no, use this approach.

So, from the other side of the fence, and I know, I'm a frustrated parent too, just tell them how your kid learns and what they need to do to help him/her.

And, if direct instruction comes to your district – support it. It really works for all kids. Our kids have been doing that since ABA. (A parent/teacher with an autistic child)

Doing DI well with the lowest kids in a school will often result in an increasing use of DI in the school as

other teachers see the most instructionally vulnerable kids succeeding and more often than not performing higher than kids who started at higher levels. This is exactly what has happened in my school, which is in a district that does not support ANY explicit teaching "programs" or materials -- the onus is entirely on the student to "take ownership of his own learning." While students certainly need to be active participants in their own learning, setting goals and being involved in the feedback and progress monitoring, putting the entire responsibility on children as young as 4 is to my mind a complete cop-out. By middle school most have psychologically dropped out already, even if their bodies are still in the classroom. Of course, we blame their low SES and lack of "parental involvement." Anything but our wonderful curriculum and instructional procedures. For the last couple of years my second grade Reading Mastery (RM Fast Cycle) kids have outperformed their (non-referred, supposedly "average or better") peers at the end of the year, advancing from 10-36 levels on the DRA (the only test we are supposed to use to measure student reading growth). This year, the top student in Grade 3 was one of the previous year's RM group --a non-reader in second who took off and became a star (he also had some Spelling Mastery (SM) work in Grade 2).

All the Grade 3 kids getting RM/SM assistance ended up outperforming their "average" peers and the classroom teachers noticed this and commented on it several times. Now THEY want to use RM with their "low" groups. Kids who were in Horizons also made great leaps forward, as did the kids using Headsprout. The only data we have is the DRA (I do other testing for our own purposes -- Woodcock (WRMT) and WRAT et al -- but DRA is our only "official" measure) but these kids outperform their non-DI peers over and over. We have a "data wall" with magnets showing where students started, ended up etc. and what intervention they had, if any. You can't help noticing the ones with the dots for Reading Mastery -- they are the only ones that regularly jump 20 levels in a year. This led our principal to buy Corrective Reading for the middle school literacy program, and Morphs for those Grade 7 and 8 teachers willing to try it (so far, two have bravely waded into the fray, with two more to follow). Two primary division teachers have gone off and bought used sets of Fast Cycle for themselves, and so has one of the teaching assistants who does tutoring in her home after school. Some of the teachers refer parents to Funnix or Headsprout if they have a computer and internet access at home. School organization factors as well as district requirements make adopting DI programs whole-class an impossibility; however, even using them surreptitiously with a small group of students changes teachers' teaching behaviour. They start previewing material to be taught, to see what the major concepts are, so as to pre-teach new ideas and vocabulary. They are more conscious of the need for active participation, frequent repetition, fluency requirements, and error correction. They notice the importance of clear, and BRIEF, communication instead of a hemorrhage of words that only confuse students more. When they see that WOW growth in one or more students, they are hooked. They can never look at teaching and learning quite the same way again. I'm going to get Jerry's new book, or several copies (lest I be trampled in the stampeded to borrow it). Never underestimate the power of DI (or other effective instruction, for that matter), to change lives at many levels. From the guerrilla front, Susan Smethurst, Freelton, Ontario

Reading program produces success stories

<http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/NEWSV5/storyV5instruction23w.htm> *Montgomery Advertiser* February 23, 2005 Zenobia Steele didn't always enjoy reading. In fact, she avoided it. "I never could understand the words that well," said Zenobia, 10, a fourth-grade student at Montgomery's Brewbaker Intermediate School. "Reading was really hard for me."

One year after becoming part of a corrective reading program, Direct Instruction, Zenobia now loves to read. She reads to herself. She reads aloud. When another student in her class is reading aloud, she takes her finger and follows along, silently speaking the words to herself. "I love to read now," she said.

Since January 2004, when Direct Instruction was introduced for struggling readers in Montgomery Public Schools, hundreds of students who could not read now are reading above grade level. Educators hope that by the end of the year the number of students not reading at their grade level will be reduced from 6,200 to 3,900.

"We know it's possible," said Sharon Sewell, an education specialist with the school system. "In just one year's time, trained teachers have moved their students through the implementation of Direct Instruction

from non-readers to emerging readers and from non-proficient readers to proficient readers in grades three through eight."

Children like Zenobia and her classmate Cameron Hall, who always shied away from reading, are now reading whatever they can, whenever they can.

"Ever since I was little, I had a hard time reading because I get really nervous," said Cameron, 9. "But since I got into this class I have been doing a lot better. I especially like it when I can read out loud."

At the beginning of each school year, each student is given a test that assesses his or her reading ability. Students then are grouped by their reading levels. If they are in need of Direct Instruction, they are grouped into one of four levels:

Level A Children who either cannot read or read up to 2.5 (second grade, fifth month) level

Level B1 Children who read at the 2.5 through the 3.9 (third grade, ninth month) level

Level B2 Children who read at the 3.9 level through the 4.9 (fourth grade, ninth month) level

Level C Children who read at the 4.9 level through the 7.0 (seventh grade) level.

Zenobia and Cameron are in Level B2 at Brewbaker Intermediate School. Each morning from 9 to 10 a.m., they leave their regular classrooms during reading time and go into Gwen Thompson's classroom.

"We call it the Walk to Read program," Sewell said. "Those who are behind are sent to another classroom that consists of students who are on the same Direct Instruction level. After they are done, the children return to their regular classrooms. When the children complete Level C, they should be reading on grade level or above, up to the seventh grade."



Gwen Townsend teaches an hour of the Direct Instruction reading program Thursday.

Sewell said the main goal of Direct Instruction is closing the achievement gap.

"For the first time in some of these children's lives, they are learning how to read," she said. "It's really incredible. I don't even think the teachers realize what a difference they are making by helping these children with the program."

Thompson has been an elementary school teacher for 22 years but she is in her first year as a Direct Instruction teacher.

"I was one of the lucky ones who was chosen to teach this program, and I love it," she said.

On Friday morning, the 12 students in Thompson's Direct Instruction class sat in two rows of desks. As she read from the teacher's manual, the students followed along in their workbooks.

The students took turns reading different passages. When one student read, the rest of the class followed along by tracing the words with their fingers.

After one student was finished reading, Thompson had the class close their books and answer questions about what they had just read. She had them repeat the important parts over and over again.

"Very good," she told them when they answered correctly.

And when the children answer correctly and follow directions, Thompson keeps track.

A yellow poster board hangs off the chalkboard in her classroom. When the students stay on task, they get a point. If they fall off task or don't answer correctly, she gets a point.

"At the end of the week, whoever gets the most points wins," she said. "And there are special treats for whoever wins. I usually always try to let them win, as long as they do well."

Cameron's mother, Cathy Hall, has noticed the changes in her son.

"Direct Instruction has been very helpful for him," she said. "He is reading faster and he is comprehending the words better."

Ramona Wilson also has noticed the changes in her 12-year-old daughter, who is a student at Georgia Washington Junior High School.

"My daughter hated reading because she had a hard time understanding the words," Wilson said. "I couldn't even get her to read a teen magazine or other things I thought would interest her. In the year since she has been in Direct Instruction, things have totally turned around. Each morning, she reads the newspaper and at nighttime, I can hear her reading out loud in her bedroom."

WHAT MAKES DIRECT INSTRUCTION DIFFERENT?

Direct Instruction is 80 percent repetition and 20 percent new information. Each lesson is taught to mastery, which means pupils understand the materials to a high degree. The students are given many opportunities to read out loud, which increases the speed at which they read a passage accurately. DI also allows teachers to periodically listen to individual children read to make sure they are reading correctly.

The biggest difference between this and other programs is the number of years it has been successful. Research shows that this program has worked for more than 30 years for any child of any economic level who cannot read.

Source: Office of Curriculum and Instruction, Montgomery Public Schools

TO LEARN MORE

For more information on Direct Instruction, visit www.adihome.org. You can also call Montgomery Public Schools at (334) 223-6830 or the Association for Direct Instruction at (800) 995-2464.

KEYS TO SUCCESS Reading program, teamwork lead Glen Park to Blue Ribbon status **By Cynthia L. Garza** Star-Telegram Staff Writer

<http://www.dfw.com/mld/startelegram/news/local/10154225.htm?1c>

FORT WORTH - Glen Park Elementary Principal Cassandra Morris-Surles couldn't wait to show off the school's newest flag, even though the flagpole had been uprooted in ongoing construction. So for now, the large flag is hanging from the ceiling in the entrance of the school, and any visitors taller than 5-foot-5 will run into it. They will know from reading the flag, however, that Glen Park is a 2004 No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon School.

The south Fort Worth school is the only in from Tarrant County -- and one of 15 in Texas and 250 nationwide -- to be named to the prestigious list. "It's just incredible, when you plan together and work together, the results that you get," Morris-Surles said. The Blue Ribbon program recognizes schools that have a high number of economically disadvantaged students, have shown dramatic improvement on state-mandated exams or are academically superior.

Consistency and working together have been keys to Glen Park Elementary's success. Test scores climbed considerably from 1998-99 to 2002-03. Third-grade reading scores, for example, jumped from a 70 percent to a 94 percent passing rate. Overall, the school's achievement levels rose from below the state average in 1999 to considerably above it in almost all areas in 2003.

The student population has also changed over the years, becoming mostly Hispanic, but throughout these changes, many of the teachers remained the same. So did the school's core curriculum.

Morris-Surles attributes much of the school's success to its reading program -- **Reading Mastery** -- which uses a direct-instruction method. Direct instruction was designed during the 1960s to accelerate the learning of at-risk students. Teachers follow scripted, sequenced lesson plans, and students must master each level before advancing to the next. **All of Fort Worth's Title 1 elementary schools use a direct-instruction reading program**, according to district school officials.

"Get ready," first-grade teacher Lillian Johnson told a group of students sitting cross-legged on the floor, waiting to begin a vocabulary review. Johnson zoomed through the vocabulary and a reading lesson, stopping to correct them when needed. Johnson likes this method. She has used it throughout her five years at the school. "Every year, the students I get from kindergarten are better trained and we become more proficient," she said. "They're learning to read in kindergarten." And of course, "you have to know how to read to comprehend math and science," Johnson said.

Although the students might not know exactly what the Blue Ribbon Award is for, they're proud they got it because they know they did something right, Morris-Surles said. Parent involvement at the school has wavered throughout the years, and this year, it's low. Still, parents take pride in the school.

Raquel Padron, who is from Monterrey, Mexico, has a pre-kindergarten student at the school. She doesn't speak English, but she said she has confidence in school officials because many staff members -- including Morris-Surles, who is African-American -- speak Spanish.

•The number of African-American and Anglo students at the 750-student school has declined in recent years while the number of Hispanic students has increased from 51 percent in 1999 to 83 percent this year. More than half of the students are still learning English. •This year, 96 percent of the students qualify for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program. •The south Fort Worth school is rated academically acceptable by the Texas Education Agency this year, which is based largely on TAKS, or the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test. *Cynthia L. Garza, (817) 390-7675 cgarza@star-telegram.com*

A Touch of Class: Hilda Pereira <http://www.kuam.com/news/11498.aspx> by **Sabrina Salas Matanane**,
KUAM News Thursday, November 11, 2004

The sound of learning in progress fills a local classroom, with students listening attentively while teachers follow through on their lesson plans. It's at J.Q. San Miguel Elementary School in Mongmong-Toto-Maite where KUAM News finds a very special teacher. "I also taught at PC Lujan at the very beginning of my teaching experience and I asked for a transfer here and I got the position here, so since then I have been teaching here, said 5th grade teacher Hilda Pereira.

For her, being a teacher comes natural. She pays close attention to her students. Like other teachers who have their own unique style to stimulate the minds of their pupils Mrs. Pereira believes in engaging in dialogue with her students. Despite a set curriculum for teachers she uses different sorts of techniques to force her students to think and express themselves.

She said, "Well, with our direct instruction being implemented in our schools, that's one of the things that we use, another thing is I have different styles of using our basic readers and other supplemental supplies and materials that are given to us in our school system. My styles that I use are a lot of oral discussion a lot of feedback from the kids and there seat assignments and so forth."

Humbled by being nominated by her peers as a teacher with a touch of class, Mrs. Pereira doesn't take all the credit, for the accolade, saying it's all about teamwork when it comes to shaping the minds of the future. "I need support from the parents, the families, support from our administrators, I also need the child's part and his responsibility and of course being a professional person, I'll always have to be there to guide the child and to make sure that my guidelines of standards and expectations are met and goals," she added.

Teaching for more than two decades, its apparent there's nothing she'd rather be doing. "I have a lot of pride in my job. I love teaching and I love my students and all that and for those who are in a teaching system it is an honor to be in the classroom working with kids. I'm very, very proud to say that I am a teacher for our public school system and I support public schools very much," she added.

If you would like to nominate a teacher that you feel has A Touch of Class for our series for School Year 2004-2005, certain criteria must be met. The nominee must be a full-time teacher of any subject any grade from preschool through high school; the nominator must be a fellow teacher, school administrator, student or parent and must provide a letter of nomination to KUAM.

Modbee.com Story shortchanges school The story about Eisenhut Elementary School ("Eisenhut teachers receiving mixed messages," Oct. 29, Page A-16) was a slap in the face to teachers and families they serve. One sentence about its Academic Performance Index score, which is above average, and no attention to the quality instruction and programs that qualified Eisenhut for the Distinguished School Award left much of the story untold.

Factors keeping Eisenhut from meeting its goal and the fact that the state is constantly changing the formula for calculating the API were not mentioned. Test scores over the past three years increased by 115 points, and they were not in the bottom third of scores statewide. Eisenhut was awarded the 2004 Association for Direct Instruction Excellent School Award for an outstanding implementation of Direct Instruction programs. Unfortunately, schools are judged on students who are enrolled from the October CBEDS date to the test date of that school year. If they come to a school two or more years behind, it is impossible to catch them up in 140 days. Staff members and parents believe that we went from good to excellent because of our dedication to students.

PATRICIA ELSTON Reading specialist, Eisenhut Elementary School Modesto *Posted on 11/07/04 05:00:24* <http://www.modbee.com/opinion/letters/story/9394970p-10302552c.html>



Wednesday, September 8, 2004 • Southport, N. C.

<http://www.stateportpilot.com/stories/charterschool.html>



Photo by Sarah Peterson Dr. Kerry Hempenstall (left) administers a reading fluency test to kindergartner Sydney Parker at Roger Bacon Academy as headmaster Mark Cramer observes.

Teach the children well: School charts different course By [Sarah Peterson](#) Staff Writer

Charter schools across the nation have found themselves on the defensive, trying to convince others that their students are keeping up with public school counterparts.

Roger Bacon Academy, located in the Maco community of northern Brunswick County, dismisses last month's article in *The New York Times* that said test scores reveal charter schools are lagging behind. "That was just one snapshot," said headmaster Mark Cramer. "There are more studies that show charter schools are effective."

Cramer recently sent a letter to school trustees explaining why he thought the article was misleading. Roger Bacon's student composite score of 86.5 percent this past school year was higher than Belville Elementary School (76.7 percent) and Leland Middle School (79.6 percent) in the ABCs of Public Education annual report.

Results of *The New York Times* study were disseminated by the American Federation of Teachers, an organization that opposes the existence of charter schools. The study used one sample from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which tested less than one percent of charter schools in seven states. It found that fourth-graders who attend charter schools performed about half a year behind students in public schools in both reading and math.

It concluded only 25 percent of fourth-graders in charter schools were proficient in reading and math, compared to traditional public schools, where 30 percent of students were proficient in reading and 32 percent were proficient in math.

The article contended a predominance of children in these schools were those who turn to charters after having severe problems at their neighborhood schools. Charter schools often have been at the center of controversy. Some people accuse them of taking the best students from the poorest schools.

Many students come to Roger Bacon Academy because they have not found success in the public school system. "Most students re-enroll," Cramer said. Every year there is a waiting list for most grades.

Both of Tonja Osborne's children began attending the school in 2003 after several years on the list. She credits the school with her children's newfound success. "My children's performance has gone up," she said. "With my youngest child, his attitude has come around. It was well worth the wait."

The school opened in 2000 with 68 students from five area counties in grades K-2. This year, enrolment was at 516 for grades K-6. The plan is to add a new grade each year to eventually serve elementary through high school students.

What local scores say The first year of state testing was in 2001-02 when the composite score was 51.5 percent. "I was surprised by those initial results," Cramer said. "On pre-EOG (end-of-grade) tests the score was 92 percent in math and 86 percent in reading."

To better prepare students, extra materials were provided. "We do not teach to the test," the headmaster said. "We give them good test-taking strategies."

Hard work on the part of teachers and students paid off the next year, based on results. For 2002-03, the composite score was 82.5 percent proficiency. The large jump qualified Roger Bacon Academy as a North Carolina School of Distinction.

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which also oversees charter school performance, the academy met adequate yearly progress. The score was 86.5 percent for the 2003-04 school year. Again, it was a school of distinction and met adequate yearly progress.

The results are similar for charter schools across the state. In North Carolina public schools, 70 percent of students are at or above grade level. For charter schools, 78 percent of students are at or above grade level. "Charter schools are having great success in this state," Cramer said.

They are not just successful in North Carolina. There are more than 2,000 charter schools in 38 states serving approximately 500,000 students. The first charter schools legislation was a parent initiative in the Minnesota in 1991. Arizona has the highest number of charter schools, followed by California, Michigan, Texas, Florida and North Carolina.

In California, charter schools produce stronger student achievement among low-income students than traditional public schools by a margin of nearly five percent, according to statistics.

Charter schools in Michigan showed greater gains than the statewide average in all but one of ten grades and subjects tested on the 2003 state test.

Directing success Cramer credits the school's teaching method for the continuing growth of student achievement. Roger Bacon Academy uses direct instruction in all of its classrooms. "I would directly relate the success at this school to direct instruction," the headmaster said. "There are three things that we do: Reward good behavior; teach to mastery so every child will learn; then we trust the child." The goal of the method is to accelerate learning by maximizing efficiency in the design and delivery of instruction. It requires intense and constant student interaction. "It's a great curriculum," Cramer said. "The data is overwhelming in support of DI. I can't say why more people aren't using it." In Brunswick County Schools, some classrooms have used the teaching method but it has not been used across the board. The exceptional children program at Leland Middle School incorporated the method. Virginia Williamson Elementary School has used it most extensively.

"(Virginia Williamson) was one of two schools that got school of distinction," said Faye Nelson, who supervises the elementary and middle schools and staff development. "It works with at-risk kids and kids who need structure." Nelson said the county school system is currently studying different options, including direct instruction for schools that have not met adequate yearly progress. "When you look at direct instruction and the research, it shows that if it is used properly, then it is successful," she said. "It's also a program that teachers need to buy into to make it work."

While it can be difficult to teach, the style is something that attracts instructors to Roger Bacon Academy, Cramer said.

Expert visits school The formation of a school around direct instruction is what brought Dr. Kerry Hempenstall, a senior lecturer in psychology at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia, to the school for two weeks to assist teachers and students.

“Dr. Hempenstall is an authority in direct instruction, and we have scheduled a number of in-service training sessions to help our teachers fine-tune their techniques,” Cramer said. Hempenstall is spending most of his sabbatical year in the United States, visiting schools that have demonstrated effective reading instruction.

“For three months, I have been a wandering academic, trying to contribute to the schools I visit and learn at the same time,” he said.

He has been involved in direct instruction for more than 20 years, teaching it at the university level and to parents for use in the home. The data and hard science behind the method is what led Hempenstall to devote his career to it.

“To come here to Roger Bacon where it’s all happening is very exciting,” he said. “To see it being used here right from day one gives the students a wonderful opportunity to avoid the debilitating effects of failure.”

In his native Melbourne schools may adopt the program, but he said it is often too little, too late. “It’s always been evident from the research that you’re better off to teach them properly the first time and avoid the problems that come from failure,” he said.

There are several school systems across the United States that have implemented direct instruction beyond a single classroom and are seeing results. In North Carolina, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools use it to teach reading in grades K-5, and it has improved scores.

A handful of elementary schools in Baltimore, Md., also use direct instruction in reading, as well as writing and mathematics. While math scores varied, reading scores show that students taught by direct instruction outscored others in reading.

“It’s not magic — it’s systematic,” Hempenstall said. “It is capable of working when properly implemented. It’s not just a flight of fancy. It’s really carefully designed and tested.”

Schools are trying lots of different things, especially with sanctions that can come from failure under No Child Left Behind legislation.

“Just trying something does not necessarily produce results,” Hempenstall said. “Schools leap, but the leap has to have a planned direction. Some may leap into direct instruction without knowing what it involved and without training. When they plan for direct instruction and get some assistance to implement it properly, then the results start to come.”

Direct instruction is one-on-one teaching to a class. Students repeat ideas, concepts and answers. The teacher does not move on until everyone masters the lesson.

“I teach, I observe, I give the students feedback and enough practice to make sure they remember,” Hempenstall said. “Lessons become cumulatively more complex.”

Another component of direct instruction is a positive learning environment.

“It’s all about, ‘You can do it, Johnny,’” the professor said. “We’re confident you can do it, and we’ll make sure you can do it. When Johnny begins to think he can do it, he’s more confident. Self-esteem comes from a sense of accomplishment.”

The initial focus of direct instruction was to improve basic skills, such as reading, writing and math. Research also shows that it works for content areas in history, science, social studies and geography.

During his visit to Roger Bacon Academy, Hempenstall sat in on some classes, giving teachers tips and hints afterwards. “They’ve been very open to feedback,” he said. “One of the principles of direct instruction is if a child is not learning, it’s because we aren’t teaching properly.”

Hempenstall also helped assess all of the school’s students. Last week, he was working with kindergarten classes, testing individual students’ fluency rate and their ability to read.

“We’re looking at the test to predict which students might have problems in reading,” he said. “It’s better to put a fence at the top of a cliff than an ambulance at the bottom. Vigilance at kindergarten is the fence.”

In higher grades, students are tested on their reading speed and accuracy. Cramer said the school will continue the assessments. At a minimum, students will be tested three times a year. At-risk students can be tested every three weeks to track their progress.

“By doing this, we hope to prevent students from falling into that failure cycle,” Hempenstall said.

Could Madison Use Milwaukee’s Successful Reading Programs? Norm and Dolores Mishelow, Madison

Principal Norm Mishelow will discuss how academic achievement excels at Barton, because the school teaches reading using Direct Instruction (DI), a program that provides a detailed script for teacher-student interaction. The program focuses on small group learning and emphasizes phonics. The school also uses a math curriculum that focuses generally on building basic arithmetic skills. Norm’s wife Dolores is a former principal of 27th Street School which was a failing school before she took over. She started DI, and their test scores soared. She used to believe in all the whole language and warm fuzzy teaching until, of course, she saw the light with DI. Norm was not using DI until Dolores nudged him to try it (after she retired) and his scores, though decent without DI, hit the stratosphere once DI got humming. The same curriculum in MMSD elementary schools could help close the achievement gap, cut instructional costs, reduce special ed referrals, and raise achievement overall. You can read more about Barton School at <http://www2.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/barton>.

To summarize the test results of our little two-year charter school: 16/6/2004 Reading First K. class 2002: started at 57%tile - average to 89 and then to 93 at end of 1st grade. Math First K. class 2002: started at 57%tile - average to 85 and then to 91 by end of the 1st grade. Reading Starting at First grade 2002: started at 36%tile - average to 65 and then to 80 by end of 2nd grade. Math Starting at First grade 2002: started at 48%tile - average to 69 and then to 77 by end of 2nd grade. Reading Second K. class 2003: started at 35%tile - average to 88 by end of this year 04 Math Second K. class 2003: started at 46%tile - average to 76 by end of this year, 04. Chuck Arthur carthur@teleport.com

A better way to read 8/6/2004 At Lapham Elementary, a successful teaching technique finds little support among school district officials By Katherine Esposito
<http://www.isthmus.com/features/clipfile/clip.php?intclipfileid=3> Sennett Middle

School teacher Sara Obern says too many black children are categorized as 'special ed' because they're ill served by the district's reading program.

If watching kids succeed is a teacher's joy, then watching them fail is an absolute nightmare. In her 14 years of teaching, mostly in special education, Sara Obern has witnessed too many failures.

Her daughter's friend is a case in point. "She's in fourth grade, and she can't even read," says Obern, who teaches at Sennett Middle School. Obern is a tall woman, with a mane of wavy, graying hair and a ready laugh. Right now, she's dead serious. "She's been in Reading Recovery and Title 1 and SAGE [all supplementary programs], but I don't think she can read all the months of the year. And it just breaks my heart."

Obern frets that the girl will fail upcoming fourth-grade tests. "What's that do to this kid? She's a wonderful sweet kid. Her mother and father are just scraping to get by, and they're just praying that their kids are safe each day. That's all that they can do."

If the girl had attended Lapham Elementary, a kindergarten-through-second-grade school in the Tenney Park neighborhood, chances are that she would not be struggling, says Obern. Five years ago, in 1999, Lapham bucked the Madison district's reliance on the Balanced Literacy reading program in favor of a grounding in explicit phonics for nearly all first-grade students. The results have been impressive. They have also been ignored.

Former Lapham principal Barbara Thompson often invited district administrators to visit, but they never seemed interested, she said last spring, before quitting to become superintendent of the New Glarus school district.

Lapham's innovative approach has resulted in reading scores for Marquette Elementary third-graders that are virtually unsurpassed districtwide. (Lapham's K-2 program is paired with Marquette's 3-5 grades.) Scores for African American students particularly stand out.

In 1998, just 9% of Marquette black third-graders were considered "advanced" readers, as measured on the third-grade state reading comprehension test; by 2003, 38% were "advanced." District-wide, only 9% of black children scored as "advanced" in 2003.

For Marquette's low-income kids, the "advanced" figure was 32%, up from 19% from five years earlier. For all students combined, the school ranked a close second to Shorewood Elementary, with 52% scoring "advanced." (See the chart on page 10 for school comparisons.)

Even more impressive, Marquette's high scores have come without reliance on Reading Recovery, a costly catch-up program for struggling first-grade readers used by other Madison elementary schools.

As Madison agonizes over how to fill a nearly \$10 million school budget shortfall, and as more and more poorly educated minority kids flow into the Madison schools, some observers think it's time to follow the Lapham model for reading.

Direct Instruction Lapham Elementary, a handsome brick school at 1045 E. Dayton St., was built in 1939, a Public Works Administration project during the Roosevelt years. Decorative tiles cover Lapham's hallway floors; colorful children's art graces the walls. At a pint-sized table in a spacious classroom on the third floor, reading teacher Sandy Blume faces an eager trio, two boys and a girl. Each child is in Title 1, a federally funded program serving academically struggling kids who are frequently low-income.

At Lapham, if you're in Title 1 for reading help, you can get Sandy Blume, the district's best-known practitioner of the Direct Instruction teaching technique.

It is the Friday before Valentine's Day, and debauchery is in the air.

"Why is everybody eating candy today?" Blume asks, pretending to wonder. Her voice is bright. She asks one of the boys to wash his hands. Then, she starts the lesson.

"Get ready!" she says, in a singsong voice. "Eh!"

The children, all first-graders, pipe back. "Eh!"

"Get ready! Eh!"

The kids respond in unison. "Eh!"

"Get ready! 'Sennnt!' It rhymes with 'went'!"

The kids chime back, excited. "Wet!" they exclaim.

Sandy corrects them. "That word has an 'n' in it. Say it again! 'Sent!'"

They get it. She soon moves them on to sentences.

"Get ready!" she calls.

The children read in unison, fingers pointing to every word. "A-girl-said-to-a-man, 'Let-us-go-to-the-pet-shop.'"

Painstakingly, they continue. "So-the-man-and-the-girl..." --

"Don't get fooled!" Sandy quickly interjects -- "Went!"

"Went!-down-the-road."

Later in the lesson, the kids play a word game and receive their night's assignment. A page of sentences to read to Mom or Dad, or, in the case of kids lacking reliable relatives, to a favorite teacher. A previous day's homework sheet bearing an adult's signature earns them two Skittles. Today, one of the boys eagerly chooses plain green and sour. They depart the room and trip down the hall.

Welcome to Direct Instruction, Lapham style. It's embodied in a specific curriculum called "SRA Reading Mastery." Precocious readers don't need it; others who catch on are fast-tracked through skill levels. Kids who don't get it keep hammering away until they do.

Trained first-grade teachers usually do Direct Instruction (DI) in 30-minute increments; the school also employs Blume, a half-time Title 1 teacher, and Jill Jones, a 1/3-time DI coach who monitors kids' progress.

Says Virginia Woods, a Lapham education assistant: "The criticism is that it's too repetitive, but we find that with kids who have difficulty making connections, that the repetitions work. They build a foundation."

An 'airtight' technique Later in February, I visit the classroom of Ken Swift, a tall, bearded veteran first-grade teacher who's experimented with many teaching techniques. One, known as Whole Language, is based on a belief that kids can incidentally learn the connections between letters and sounds if they're immersed in a literature-rich environment. Balanced Literacy is a Whole Language spin-off.

Yet these aren't the only or the best ways to teach reading, Swift now thinks. This year, Swift has three reading groups in his class of 14. On the day I visit, a loose assortment of kids are engaged in various reading activities: writing in journals, silent reading. Sunlight filters into the room and streaks their hair.

Four children -- three girls, one boy; three white, one black -- sit at a small table with Swift as he clicks his fingers and guides them through a Direct Instruction passage. "Get ready!" he calls. They return a chorus of responses. "Some-bo-dy-told-them-to-come-down-the-stairs!"

Swift initially resisted the "scripted" nature of Direct Instruction, and even now injects his own humor. "But I do basically follow the script," he says. "I've learned over the years that it's for good reason, because it does the job so well."

Of five students in Swift's class who are learning to read the Direct Instruction way, only one qualifies for Title I help. These at the table do not, so Ken doses it out himself. Over the years, he says, he's learned that affluence does not always predict reading success. His own son is dyslexic and learned to read from Blume, in fact.

"They can be from a mansion on Sherman Avenue or from the Salvation Army homeless shelter, and they still may struggle," he says. "But for kids who may not have a lot of support at home, this is a really good program. It's really airtight."

During each school year, continual evaluations allow Lapham staff to occasionally transfer kids into different reading groups, sometimes with different teachers. Such fluid movement of kids among classrooms was a hallmark of Thompson's methods, according to Swift.

"I know a lot of approaches say that you don't distinguish between reading levels, you teach all the kids together," he tells me later. "In certain parts of the curriculum, that's very fine. But in the teaching of reading, and in some degree math, you want to have kids working at their peak ability. You don't want to have some kids being really bored, while other kids are overly challenged."

Where's the proof? As controversial as the federal No Child Left Behind Law is, it does at least one good thing by emphasizing the need for "evidence-based" teaching practices.

There's good reason to demand that rigor. "The 'evidence-based' idea is a reaction against the traditional educational policy, which is that people introduce new curricula without prior testing," says UW-Madison psychology professor Mark Seidenberg, who co-authored a much-discussed 2002 article in *Scientific American*, "How Should Reading Be Taught?"

Seidenberg is serious and intense, shuffling playing cards as he talks, seated behind a handsome desk of cherry wood stacked high with reports. "It's like introducing a new drug without having done clinical trials. So, people said, 'Whole Language, sounds like a good idea to me!' One could have asked, does this make kids better readers? Those studies weren't done. They're being done now."

The new neurological research shows the critical nature of "decoding," the specific instructions that explain connections between spoken language and the written word. "That is a crucial step," he says. "You leave that step out, then the [Whole Language] idea that the kid's going to be able to guess the words from the context, because they've got a lot of background knowledge, or because they understand the structure of stories, that's not going to be sufficient."

Obern agrees. She notes that some families don't have books in the house. And some kids struggle over the meaning of simple words. "These kids are trying to generalize, they know there's some rules to this game, but [they wonder], 'Won't somebody just tell me the rules?'"

Teaching "the rules" was recommended in a 2001 report known as "Put Reading First," issued by the National Reading Panel. "Systematic phonics instruction is significantly more effective than nonsystematic or no phonics instruction in helping to prevent reading difficulties among at-risk students and in helping children overcome reading difficulties," the report stated.

Over the years, phonics has been incorporated into Reading Recovery, the Madison district's flagship reading program for struggling first-graders. It is a flawed program, however, some contend. Only a fraction of the kids who need intensive help actually receive it; in 2001-02, 325 first-graders were served, two-thirds of them minorities. Furthermore, half don't "graduate," and require more assistance. Sometimes that means a referral to special ed.

It's also expensive. Reading Recovery cost \$1.3 million in 2001-02, with nearly \$1 million of that coming from the school district's general fund. The price per student was about \$4,000. During an earlier budget crunch in 2002, the consulting firm Virchow & Krause suggested cutting back or even eliminating Reading Recovery. "It is the highest-cost literacy program," the report stated. It was retained.

Seidenberg calls Reading Recovery "an inefficient use of money. If some of those methods were just incorporated into the curriculum, you'd have fewer kids who need to go to Reading Recovery. And the big bucks that are going to Reading Recovery could be used for other things, which we know teachers and schools need."

District administrators, however, remain wedded to the status quo. Last month, when they applied for a chunk of money under "Reading First," the \$5 billion federal program to boost the nation's reading scores, Direct Instruction was nowhere mentioned. Nor was Lapham. Instead, the district asked for more money to continue "balanced literacy" at five Madison schools.

The problem with "balanced literacy," says Seidenberg, "is that it could mean anything. It depends on the teacher. It depends on how long ago they came out of ed school." What Obern and others see in the Madison schools is a scattershot, albeit well-intentioned, approach to reading instruction.

Special Ed and DI In the Madison schools, special education teachers most often use Direct Instruction. In 1997 at Glendale, Sara Obern was assigned to teach a group of special ed kids: one autistic, one emotionally disturbed, one labeled "cognitively disabled," and seven called "learning disabled." Several had already been through Reading Recovery. All but the autistic child were black.

Obern grouped them according to certain innate traits -- "some were real bouncy, high-energy kids, others were ponderers who needed time to think things through" -- and gave each a daily 20-minute lesson from an SRA Direct Instruction book. By year's end, every learning-disabled child had moved ahead two grade levels in reading, far enough to drop the LD designation. The cognitively disabled student had also improved.

Obern was thrilled for the kids, but appalled that it took a "special ed" classification to provide those benefits. "It made me so angry just having those kids and realizing, 'They're not disabled!'" she says now. "They're saying this kid is failing because there's something wrong with this kid. But if I can have him come up two years in one year, there's nothing wrong with that kid."

Meanwhile, statistics show the Madison district is far above the state average in its numbers of black kids labeled "special ed." (Madison referred 33% of its 4,764 black students to special ed in 2002-03; the statewide figure was 19%.) Obern thinks the Madison figure is so high because many first-graders need a reading curriculum that is far more explicit than Balanced Literacy.

"DI is so carefully thought out that it doesn't matter how many wacky things are happening in a kid's home and life," she says. "Just 10 to 15 minutes of this, and it's like a potent medicine, they get it! But if you just say" -- here she raises her voice to a lilt -- "'Oh, what's the print in your environment?' Lady, you're speaking from another planet."

Obern's abiding frustration is her conviction that the district's menu of Balanced Literacy is heavily weighted against the one program that works well with the kids who need it most: phonics as taught in Direct Instruction.

"Yes, we give kids warm, fuzzy, welcoming classrooms, but we're not teaching every kid in the way he can learn," Obern says. "It doesn't matter how nice the teachers are if you can't do what the kid sitting next to you can. You feel stupid, even though you're not."

At Lapham, she says, "it took big guts. And Barb Thompson was willing, because she saw the data. She saw the results."

Kids left behind I met Barbara Thompson one year ago when she was still at Lapham. The prior year, she had been denied the vacant principal slot at East High, effectively ending her chances of promotion within the Madison district. Like Art Rainwater, she is from the South, but she's black, not white. She grew up poor, in rural Georgia. In college, she said, she realized that some kids had indeed been left behind.

"I feel strongly about all kids, but particularly strongly about children of color," she told me then, in a calm drawl, seated in a Lapham classroom. "You often hear that they can't learn, and that they belong in special ed. I've heard it."

She'd seen Direct Instruction techniques used with great success in all-black Milwaukee inner-city schools and was happy to see it work at Lapham. "Eighty percent of the district does okay with Balanced Literacy.' The population we're trying to reach is a population that Madison typically hasn't taught well."

"There's nothing wrong with these kids' abilities to learn to read," Thompson continued. "But you don't want them turning to a life of crime because they dropped out of school."

Last month, I presented the Lapham story to Art Rainwater. Rainwater, a big, charismatic man with a distinctive Southern accent of his own, had just returned from a talk with Memorial High students. We chatted affably for a few minutes, but when I compared Lapham's "advanced" reading scores to a few other Madison schools', he turned curt.

"Lapham is a great example of what works at Lapham," he said, testily. "It is not a great example of what works at Lincoln." With obvious pride, he mentioned the better grades that many black students have achieved, districtwide. (See sidebar on page 10.) "Find me another place that that's happened to. We must be doing some things right. Just because we don't do what you want us to doesn't mean that we're wrong."

There was defensiveness in his rising voice. "Believe me, my whole life is spent trying to help children be successful, so any indication that I could take something over here that would make all our children successful, and that I would withhold that from other children, I find insulting. Absolutely insulting!"

Lapham's uncertain future Today, Barbara Thompson is gone from Lapham, and the new principal, Kristi Kloos, has had to navigate a middle course between Rainwater administration directives and the preferences of Lapham teachers. The school's reading program is now officially Balanced Literacy, she told me. Furthermore, due to changing city demographics, Lapham is set to lose its small share of Title 1 money that paid for Sandy Blume's time.

In Duy Nguyen's first-grade classroom, Kloos bends down to inspect a brightly colored picture book that a redheaded boy eagerly shows her. "That's the ogre's castle and that's the knight's castle," he says. "Are you wondering why there's a window?" She smiles.

Unlike Ken Swift, Nguyen does not use Direct Instruction, though one Title 1 student receives it through Sandy Blume. On the day I visit, I see a "word family" wall, featuring the letters "D, U, I, R, S and G." There are "book boxes" designed to meet every child's reading level. There is a story about an owl printed on a wall poster. There is the suffix "est" written on a board, and two children are working hard to make words. One girl in purple kneels over her paper and writes "vest," "nest" and "rest."

Ken Swift's classroom is not so different. What is different, however, is the number of teaching strategies he offers. And he says that while he likes Kristi Kloos very much, he greatly admired Barb Thompson.

"I feel Barb really stuck her neck out, advocated for that program, against the wishes of Art Rainwater and people downtown," he says. "She did things that she felt were important. She really did have kids first in her thinking."

Two losses in a year -- Barb Thompson and now the Title 1 funding -- have left him apprehensive about the future of the Lapham reading program. For her part, Sara Obern contents herself with guerrilla tactics: sneaking Direct Instruction into the lives of the needy kids she meets at her school. But there are so many others.

"Balanced Literacy means you use a mixture of Whole Language and phonics," she says, a touch of cynicism in her voice. "Yes, you surround the kids with good books. Yes, you read out loud to them. Yes, you use many different approaches. Except -- let's guess. Which one?"

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May 3, 2004 <http://www.registerguard.com/cgi-bin/printStory.py?name=b4.cr.ed.places.0503&date=20040503>

Private school focuses on reading **School:** Central Little School **Location:** 87980 Territorial Road, Veneta **Grades:** Preschool through grade five **Head teacher:** Sonia Hall, who has been with the school for 28 years. A former Forest Grove teacher who had left the profession to be home with her children, Hall started as one of two teachers just a couple of years after the school opened and never left. "I just love the teaching end of it," she said. "It's fascinating watching these kids with no reading skills at all and then the light bulb just goes on and, 'Wow, I can read this. This is something I understand.' It's just a marvelous thing to see that bulb come on."

Mission statement: "If you can read, you can do anything."

History: The school began as a private kindergarten at Central Elementary School 30 years ago, under then-Principal Russ Ross, Hall said. The school had no public kindergarten at the time. Its key purpose was to teach the Direct Instruction method of reading, a scripted, phonics-based approach developed at the University of Oregon. When Central started a public kindergarten in the 1980s, the Little School began serving preschool-age children. The school was then located at the Central Grange, next to Central Elementary. In 1999, after years of collaboration and a break on rent from the Grange, the relationship broke down and the Little School had to relocate. The school, which expanded to a full elementary this year, is now in a building at Territorial and Bolton Hill Road that formerly housed a parochial school and before that a retail outlet.

What's distinctive about the school: Its focus on reading, and belief in the Direct Instruction method. "That's really been one of the most special things," kindergarten teacher Justine Voyles said. "The feeling that we have is that if you give children that skill, then all of the other things they might be interested in they will be able to explore." Voyles noted that virtually every student in the school is reading at or above grade level, some of them several grades above. Next week, the third-, fourth- and fifth-graders for the first time will be taking the Oregon Statewide Assessment reading and math tests. Because they are able to assess abilities on a daily basis, teachers know the kids will do very well, but they want to be able to show evidence to prospective parents.

Number of students: 66 **Number of staff:** Five, all of whom teach. Parent volunteers assist with office work and other duties. **Average teacher experience:** 10 years **Class sizes:** For the preschool and prekindergarten classes, the maximum class sizes are 24, although this year they are 15. The K-5 classes have a cap of 16, and this year hover around 12. **Classes:** The all-day K-5 classes offer reading, math, music, P.E., science and Spanish. **Student makeup:** Most come from the Fern Ridge area, though a few come from Eugene. Most go on to attend Fern Ridge Middle School. **Tuition:** For preschool and prekindergarten, which are half-day programs, the cost is \$85 per month. For K-5, the cost is \$160 per month. **Web site:** www.centrallittleschool.com

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/metro/jan04/198554.asp> Jan. 9, 2004 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Bush honors principal's work Barton School's success under initiative lauded By ALAN J. BORSUK

Marking the second anniversary of the signing of the "No Child Left Behind" education law on Thursday, President Bush singled out Milwaukee's Barton School and its principal, Norman Mishelow, for their success in educating low-income children.

Bush was joined on stage at an elementary school in Knoxville, Tenn., by five educators, including Mishelow, who described the success they have had using educational practices in line with the law.

Mishelow told Bush about the reading and math programs at the high-scoring kindergarten-through-sixth-grade school at 5700 W. Green Tree Road and about the school's success with using about 50 volunteer tutors to help students. Mishelow praised the school's staff as "the best, most dedicated staff in the country."

The school teaches reading using Direct Instruction, a program that provides a detailed script for teacher-student interaction. The program also focuses on small group learning and emphasizes phonics. The school also uses a math curriculum that focuses generally on building basic arithmetic skills.

According to a White House transcript of the session, after Mishelow spent several minutes describing the school's success, Bush said, "We're learning what works when it comes to reading. It's not guesswork anymore. For a while it was a guesswork. You might remember the great debates, capsulized - whole language versus phonics. There was a lot of political capital expended over that.

"And all of a sudden the accountability system starts to clarify reality. And as Norm (Mishelow) mentioned, they've chosen a program and a curriculum that is now working. Why do we know? Because they measure. They're able to tell because there is a measurement standard. The other thing that happens when Norm's school does well, other schools say, wait a minute, old Norm doesn't seem to be all that good, how is he able to do what he's doing?"

To laughter, Mishelow cut in, asking, "Who've you been talking to?" "Well," Bush said. "Just guessing, Norm."

The president went on to say, "As Norm mentioned to you, he's taken a school of children who - as we say - used to say, tough to educate, and showing what can happen. I appreciate, Norm, your leadership. . . . I know the people of Milwaukee are thrilled that you are where you are."

Barton School was the only school in Wisconsin to receive recognition from the U.S. Department of Education this year as a "Blue Ribbon" school, a long-standing federal program that has been retooled by the Bush administration to emphasize provisions of the "No Child Left Behind" law.

After the event, Mishelow called it "one of the highlights of my 32-year career, just to be on the stage with these people and to be with the president and the secretary of education. . . . The whole thing was amazing."

Mishelow said a White House aide called Tuesday, asking if he would be part of the program. The White House paid the expenses of the trip.

Mishelow said he had seen some of the school's scores from standardized testing done in November, and more than 90% of the school's fifth- and sixth-grade students were rated proficient or better in reading and none was in the "minimal proficiency" category. The school's fourth-grade scores a year ago were well above state averages and among the highest in Milwaukee. A large majority of the school's students are African-American and have family income levels that qualify them for free or reduced-price lunch.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A32026-2003Dec3.html>

Direct Instruction Gets Direct Results By Karin Chenoweth Thursday, December 4, 2003; Page GZ06

Last week I said that Baltimore's City Springs Elementary School has successfully used Direct Instruction, a program Montgomery County is putting into its high-poverty elementary schools. I based my statement about City Springs on data showing that 61 percent of the third-graders and 75 percent of the fifth-graders at City Springs met state reading standards last year. But, I decided, I had to see the school for myself.

City Springs students are housed in one of those grim urban school buildings with no obvious way to enter. Mid-morning visitors find all the doors locked and have to push a button near one of the back doors to alert someone in the office to buzz them in.

Across the street is a bigger, even more grim, middle school. They are both surrounded by low-rise housing projects. Brick, broken concrete and iron bars form the dominant visual theme, with a strong subtext of plywood-covered windows. Off to the west, the tops of the gleaming buildings of Baltimore's Inner Harbor are visible but distant.

For the most part, kids who go to City Springs lead isolated lives. All the children are African American, and 90 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, which means they meet federal guidelines for poverty. Eight years ago, by all accounts, this was a very tough school indeed, a place where teachers locked their doors to keep roaming students and adults from disrupting their classrooms, and where very few kids were learning much of anything. No students met state standards. It was considered the most dysfunctional of schools in a largely dysfunctional urban school district.

Principal Bernice Whelchel came to City Springs at its nadir, bringing order to the school environment and Direct Instruction to the academic program.

Direct Instruction is an instructional method developed in the 1960s that has been cited again and again as the most effective instructional system now available to boost achievement of poor and minority students. At its heart is a fundamental assumption that students don't arrive at school with the background to be academically successful.

Although this is a useful assumption for all children, it is absolutely critical for those with few academic advantages, such as the children of City Springs. "You're dealing with that tremendous vocabulary and information deficit," says Jerry Silbert, who has written several Direct Instruction programs and has acted as a consultant to a number of Direct Instruction schools, including City Springs. "You want to catch the kids up in a systematic way so they can be on a par with their more advantaged peers."

Direct Instruction teachers are never supposed to assume a child knows something he or she has not been taught. If a teacher hasn't taught that "answer" is a synonym for "reply," for example, she will not use the terms interchangeably, because it might confuse her students.

To prepare for Direct Instruction, Whelchel, her teachers, their aides and even some parents underwent a full week of training before school started. For the initial years, a full-time coach from the National Institute for Direct Instruction worked at City Springs to demonstrate the program's techniques, teach lessons and go over the data.

Data is at the heart of Direct Instruction. Teachers teach carefully constructed lessons from scripts, listen to the students read and respond in unison, and every few lessons assess their students individually. For example, to assess reading, teachers listen to their students read aloud and enter the results on a classroom chart, noting how long the student takes to read a particular passage and what mistakes the student makes. Whelchel and the coaches review the data sheets regularly.

During my tour, Whelchel showed me one class's data chart and noted that several children had had trouble reading the letter combination "sc" on the last assessment.

"I'll send a coach in to help the teacher teach 'sc.' Maybe she is saying it wrong, maybe something else is going on," Whelchel said.

The assumption in a Direct Instruction school is that if children haven't learned something, it is because the teacher hasn't taught it. He or she may have tried to teach it, but until the kids learn it, it hasn't been taught. And just as students need to be taught, so do teachers. Part of successful implementation of Direct Instruction is having highly skilled, highly trained coaches who can teach teachers how to teach specific skills or information.

Although Whelchel still brings outside coaches in periodically, she now has her own homegrown coaches, including Lauren Brown, who was trained as a teacher and coach on the job. "I had no teaching background," Brown said, recalling when she arrived seven years ago, fresh out of Hampton University with a bachelor's degree in English, but "because of the training I understand the script and know how to look at the data."

While looking at the testing data on our classroom tour, Whelchel noted that one child had read the passage uncommonly quickly and accurately, which may indicate that she had absorbed the reading lessons and might be ready to move up a level. In this way, the data is used to move kids around as they are accelerated or remediated, depending on what they need at any particular time.

Teachers also move around. One new teacher had trouble with classroom management earlier in the year, Whelchel told me as we walked into a first-grade classroom. "We weren't satisfied with her progress," Whelchel said, so she and her class were put in the classroom of a veteran teacher with excellent class management skills. Once the new teacher learns how to manage a classroom, she and her class will move back to their own room. Until then, more than 40 squirmy but well-behaved first-graders and two teachers share a room.

Whelchel has had to contend with all the problems of any urban school -- a highly mobile student body (almost 50 percent of her students move in or out during the year); a highly mobile teaching force (47.6 percent of her teachers are conditionally certified, which means that they don't have full teaching certification); and parents who don't always know how to help their children succeed in school.

She provides a lot of opportunities for all of them to succeed, and recognizes them when they do. Students earn little toys and books for good behavior and academic success; teachers are rewarded with dinner out; and parents are recognized publicly when they manage to bring their children to school on time and ready to learn.

Whelchel is well aware that many teachers have a disdain for Direct Instruction because they consider the scripts overly programmed. "They call DI kids robots," Whelchel acknowledged. "It's not true." Although the early reading lessons can seem "tedious," once children have mastered the fundamentals of reading, they move on to read interesting stories and lots of nonfiction, she said, rattling off the subject matter of the third reading level: "The solar system, parts of the eye, the skeletal system."

In the fifth level, children read "Odysseus"; in the sixth they read "The Prince and the Pauper."

She showed me a fifth-grade history class, in which children are studying history as "change over time," in the middle school program developed by Direct Instruction's Douglas Carnine, a professor at the University of Oregon. "It was designed to help kids who are at risk of failure," Carnine said. "The thing that animated me was getting kids the background knowledge linked with the big ideas."

Carnine related the story of a group of City Springs students who visited a federal judge on a field trip a few years ago and held a lengthy, animated discussion of how the Fourth Amendment's protection against unreasonable search and seizure is interpreted for students' backpacks and lockers. "These were fifth-graders," Carnine said, adding that the story illustrates how Direct Instruction students are able to take what they have learned and apply it to their lives in creative ways.

To the criticism that Direct Instruction is too scripted, leading to "robotic" children, Carnine said, "Direct Instruction poorly done could do that. But well done it does just the opposite."

The lesson of City Springs seems to be that remarkable results can be expected when Direct Instruction is implemented faithfully and when its central tenet -- that all children can learn if they are taught properly -- is completely absorbed and acted upon.

"My children are poor, they are dirty, they bring baggage from outside this building," Whelchel said. "But it's my job to teach them."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16475-2003Nov26.html> **New Reading Program Is Proven, but County's Support Is Not**

By Karin Chenoweth Thursday, November 27, 2003; Page GZ06

Hallelujah -- I hope.

As regular readers of Homeroom know, Montgomery County, Maryland has a reading problem.

Lots of statistics demonstrate the point, but I'll stick to the spring Maryland School Assessment, on which 30 percent of county kids failed to meet state reading standards. If you break down that number, it means that 15 percent of the non-Hispanic white students didn't meet standards, nor did 20 percent of the Asian American students; 47 percent of the African American students; 53 percent of the Hispanic students; 58 percent of the poor students; and 63 percent of the students receiving special education services. In some of Montgomery County's low-performing schools, as many as 70 percent of third-graders failed to meet state standards.

These are disastrous numbers, pointing to endless amounts of heartache and failure, because unless you can read fairly well, you are pretty well doomed to failure in high school and beyond. Poor kids, especially, who don't learn to read well will, in all likelihood, remain poor all their lives.

It doesn't need to be so. Extensive research shows that with well-prepared teachers using proven methods and materials, at least 90 percent of all children can read at or above grade level.

So the fact that Montgomery County has decided to put a proven reading program into elementary schools that receive federal Title I money is welcome news indeed. We'll get to why I have trepidations in a minute.

The program is Direct Instruction, which has a long history of raising achievement, particularly among poor and minority students.

The history goes back decades, when Direct Instruction was the one reading program found to be effective in raising achievement among poor students in a \$1 billion federal evaluation of instructional methods called "Project Follow Through." The project was part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society effort to identify and eliminate the causes of poverty. Direct Instruction was similarly found to have a strong record of raising achievement in a recent analysis by the American Institutes for Research on behalf of a number of organizations, including principals associations and unions representing teachers.

Direct Instruction has been so clearly identified as successful, in fact, that it is a mystery why it has not been used more widely.

The only places it hasn't done well in boosting achievement among kids is where it was implemented clumsily and without adequate preparation of the teachers and principals.

That is why I'm nervous about what's being done here in the county, where it is being shoved into schools with what appears to be inadequate training and inadequate explanation.

I'm looking at an Oct. 31 memo that went to elementary school principals from school system muckety-mucks (associate superintendents and the like) that is almost incomprehensible. It certainly gives principals none of the reasons Direct Instruction was adopted.

Here's one reason the memo could have cited: City Springs Elementary School in Baltimore. The enrollment at City Springs is just about all poor and all black, with a mobility rate of nearly 50 percent -- meaning that kids are coming and going all the time. Thanks in part to Direct Instruction, 66 percent of the students met the state reading standards this spring, including 80 percent of the students receiving special education services. They still have a way to go to bring the rest of the kids up to state standards, but City Springs is proving that success is possible under very difficult circumstances.

One of the issues for Direct Instruction in Montgomery County, however, is that it is totally different from the teaching method the county has been using.

Direct Instruction programs -- which have different names, such as Horizons, depending on the grade level -- lay out the lessons for just about every school day and require teachers to move at a very fast clip, monitoring how well students are mastering the lessons, partly by frequent tests and partly by listening to kids read aloud in unison (a method called choral reading). They explicitly teach all the sounds used in the English language and how they are represented by letters -- otherwise known as phonics instruction.

All this requires a huge culture shift among Montgomery County teachers, who have been told for years to eschew explicit, systematic teaching of phonics and rely on what is called "contextual clues," such as pictures, to help children derive meaning from a storybook.

For the most part, county teachers are desperate for a program that will actually work, and in places where Direct Instruction has been successfully implemented, teachers have become convinced of the possibility of success and have dropped their initial misgivings.

But there's no question that some Montgomery County teachers and principals will approach such a radical change hesitantly, and it is unfortunate that as of today they have not been provided with enough information or training to make them comfortable with the program.

For example, only two days of training is being offered to principals and teachers, according to the Oct. 31 memo. "Uh-oh" was the reaction of Jerry Silber, who has written a book on how to implement Direct Instruction programs, when I told him what the memo said. "A week of training" is the minimum he says is necessary, with additional training and coaching available.

Karen Harvey, the new director of the county school system's Department of Curriculum and Instruction, said more training will be provided during the year, and that it will be of a very high quality.

But here's another issue: It will be used only in the second, third and fifth grades, as an "intervention" program for kids who need help. "That's a real mistake," said Silber, who believes such an approach is just "waiting for kids to fail," rather than getting them the instruction they need in the first place.

And here's another confusing point. Some of the schools that will use Direct Instruction beginning this school year will be part of the federal Reading First initiative next year, which will require them to adopt a reading program instead of the current Montgomery County language arts program. So the teachers and principals will have to train in yet another reading instruction method, though it may be similar to Direct Instruction.

If those issues can be worked out, the news should be good for kids. And then maybe in a couple of years, we can start seeing scores on reading assessments in our high-poverty schools that don't make us wince.

Booking success at Stop Six school PBS documentary to air this weekend shows reading improvements at Walton Elementary By Matt Frazier Star-Telegram Staff Writer

Ruby Jackson, Walton Elementary's reading specialist, uses visual aids to help teach kindergartners to read. Walton, which is featured in the PBS documentary *The Tale of Two Schools*, uses a program called Reading Mastery, which emphasizes letters and their sounds, then gradually adds spelling, writing and reading stories.

FORT WORTH - The nation is watching Walton Elementary School for clues on making children better readers.

Walton Elementary, which pulls many of its children from housing projects in the Stop Six neighborhood in Fort Worth, is featured along with a campus in the Mississippi Delta in a new PBS documentary that airs at 9 p.m. today and again at 2 p.m. Sunday in the Metroplex.

The hourlong documentary, *The Tale of Two Schools*, was filmed throughout the 2000-01 school year. It reveals how a campus once known as one of Fort Worth's worst became one of its best.

The documentary has already been broadcast in other markets, and Walton has received congratulatory phone calls from across the nation -- and two CDs from the "Godfather of Soul," James Brown.

"It's exciting. It's rewarding for the parents and teachers and whole community," Walton Principal Leonard Brasfield said. "Now we have to keep the momentum going."

The documentary is part of PBS' Reading Rockets projects, which is studying how children learn to read, why so many struggle and how caring adults can help them. Its producers have said that they chose the two schools because both face challenges in states actively seeking to improve student reading levels.

For years, Bearden has struggled as one of Mississippi's lowest-rated schools. Salaries are among the country's worst, and 95 percent of the students are on free lunch programs.

PBS said that problems were almost as bad at Walton but that over the years, the school started winning its battle with illiteracy.

At Walton, 77.1 percent of students were economically disadvantaged in the 2002-03 school year, according to the Texas Education Agency. Some lack parental supervision or come from households without books or magazines. Many lack stability at school because their families move often, sending children from campus to campus.

"We have children at Walton who don't know the alphabet," said Vanessa Kemp, Walton's lead reading teacher when the program was filmed. "They can't write their name. They don't know how to open up a book. They don't even know what a book is for."

Over the past decade, the school has found a formula for success, rising from the lowest possible rating of low performing to the state's second-highest rating of recognized.

"They are an example to all schools to show how children can achieve at high levels," Deputy Superintendent Pat Linares said.

Walton tries to give students a sense of structure by teaching them how to act in class and follow instructions. It works to discover reading problems while students are still young to keep them from falling too far behind.

Those needing extra help may spend an extra hour a day with Walton's reading specialist, Ruby Jackson. She teaches a program called Reading Mastery, which emphasizes letters and their sounds, then gradually adds spelling, writing and reading stories.

In Fort Worth, the documentary focuses on first-grader Tavares Gross, who is being raised by a single father and who begins school already far behind. Tavares has trouble recognizing letters and their sounds at the beginning of the program. By the end of the year, his reading is still slow and struggled -- but he is reading.

"I'm not glad that school is over. Because I wanna stay in school. School teach me how to read," he said at the end of the year.

Reading Mastery has become a religion at Walton, the documentary states. Teachers who didn't like Reading Mastery have left or were pushed out, the documentary says. Those remaining have had a lot of success.

Some districts concerned with their students' progress are turning to Walton for help. Officials with the mostly white Kopperl school district in Bosque County visited the school during the documentary.

Toward the end of the school year, the documentary captures Walton's staff and students as they learn that their school achieved the state rating of recognized -- becoming one of Texas' highest-rated inner-city schools.

"It means to me that all kids can learn, all kids can be successful, and that I will never ever lower my standard of expectations, because I know now in my heart that it's real," Kemp said that year.

Kemp has since moved to another school district. Tavares, like many students who have attended Walton, moved on after only a year. But the skills he learned at Walton have helped him be successful in school and he is reading at grade level, said Brasfield, who continues to monitor his progress.

And success and accolades from the documentary have provided the school and the community with the proof and momentum needed for Walton's continued success, Brasfield said.

"It changes the whole atmosphere of the school," Brasfield said. "It's allowing high expectations to run through the minds of teachers and community. And when you have high expectations, you can't help but achieve."

READING TIPS FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

- Read to your child every day. Make this a warm and loving time when the two of you can cuddle close together. Bedtime is an especially great time for reading together.
- Give everything a name. You can build comprehension skills early, even with the littlest child. Play games that involve naming or pointing to objects. Say things like, "Where's your nose?" and then, "Where's Mommy's nose?" Or touch your child's nose and say, "What's this?"
- Say how much you enjoy reading together.
- Read to your child with humor and expression. Use different voices for different characters. Ham it up!
- Know when to stop.
- Be interactive. Engage your child so he or she will actively listen to a story. Discuss what's happening, point out things on the page, and answer your child's questions.
- Read it again and again and again. Go ahead and read the same book for the 100th time! Research suggests that repeated readings help children develop language skills.

- Talk about writing. Draw your child's attention to the way writing works. When looking at a book together, point out how we read from left to right and how words are separated by spaces.
- Point out print everywhere. Talk about the written words you see in the world around you and respond with interest to your child's questions about words. Ask him or her to find a new word every time you go on an outing.
- Get your child evaluated if you suspect a problem. Be sure to see your child's pediatrician or teacher as soon as possible if you have concerns about his or her language development, hearing or sight. *ONLINE: The Tale of Two Schools documentary, www.pbs.org/weta/twoschoolswww.readingrockets.org Matt Frazier, (817) 390-7957 mfrazier@star-telegram.com*

23/9/2003 There is a school, the **Ben Bronz Academy**, in West Hartford, CT. You probably know of it. All the students there are children whom the regular public schools in Connecticut could no longer help, for a variety of reasons, and most are students expected to return to the public schools, after they have had their problems adequately addressed, and are then able successfully to deal with school as we know it. Most make the transition back after a year or two.

80% of the students are there at public expense (considerable public expense - \$32,000 a year), and the remaining 20% are privately paying guests. Ian Spence and his wife, Aileen Stans-Spense, organized the school over seventeen years ago, and they have computer-stored data on every child who ever crossed their path, a research trove that has gone largely untapped.

Ben Bronz uses Direct Instruction, and also Precision Teaching as needed, plus a cognitive curriculum designed by or following the ideas of Reven Feuerstein. Ben Bronz uses whatever the staff thinks will work with particular children, and they try something else if it does not work. They have a student to staff ratio of 2 to 1 (hence the high cost), and - and this is what caught my eye in your question - they quite commonly use Lindamood-Bell exercises.

Ian has said flatly, that the Lindamood-Bell exercises work, but **IF AND ONLY IF** they are practiced to high frequencies, after the fashion of Precision Teaching, and charted with PT charts. Otherwise, the exercises are just moderately effective. He can tell you what it is that they do at Ben Bronz, and what they do that makes the Lindamood-Bell exercises work well, and I believe that their practice goes considerably beyond what the Lindamood-Bell people recommend.

You can find Ian and Co. on the web at <http://www.tli.com>. Ian has an e-mail address there. The school is administered day-to-day by Susan Sharp, who is also adjunct faculty at the University of Connecticut at Storrs, and who really is sharp, as well as enormously friendly and helpful. Both Ian and Susan have doctorates of some sort, and Ian also has a background in social work. Aileen used to teach Fourth Grade in the New York City Public Schools, and has the perspective of one who has spent much of her life in the trenches of inner-city education. Ben Bronz (named after Aileen's late father, a manufacturer), was started after Ian and Aileen had long years of experience in residential care of handicapped and emotionally disturbed children.

Ben Bronz is one of the few schools I have been drawn to visit, and I was utterly wowed. For one thing, the classroom teachers do not commonly rush children who are asked to answer a question. The teachers may push, but not rush. The class sits quietly until the student who is queried has a chance to think the problem through and answer it. The place runs on huge amounts of genuine courtesy and thoughtfulness.

I told this to a friend who has an administrative position in Special Education in Prince George's County, Maryland, and who instantly replied that there are studies on this particular lack of courtesy: the average classroom teacher waits only 6 seconds (that's an average) for a response before asking someone else the question posed. This is, of course, much too fast for many children, and those who are accustomed to being ignored by such rapid-fire interrogation, soon learn that they do not have to answer at all, and that the world

will go on without them. Presumably Direct Instruction, by carefully sorting the children in the first instance, avoids this particular problem.

Very truly yours,

John Shewmaker Columbia, MO

Just a reminder: The Sixteenth Annual International Precision Teaching Conference will be in Columbus, Ohio, this November 6, 7 and 8, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. See: <http://www.celeration.org> or <http://www.celeration.net> for particulars. I think that some of the Ben Bronz people, including Ian and some (not all) of the students, will be there this year. Last year Ian and his gang brought the entire school, all fifty students, to Harrisburg, PA. The students are quite fascinating, and behaved themselves splendidly, explaining just what their celeration charts showed. The ABA will be meeting in Boston in 2004, over Memorial Day Weekend, and there is a hope (not confirmed by anything anyone has said) that Ben Bronz may make a showing there in considerable force, bringing the students as the best exemplars of what it is that they do at Ben Bronz.

18/9/2003

I just got a call from Vicky Martino at the Mountain View Academy in Greeley, Colorado. She informed me that their private full DI school has received recognition as a Blue Ribbon No Child Left Behind school by the US Dept of Education. In order to qualify they had to either have "dramatic improvement" or a more objective score of the top 10% nationwide in reading and math scores. They qualified on the top 10% category. For more information on go to <http://capenet.org/brs.html>

"Dramatically improved" is defined as an increase of at least one-half standard deviation over at least three years and includes the disadvantaged students as shown by disaggregated data. "High levels" is defined as student achievement at or above the 55th percentile on assessments referenced against national norms at a particular grade, or at or above the 55th percentile on state tests.

"Top 10 Percent": Regardless of the school's demographics, it may be recognized if its students achieve at the highest levels, that is, if the school is in the top 10 percent of the schools in the nation in reading (or verbal for high schools) and mathematics in the highest grade tested, as measured by an assessment referenced against national norms at a particular grade or in the top 10 percent in its state as measured by a state test. Bryan Wickman <brywick@adihome.org>

7/9/2003

I just wanted to let you know about some of the very exciting developments that have been going on in Region 8 (Virginia). Longwood University in collaboration with 4 school divisions has secured over 3.2 million dollars in CSR and Reading First grants to implement DI school-wide in 7 possibly 8 elementary and middle schools over two years. We are very excited for these schools and have work very hard to set up the structured collaboration between Longwood, the school divisions, and the external coaches (ERI will be handling most of the coaching). In order make sure everyone is on the same page, we have created Reading First Initiative Teams (RFIT). RFIT teams are composed of key players in the DI implementation process and work to:

- a. act as a united voice in support of the building administrator and DI,
- b. evaluate student progress,
- c. create alternative treatment plans to help those students who are not making significant progress in the model.

Each school has a RFIT team which meets at least once a month. If a school division has more than one elementary school using the DI model, the RFIT teams will also meet monthly to address division concerns. In addition to the one or two monthly meetings, all of the RFIT teams in the 4 divisions will meet twice a year at Longwood University to encourage region 8 collaboration. During these Region 8 RFIT meetings, we will discuss common problems and seek to replicate solutions that were effective in partnership counties.

The RFIT's major role is to monitor student progress and initiate treatments for those students who are not making sufficient progress in the DI model. There are three levels of intervention:

1) The Reading Mastery + program (all students) at least 90 min of uninterrupted Language art instruction 2) If students are not making significant progress, we evaluate placement, pace, and delivery of instruction and make any corrections in collaboration with the external coaches. If there is still minimal student progress, we operate on the principle of "More not Different." Students not making significant progress after the grouping and delivery has been evaluated and modified are eligible for an additional 90 min of language arts (RM+) instruction. 3) If students are still not making significant progress, then the RFIT team, in collaboration with the reading specialist, will develop an additional reading instruction period (in addition to the 180 min of RM+ instruction) where the approved supplemental programs (usually Read Well or Read Naturally) will be introduced.

Needless to say this has been a long time coming and we are very excited about this academic year and welcome any feedback you guys might have.

One final note: We have been working with Cumberland Middle school (ERI set up the initial coaching) for two year now(they are beginning their 3rd year of CR). Currently all of their students receive Corrective Reading for 90 minutes and a cohort receives Reasoning and Writing. They recently found out that they are now a Fully Accredited Middle school and won a school improvement award from the Governor! This is a testament to the hard work they have done over the past three years. Prior to Corrective Reading they only had 45 percent of their 8th graders passing the Va Sol Reading test. They now have a 80% pass rate and look to increase their scores this year. Much of this growth can be attributed to ERI's initial training/coaching and Todd Forgette's persistent work as the DI coordinator for the County. I am happy to say that starting this year.....NOW SIT DOWN.....Cumberland county is a K-8th grade DI Division. All students in the county in grades K-8 are receiving DI as their primary reading/language art instruction.....

Take care, Christopher D. Jones Longwood University

An urban oasis of flowing hope Projects: Rosemont Elementary pupils build an indoor habitat as a symbol of becoming an 'educational corridor' in West Baltimore. Education Beat: Mike Bowler

<http://www.sunspot.net/news/local/bal-md.edbeat15jun15.story>

Originally published Jun 15, 2003 ROSEMONT Elementary School sits in a West Baltimore neighborhood that had seen better days 30 years ago. That's why the new pond in the lobby, complete with goldfish, plants, snails and a gurgling fountain, is such a treat for the eyes and ears. The "indoor habitat," built brick by brick by Rosemont pupils in a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is an urban oasis, a calming influence on both children and adults who enter the school in the tattered neighborhood a few blocks south of [Coppin State College](#). The only neighborhood public school in Maryland operated by a state college, Rosemont is about to become the centerpiece of an "urban educational corridor" envisioned by Coppin's new president, Stanley F. Battle. Rosemont will continue as a training place for Coppin student-teachers. The school's staff can take courses tuition-free at the college. And Battle has asked Principal Sandra Ashe to choose 10 of her "most challenging" kids for a year of mentoring, starting in the fall. "I'm going to call them the 'Talented 10,'" says Battle, "and they'll spend a lot of their time with me on campus." I visited Rosemont in the first days of the school year to judge the mood of Ashe, then beginning her second year there after a distinguished 11 years at John Eager Howard Elementary a couple of miles east. Ashe, who gives her age as 39 but acknowledges having worked in the system for 31 years, wasn't sure in September if she'd made the right move. Rescuing two of the city's stressed schools, one after the other, is an almost superhuman challenge. Last week she had the answer: "I'm energized and rejuvenated," she said. "It's like

the second child. You never think you could love it as much as the first, but then you love it just as much." Rosemont's test scores, released last week, were up significantly in the fourth and fifth grades. The Fish and Wildlife partnership, on first thought a case of strange bedfellows, has raised consciousness about conservation. "The next thing we want to do is an outdoor habitat," Ashe said, "and I guarantee that nothing the students build will be touched by vandals. I tell the kids that people who are smart do not destroy their own property." If anything, said Ashe, the Coppin relationship, forged by the now-retired Calvin W. Burnett, has strengthened under a new president, who now wants to take a middle and high school under Coppin's wings. Every principal, of course, has to deal with North Avenue. And even though Coppin operates Rosemont, budget strings are pulled at system headquarters. Just a couple of weeks before this year's round of testing, Ashe lost a second- and a third-grade teacher as the system struggled to erase deficits. She thinks that's why the school's TerraNova scores in the same grades went nowhere. "Losing the teachers was a terrible blow," Ashe recalled. "We all cried. Now I'm going to lose at least one of my coaches. I haven't asked them [North Avenue] for anything except that they not take more away. "Is that too much to ask?"

'Mysteriously cool' school celebrates its 10th birthday "This school is mysteriously cool." Thus reads the cover of a brochure noting the 10th birthday of the GreenMount School. Penned by a first-grader, the sentence sums up the atmosphere at the parent-run school founded in a Waverly church basement in 1993. It's now located on West 30th Street in Remington. Today, enrollment is seven times the original, and there's a waiting list for each of the eight grades. Perhaps that's because GreenMount has managed to keep tuition affordable. Ninety-eight percent of its students live in the city. Mayor Martin O'Malley proclaimed Thursday GreenMount School Day and turned the City Hall rotunda over to kids, parents and staff. Proclamations flew, and "Believe" rulers and T-shirts were handed out. A good birthday was had by all. **Direct program overlooked in school's testing success** It's getting to be a broken record, but City Springs Elementary, one of Baltimore's poorest, led the city again in this year's TerraNova testing, results of which were announced last week. The east-side school's scores have been surging for five straight years in both math and reading, surely proving that Direct Instruction, the scripted curriculum used at the school, is a success. Four of the top five city schools in first-grade scoring use Direct Instruction. Yet the curriculum is seldom credited by the school system's leaders. One wonders why.

City Spring Elementary – Fifth Year Comparison CTBS/TerraNova Scores, 1998 and 2003

http://www.nifdi.org/img/City_Springs_5th_Yr_Compar.pdf According to the latest CTBS/TerraNova Scores, City Springs Elementary has made vast strides in schoolwide academic gains over the last five years since Direct Instruction was implemented by the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI). Before the introduction of Direct Instruction City Springs Elementary was the second lowest performing school in the Baltimore school district; today it is one of its highest performing garnering number one rankings (out of 114 schools) in reading for first and fifth grades. All grades (1st – 5th) at City Springs ranked in the top ten for reading, and in the top 20 for math. City Springs' first grade also took number one honors for math, and its fifth grade ranked fourth.

In 1998 (the first year for which CTBS/TerraNova scores are available), the average median percentile CTBS/TerraNova score for reading for grades 1 – 5 was 23.2. In 2003 the average median percentile CTBS/TerraNova score for the same grades was 74.2 - a gain over the period (1998-2003) of 51 percentile points. In math the gains were greater: the average median percentile CTBS/TerraNova math score for grades 1-5 in 1998 was 11.6, by 2003 the score was 73.8 - 62.2 points higher.

In 1998, the first grade reading score was in the 28th percentile. In 2003, the score rose to the 99th percentile, achieving a 71 percentile point rise. More noteworthy, the first grade math score was at the 8th percentile in 1998. By 2003, the score was at the 99th percentile - an increase of 91 percentile points.

The median percentile fifth grade reading score was 14 in 1998 and 87 in 2003 – gaining 73 points. The fifth grade math score was in the 9th percentile in 1998 and the in 79th percentile in 2003 – increasing 70 points over five years.

Eastside sets the standard Despite obstacles, every third-grader at small school passed math, reading tests
By MICHELE FUETSCH Staff reporter 07/31/2003

<http://www.delawareonline.com/newsjournal/local/2003/07/31eastsidesetsthe.html>

It sits on some of the poorest soil in Delaware, a hard, dusty loop of land where the flowers and vegetables in the small garden plots outside struggle to produce. Inside the small school, the desks don't match. The hallways are narrow. The principal has to share his cramped office with another staff member. But in an appearances-are-deceiving triumph, Eastside Charter School in Wilmington has outdone every school in the state this year, maybe in the history of standardized testing in Delaware. Every third-grader at Eastside - 88 percent of whom come from low-income families - passed the state's standardized performance tests in both math and reading, according to scores announced in mid-July. "It's definitely a success story," said Nancy Wilson, who heads the curriculum and instructional improvement branch of the state Department of Education. "It's like the little engine that could," said Audrey Helfman, a professor at the University of Delaware and a board member at the school. Third-grade teacher Christine Chaney recalled how the staff crowded around the computer the morning the Department of Education posted student scores on its Web site. "When we saw them, I was, like, screaming," said Chaney, who moved from the Baltimore public school system to teach at Eastside. Except for small parties that Chaney and a group of school volunteers from The Monday Club gave the third-graders, there has been little public fanfare to mark the success at the Thatcher Avenue school. And the two students, Jameere Tyler and Eric Comeger, both 9, who scored fives on the state tests aren't particularly impressed with themselves. They received blue certificates from state Secretary of Education Valerie Woodruff, sent to all students who score in that distinguished category. When asked if he knew what the secretary did, Eric, after a moment of thought, said that she probably made sure everybody had the right supplies. After he and Jameere were told that the education secretary is in charge of all public and charter schools in Delaware, Jameere said, "I guess we're kind of lucky to get a certificate signed by her herself." Eastside has only 16 third-graders and 126 students altogether in its preschool-through-fifth grade classes. But that's the point. "We are supposed to be a lab," principal Will Robinson said. Charter schools, as envisioned by the legislators that created them in Delaware, are supposed to be models from which public school systems can draw lessons and innovations. "You can't just crowd a lot of people in the same place with a lot of the same problems," Robinson said of Eastside's commitment to disadvantaged children. "The problems perpetuate themselves." There are three charter schools on Thatcher, an asphalt strip running through the Eastlake section of Wilmington. It was here in "the bucket," named after the shape of the most notorious housing project among several there, that crack cocaine reigned for years. Eastside was opened in 1997 in the same three undistinguished brick buildings it still leases from the Wilmington Housing Authority, which after years of trying to redeem the neighborhood, levelled it. The two nearby charter schools, Marion T. Academy and The Edison School, posted some of the lowest third-grade scores in the state, as did some public schools where the majority of students are black and Hispanic youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is the second time, though, that 100 percent of Chaney's third-graders have met the state standard in math. The first time was in 2000. An analysis of past test data by The News Journal turned up only one other case of all students in a class meeting state standards in two subjects: a gifted class last year in the Brandywine School District. Small classes and a small school overall are the keys to Eastside's success, according to its staff and others familiar with the school. "When it's a small school like this, you become a family," said Eric Ford, a fifth-grade teacher. "It's almost like a small church. You can't hide like you can in a big cathedral." The close ties are obvious. Robinson said he has been inside the home of each student at least once. Moving through the crowded hallways one morning this week, he suddenly stopped, lifting a pint-sized first-grader up by his shoulders until their faces were even. "Isaiah, where were you yesterday?" Robinson asked, wanting to know why the little boy was absent. Peter Wenigmann, director of the lower school at Wilmington Friends School, one of the city's most prestigious educational institutions, serves on the board at Eastside. "The faculty's so clearly dedicated to knowing the kids as individuals and demonstrating that they really care for them," Wenigmann said. "I think that supports ... their growth and development." At Eastside, youngsters stay in school 11 months of the year, another of the critical factors in its success, many believe. Their last day of school is today. In the fall, Eastside will have a sixth grade for the first time but doesn't have plans to expand beyond that or beyond its classroom size of 16. Helfman, who teaches leadership at UD, said Eastside doesn't want to make the same mistakes other charters and many businesses make by expanding too fast. Robinson said he believes much of the school's success can be laid to its curriculum, a **direct instruction method** that relies heavily on phonics and tightly scripted lessons that he and others working throughout the country with low-income children say is especially successful with such students, who often have little in the way of early literacy training. The school has had full-day kindergarten from the beginning and, this year, began full-day preschool for 4-year-olds. The staff, though, may explain much of Eastside's success. Teachers are expected to make extraordinary commitments that have them

working well beyond 3 p.m. each day, tutoring children who often stay until 6 p.m., when the school finally closes its doors. For test preparation, the teachers ran Saturday classes. "I let them know upfront," Robinson said of his prospective teachers, "this is not a normal school day, where you can just expect to come in at 8:40 a.m. and leave at 3 p.m."

2003 TEST SCORES

2003 RESULTS

- [Search for testing results by school and district](#) • [Search for testing results by grade and subject](#)

STATEWIDE SCORES

Reading

Grade	2003 Score	Below Std.	
	3	443	21%
	5	480	22%
	8	517	30%
	10	514	33%

Math

Grade	2003 Score	Below Std.	
	3	435	26%
	5	468	59%
	8	494	53%
	10	525	54%

Writing

Grade	2003 Score	Below Std.	
	3	5.7	61%
	5	7.3	40%
	8	8.1	22%
	10	8.2	28%

Reach Michele Fuetsch at 324-2386 or mfuetsch@delawareonline.com.

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Chuck arthuracademy.org

Charter School NEWS RELEASE June 16, 2003

Arthur Academy, a charter school in southeast Portland, has successfully finished its first year. Arthur Academy operates under a charter with the David Douglas School District for a k-3 school. The first year started with grades k-1. A grade will be added each year up to grade three.

The first year included 40 kindergartners and 20 first graders. Next year the school will include 20 kindergartners, 35 first-graders and 20 second-graders. These children will be placed in three classrooms of 25 each.

Arthur Academy is located at 13717 SE Division. It's facilities, adjacent to a residential area north of SE Division; include three attractive modular units and a playground. A fourth unit will be added before grade-three becomes a part of the school.

Arthur Academy is particularly known for its early grade academic focus and its acceleration of student academic achievement. All children are tested at the beginning and the end of the school year. In comparison to national groups, the scores of the kindergartners in this year's class averaged at the 57th percentile in both reading and math at the beginning of the year. At the end of the year, the averages of these children were raised to the 89th percentile in reading and the 82nd percentile in math. Only one child scored below the 75th percentile in reading. Fifteen scored at the 99th percentile. These averages include two special education students, one of whom could not obtain any score on either of the tests.

At the beginning of the year, the scores of the first grade class averaged at the 36th percentile in reading and 46th percentile in math. These scores were raised to the 65th percentile in reading and 66th in math by the end of the year. (The test used is the Stanford Achievement Test, a nationally-normed, widely accepted achievement test.)

Arthur Academy seeks to provide one example of a research-based instruction in the early grades, an emphasis that is being given increased interest in schools. The particular research-based teaching approach used at Arthur Academy is known as the "Mastery Learning Model." It utilizes programs from the Direct Instruction and Core Knowledge curricular materials. This approach emphasizes well-developed and carefully planned lessons designed around small learning increments and clearly defined teaching tasks. The programs specifically identify all that children need to know within a subject area at their grade level and seeks to explicitly and systematically teach these objectives from the simplest and easiest to the more complex and difficult, while maintaining the child's interest.

By all accounts, Arthur Academy has successfully accomplished these goals during its first year. The test scores of the children are not the only evidence of this accomplishment. The interest and work of the children throughout the year exhibited this everyday. All but one of the children are returning to the school next year. Next year's new kindergarten class is already full and has a waiting list. In addition, on a parent survey, all the parents indicated that they were at least satisfied with the school, 96% marked "highly satisfied."

Arthur Academy seeks to provide parents within the community with an option that currently is unavailable in schools, an option that is proving to be exceptionally effective. The governing board of directors, the nonprofit organization Mastery Learning Institute, also is currently taking steps to replicate this educational charter school model in other communities in the state.

Frontier Academy and the Colorado State Assessment 7/5/03 The Colorado State Assessment (CSAP) third grade reading scores were recently released. Today's Greeley Tribune carried a picture and front page story about Frontier Academy, a local charter school, which was modeled after a private DI/ Core Knowledge school, also located here. I had the privilege of overseeing the training of the staff and serving as the Instructional Facilitator when it opened its doors in 1997 to all comers. Since the inception of the CSAP, the Academy's reading scores made it one of only a few (out of 14) local elementary schools exceeding the state average. The top performing school was the community's "flagship" elementary school.

Despite less money, begged and borrowed facilities and materials, and a population entering with generally weak foundation skills, the Academy has now surpassed the "flagship" elementary school in percentage of third graders rated proficient in reading on the CSAP. Ninety-three percent of its kiddos rated proficient this time around. In addition, Frontier Academy has succeeded in adding a grade a year since its K-5 inception, and opened a brand new middle through high school facility last Fall.

Reading Mastery made it possible for those kids to get it right from the first days of kindergarten. Fine-tuning has put the frosting on the cake. The school now has an enormous waiting list, and must use a lottery

for selection. I attach the link to the article below. No mention of the DI component in the article, primarily because of the local political tradewinds, but those in close know how it was made to happen. Never give up. Each one of you can make that kind of difference. "Steve Hoffelt" <hoffeltsteve@qwest.net>

Steve, you are not the only one with a success story here in Colorado. I helped implement DI in District 11 in selected schools. In just one year, the initial scores were 50% and 60% CSAP proficient and above. After implementing over a three year time period, we now are at 86% proficient and above with 14% in advanced. Yes, we are doing a dance. "Gail Coulter" <gcoulter@mail.uccs.edu>

Proven method to teach reading shelved for untested plan The Columbus Dispatch Wednesday, April 30, 2003 William L. Heward

A child who cannot read proficiently by the early grades is destined to struggle. Reading is critical for success in school and in life.

In Columbus, about four in 10 students achieve a passing reading score on the Ohio Fourth Grade Proficiency Test. Administrators and teachers view this as unacceptable. The district last year evaluated its four reading programs and presented its report and recommendations to the school board in December.

The results show that the Direct Instruction program has produced better outcomes than the three other programs. DI features small-group instruction, high rates of participation, immediate correction of errors and repetition until each student demonstrates mastery of the lesson's objectives.

DI had especially positive effects on proficiency-test passing rates at high-poverty schools. This is significant because the limited language skills that many poor children have make teaching them to read especially challenging.

The average percentage of children who passed the reading portion of the proficiency test at the six high-poverty schools where DI is used in the early grades nearly doubled, from 23.4 percent in 2000 to 43.3 percent in 2002. During the same period, the average passing rate at the 19 high-poverty schools that used a program called Four Blocks decreased from 30 percent to 29.5 percent.

The 16 schools using the Success for All program went from 17.9 percent to 23.5 percent, and the seven schools that used a program called Literacy Collaborative increased from 27.8 percent to 36.1 percent. Good, but not as good as DI.

Yet the district's report concluded, "Schools with Direct Instruction and Success for All programs achieved lower results than the district. Schools with Four Blocks and Literacy Collaborative programs had higher results."

While this is true in a limited sense -- average 2002 proficiency-test scores at Four Blocks and Literacy Collaborative schools were slightly higher than the district average, and average scores at schools that used DI and Success for All were slightly lower than the district average -- it is not true in a more meaningful sense.

In 1999, before the reading programs had begun, the average score for students at the DI schools was 7.2 points below the district average. In three years, the average score at the DI schools gained 4 points relative to the district average.

Three years of using the Four Blocks program saw the average score in those schools drop from 1.6 to 1.1 points above the district mean. In other words, children in schools using the Four Blocks program lost ground compared with the district average. Students at Literacy Collaborative schools gained just 1.4 points against the district average.

Teachers in the DI schools worked with the lowest performing, most disadvantaged students, yet raised reading achievement the most.

In spite of these findings, Superintendent Gene Harris recommended to the school board that a new "integrated literacy program" be written by the Columbus staff and teachers and implemented district-wide.

Using the same reading program across the district makes good sense for many reasons, one being that 40 percent of Columbus students change schools at least once each year. But the superintendent's plan would eliminate DI, the one program that has been the most effective in raising students' proficiency-test scores, in favor of a currently nonexistent and untested program.

BREAD, a grass-roots community organization whose advocacy for effective instruction four years ago was instrumental in making sure DI was on the list of approved reading programs in Columbus, has made three very reasonable requests of Harris and the school board:

V Allow the 10 schools that use DI to continue using it.

V Allow the lowest-performing schools the opportunity to select DI for beginning reading instruction.

V Pilot any new reading program in a limited number of schools and evaluate its effects before using it district-wide.

At a recent meeting with BREAD, the superintendent said the current plan is to install the new literacy pilot program this fall in all K-1 classrooms at 30 schools. Harris said the unified program should be implemented in each of the district's 92 elementary schools in 2004-05.

I don't understand why the district would ignore the results of its own study and choose to implement an untested reading program.

Harris and the school board should be commended for focusing on improving the reading achievement of all children in Columbus. Let's hope that their well-intentioned efforts to achieve this important goal do not deprive children of the program that has produced the best outcomes to date.

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<http://www.greeleytrib.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?Site=GR&Date=20030507&Category=NEWS&ArtNo=305060009&Ref=AR>



Article published May 7, 2003 High standards Charter school expects

top scores on CSAP



Brad Pershing, 8, a third-grader at Frontier Academy in Greeley, concentrates on reading "Night of the Twisters" so he can answer questions on a worksheet. The third-grade class at the charter school scored 93 percent on the reading part of CSAP, the second-highest score in Weld County. Jay Quadracci / quadracci@greeleytrib.com

By
[Lisa](#)
[Martí](#)
[nez](#)

Every
day at
Frontier
Charter

Academy in Greeley, third-graders spend more than an hour doing what they do best.

One group of children sits at the front of the classroom, reading a textbook with teacher Tiffani Helmick, while others are reading a novel. Yet another group is reading about the fall of Baghdad and writing a report on it. Their intense reading has paid off.

“Ninety-three percent! Ninety-three percent. We got 93 percent!” principal Rebecca Dougherty said to teachers as she walked through the school and into third-grade classrooms Tuesday.

Teachers and students were excited when they heard the news Tuesday that Frontier received a near-perfect score on a third-grade reading assessment released Tuesday.

School officials weren’t surprised by the results. In fact, the three Weld County schools with the highest scores on the Colorado Student Assessment Program are charter schools.

Knowledge Quest Academy in Milliken received the highest rating countywide with 94 percent of students reading at or above proficiency. Frontier reported 93 percent of students at the same level. Windsor Charter Academy and Christa Mc-Auliffe Elementary School in Greeley both recorded 88 percent of students at or above proficiency.

Charter school officials attribute high CSAP marks to the strong Core Knowledge curriculum, which allows teachers to work with students on basic concepts at an early age and build on those ideas throughout the school year and in future years.

Knowledge Quest director Brenda Jaynes said charter schools typically outperform traditional schools because students are consistently challenged academically.

“Charter schools normally have higher expectations,” said Jaynes, who runs the first-year school that teaches kindergarten through eighth-grade. “That’s the point of what a charter school is. You are different than the regular public school.”

At Frontier, officials said they improved eight percentage points from last year because they were focused more on the curriculum instead of the tests found on CSAP.

“Everything is focused on the Core Knowledge program,” headmaster Michael McBrien said. “Even in music, they’re reading and writing.”

Frontier kindergartners can read by the end of the year, and they can identify continents, large oceans and other geographic locations. “What sets us apart is the commitment to a consistent curriculum, year after year,” McBrien said.

Lack of literacy pervades high schools Mon, Apr. 28, 2003 By Suzanne Pardington CONTRA COSTA TIMES

<http://www.bavarea.com/mld/cetimes/living/education/5734200.htm?template=contentModules/printstory.jsp>

Before California's high school students can hope to succeed in college and careers, before they can pass the new exit exam to earn their diploma, before they can keep up in their classes, they have to know how to read. Not just sound-it-out, halting, word-by-word reading. They have to understand what they are reading and form their own thoughts about it. After five years of high stakes, statewide testing, the truth is hard to ignore: An alarming number of high school students still struggle with reading. Some can barely decipher simple words. And, as a whole, they have not improved at all in recent years. In California last year, 39 percent of ninth-graders scored at the bottom of national reading tests, with the percentage rising as high as 89 percent at one East Bay continuation school. This is not a new problem. But for many high schools in the East Bay, it is no longer acceptable. With the help of state grants, they have started intensive remedial

reading programs. In the fall, ninth-graders who somehow managed to make it through elementary and middle school without mastering basic reading skills found themselves back in special reading classes, learning to recognize words and sounds. As the end of the school year approaches, teachers say many students in these classes have advanced several grade levels. Ninth-graders who began the year reading at a second- or third-grade level are now reading like seventh- or eighth-graders. "As they say, it's better late than never," said Haidee Foust, principal of Richmond High. "Reading is the basis of everything they'll have to do in life. Reading is a civil right. Without it, you're just lost." **Producing results** Lisa O'Dell was one of nearly 100 incoming ninth-graders at Mt. Diablo High school who still needed help learning to read at the beginning of the year. Like many of these students, Lisa had always struggled with reading, and she didn't get much help in earlier grades, she said. She used to read slowly, stuttering as she sounded out words she didn't know. She was embarrassed when she had to read in front of other students, because they teased her. Now she is one of the fastest readers in her reading intervention class. Her spelling has improved, and her grades in other classes have gone up as well. "People don't make fun of me anymore," she said. "They know I can read now. I'm pretty sure I'll be better than they are at the rate I'm going." "I'm actually proud of myself," she added. Reading classes at Mt. Diablo High use a systematic approach that leads students through lessons with vocabulary and texts that gradually increase in difficulty. The eight students in Lisa's class started with a book at the second- to third-grade level, with words such as "first," "proud" and "garden." Now their lessons are at the fifth- or sixth-grade level. Words in a recent lesson included "coordinated," "exaggerated," and "pituitary." Before reading a passage about human height records, teacher Randy Woodley ran a word drill, following a script in his teacher's manual. "What sound?" he said, and tapped a marker on his desk to prompt a response. "Ex," a couple of students said. "Together," he said. Tap. "Ex," the students all repeated. "What word?" Woodley said. Tap. "Expression," they said. They practiced several more words in this manner before taking turns reading the passage aloud. Reading in a quick, quiet monotone, the students stumbled over some words and left others out, but they finished the text without much trouble. When it came to answering comprehension questions, however, some needed coaching from the teacher. Some students seemed weary of the process, which improves students' skills quickly, but can be repetitive and tedious. Woodley himself was unsure of the program at first. His passion is teaching sophomore English, not basic reading skills. Some students did not want to take a basic reading class, either, considering it kids' stuff. But the results have won over Woodley and many students. "Ever since this class, I just love to read now," Lisa said. "It surprised me, too. I would never have thought I'd be reading now."

Minorities, poor struggle It is unclear why so many students reach high school without mastering basic reading skills. Some educators say that the problem starts at home, with families that do not read at home or teach early literacy skills to young children. Others say today's high school students were taught to read at a time when basic sound-it-out phonics instruction was neglected in elementary schools. Students' motivation may also play a role: They have a hard time learning to read, so they get frustrated and give up. "In California, we appear to have a decrease in performance as kids get older," said P. David Pearson, dean of the Graduate School of Education at UC Berkeley. "What's really unconscionable is this problem hits minorities even more dramatically." Poor students are also more likely to struggle with reading. Two schools on opposite sides of the East Bay hills highlight the disparity. At Richmond High, 71 percent of students receive free or reduced-price meals and 3 percent of students are white. At Miramonte High in Orinda, no students signed up for subsidized meals, and 71 percent of students are white. At Richmond High, 62 percent of ninth-graders score at the bottom of national reading tests, compared to 4 percent at Miramonte. Reading intervention classes have been started at many of the low-performing high schools in Contra Costa County, including all the high schools in the West Contra Costa Unified School District and Mt. Diablo High in Concord. Pittsburg High plans to start one in the fall. The higher students advance in school, the harder it is to correct the problem. Teachers become increasingly focused on the subject they are teaching, and they don't have time to go back and teach a student how to read. "Most math teachers did not sign on to be reading teachers, nor did science teachers; they want to teach their subject matter," Pearson said. "(Teaching literacy) is a hard sell." However, Pearson added, "The test data are hitting people between the eyes. There is an increasing frustration on the part of secondary teachers that their students can't handle the material they are supposed to handle." High school English teachers may have students with reading levels ranging from first grade to collegiate in the same class, making it close to impossible to teach each student at his or her own level. In Lisa Storer's senior college prep English class at Richmond High, students went through as many as seven drafts to write a passable essay on Hamlet. "That's why they hate me, and they hate Hamlet," she said. "Luckily, I love Hamlet." Even a student with a fourth-grade reading level eventually managed to

write a simple five-paragraph essay with a thesis sentence, supporting paragraphs and a conclusion. But colleges expect far more sophisticated work. Parents should ask what their children's reading levels are, because grades can mask a deeper problem, Storer said. "These kids work their hearts out," she said. "On one level, it's not fair to expect seniors reading at a third-grade level to read Shakespeare." **Need for support** Despite signs of early progress, East Bay high schools are far from solving their literacy problem. Many schools cannot afford to offer remedial reading help to every student who needs it. Even students who have mastered basic reading skills often lack the comprehension and writing ability they will need after high school. The key to developing strong literacy skills in high school is to make it the goal of the entire school, not just the English teachers, some educators say. At Mt. Diablo High, teachers have begun to teach reading in all classes. Social studies, math, science and English teachers alike are expected to teach vocabulary words, note taking and reading strategies using the same methods. Ultimately, colleges and employers expect students to be able to read, write and think analytically. That goal is far off for the students who are still working to read at an elementary school level. For now, teachers and students in high school reading classes are celebrating each small success. Diamond Anthony, a 14-year-old with a diamond in his left ear, is no longer embarrassed when he reads aloud in Amy Anderson's reading class at Mt. Diablo High. In elementary and middle school, he said other students would laugh at him when he read. Sometimes he would get so mad, he would leave class and go to a park to cool off. Now he likes to read. "Diamond, 100 percent on your quiz," Anderson announced on a recent day in class. He took a slight bow. "Very nice," Anderson said. "You can take autographs later."

DI list di@lists.uoregon.edu 29/4/2003 I just heard that Cumberland Middle School in Virginia just won the Governor's award for excellence. We (Longwood University and Cumberland Middle school) have been working hard on their Corrective Reading School-wide implementation. They went from having 42 percent of their students passing the Virginia English SOL (our high stakes assessment) to 85% percent passing after one year of Corrective Reading. Just wanted to share another DI success story. Christopher D. Jones
Longwood University

Charles Carroll, Barrister School, Baltimore <http://www.nifdi.org/> 25/2/03 Baltimore's Charles Carroll, Barrister School brings many challenges to the educational effort. With some 20 different primary languages and a mobility rate sometimes exceeding 50%, meeting the needs of the school's 350 or so students is often difficult at best. As a result of those factors, principal Billie Rinaldi and her faculty/staff team found their school labeled among the district's lowest performers in '96. They were determined to do better for their students and began researching alternatives.

One approach some schools in the district had implemented a year earlier came to their attention. Billie quickly recognized it as a program she'd seen achieve great success in a Follow-Through environment in which she'd worked nearly 30 years ago. That approach was Direct Instruction. She thought it was again worth a try, and began introducing members of her faculty to the program. Not everyone was convinced initially, but they decided to forge ahead.

Now, well into their third year of implementation, they're very glad they did. The results they're seeing among their students are impressive....sometimes remarkable. Some students are showing roughly 3 years of growth in only two years of instruction. But that's not all. Rinaldi reports, "The entire focus of our students has changed. Now, it's clear that they understand why they're here. We're also seeing much more focus, much better support and involvement on the part of parents as well." And where parents may have had less-than- successful school experiences, in some cases they're even seeing students teaching their parents.

There are other benefits too. Now, even students with disabilities are included in regular classroom sessions, and benefiting greatly from the experience. Rinaldi believes one reason this is so is the highly reinforcing

nature of the multi-sensory instructional approach. Rinaldi points out that these successes would have been much more difficult to achieve without the support of consultants from NIFDI. She believes their expertise, coaching and facilitation skills were crucial in getting new faculty members up to speed and helping experienced ones with that occasional roadblock most everyone faces from time to time. But the positive effects of Direct Instruction don't stop with the students. Now, faculty members who had become disillusioned with months or years of failure are buoyed by the effects of seeing students make great gains. Students are learning because teachers are teaching....and everyone wins in the process.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Thursday, February 6, 2003 CONTACT: Christina Falkenberg (541) 686-9185 or at cb_care@hotmail.com

NEWS RELEASE High poverty middle school using Direct Instruction model continues to receive an "A" grade from State. Lincoln Middle School, Gainesville, Florida receives an "A" rating for third consecutive year 2000, 01, 02.

For the past three years Lincoln Middle School, has received "A" scores from the state of Florida for student performance. These consecutively high grades come in spite of serving a very high-need population. Of the 620 grade six to eight students, 83% qualify for the free or reduced lunch program and 92% are African American.

Three years ago, Lincoln Middle School, which at the time had a "D" rating, began to implement the Corrective Reading Decoding program, a component of the Direct Instruction Model. Over the past two years, Lincoln M.S. expanded the D. I. Model to include other programs: Corrective Reading Comprehension, Reasoning and Writing, Expressive Writing and Connecting Math Concepts. All students now learn from at least one Direct Instruction program each day; 70% learn from 2 DI programs, and 60% learn from 4 DI programs per day. Here are some highlights from the 2002 FCAT results; 63% of the lowest quartile made above normal gains in FCAT reading. 67% of all students made above normal gains in FCAT reading. 96% of all students passed the FCAT writing assessment.

Lincoln Middle School joins a list of schools from around the country who have implemented the DI Model with the support by Dr. Bonnie Grossen, Director of the Center for Applied Research in Education(C.A.R.E.), in Eugene Oregon. Dr. Grossen, co-author of several DI programs, is establishing a network to support other schools that desired to replicate the program established at Lincoln M. S.

Open Houses are scheduled for the following dates at Lincoln: February 27, 2003 April 17, 2003 May 15, 2003

Lincoln M.S. can provide information on steps that interested schools can take to begin a D.I. Model implementation. More information can also be found on the C.A.R.E. website, www.higherscores.org, or by contacting the CARE office, (541) 686-9185

The Florida Times-Union Friday, December 27, 2002

EDUCATION: New evidence

One of the learning programs being used in Jacksonville's public schools has earned high marks in a recent study for Johns Hopkins University and another has been labeled "promising," both indications that the system generally is on the right track. However, the study lends support to those advocating a scripted, phonics-based reading program and taking issue with the school superintendent, who favors a different approach.

The study examined 232 studies of 33 different programs in what is called a meta-analysis. That means it did no new research but was a review and analysis of all existing research. Using that method, the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) concluded that **Direct Instruction**, Success for All and the School Development Program had proven benefits for students. They were in the top

level, labeled "strongest evidence of effectiveness." Direct Instruction is a specific brand name. There are several generic versions of direct instruction, all with phonics components. Phonics is a method of teaching reading that has had a resurgence following decades of experimentation with "whole language" learning. Many teachers object to direct instruction because it is a scripted program that allows little deviation. Nevertheless, it is safe to say at this point, it works.

What must be considered is not what is suitable to the teacher but what is best for the child. The No Child Left Behind Act approved by Congress is the largest grant of money for education ever by the federal government and it speaks no less than 100 times about "scientifically based research" as the standard for comprehensive school reform. America's Choice, a "school design" program, fell into the third level of programs, which have "promising evidence of effectiveness." This program is used in 48 local schools and it is strongly supported by Superintendent John Fryer. However, Fryer said each school is free to choose its own learning program.

Direct Instruction is used in 15 schools currently. The local ICARE has been the most outspoken proponent of Direct Instruction. With Florida designated to receive \$43 million in federal funds that will be distributed by the state, ICARE says Jacksonville should apply next month for funds to use the program in 24 of the 59 local schools at the bottom of the achievement list. All students below the 39th percentile should get direct instruction, ICARE says. That is the policy in Clay County schools. "Without the benefit of high-quality evaluation, many widely disseminated educational practices have simply wasted the time of teachers and students," the CRESPAR study concludes. One reason the nation's public schools have languished for years in mediocrity is that they have been prone to the fad of the year. Standards and programs with proof of effectiveness certainly seem like one way of breaking that cycle.

The Education Intelligence Agency, COMMUNIQUÉ -- December 16, 2002, <http://www.eiaonline.com>
Want Parental Involvement? You Got It. "Parental Involvement Improves Student Achievement" reads a banner headline on the NEA web site. But I don't think this is the kind of parental involvement the union has in mind.

More than one-third of the parents of students of the Johnson Magnet School for Space Exploration and Technology in San Diego kept their kids at home in protest of school policies. Test scores fell last year and the parents blame it on the school's decision to abandon their preferred reading program: Direct Instruction.

Direct Instruction in reading is controversial among educators because it relies on scripted lessons, teacher-led instruction, drilling and phonics. It is less controversial among parents who find their children are unable to construct their own road to literacy.

The walkout ended with students heading to the Greater Life Baptist Church, where classes were held, staffed by retired teachers and other volunteers. After a meeting with school administrators, the parents agreed to return their children to school.

Does It Work? By JAMES TRAUB New York Times
<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/10/edlife/10CHILD.html?pagewanted=1> 11/11/02

JOURNALISTS using the most exacting method available to social science -- that is, counting -- have determined that the phrase "scientifically based research" occurs more than 100 times in the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The government, for example, will award \$5 billion over six years to states and districts where reading is taught using "scientifically based" methods. Though No Child Left Behind is perhaps best known for requiring every state to test annually in English and math, its passage may ultimately be recalled as the moment when education came to be treated more like medicine -- a science that advances according to the findings of impartial research -- than moral philosophy or folk wisdom.

The idea that pedagogy ought to aspire to the condition of science, or even social science, is quite novel, and it runs against the grain of mainstream educational culture. As Grover J. Whitehurst, assistant secretary for

research and improvement at the Department of Education, says, "Education has not relied very much on evidence, whether in regard to how to train teachers, what sort of curriculum to use or what sort of teaching methods to use. The decisions have been based on professional wisdom or the spirit of the moment rather than on research."

Last month, Congress passed legislation replacing the **Office of Education, Research and Improvement**, which has been widely criticized for being too easily sold on fads, with a more independent institute intended to foster a new culture of rigorous research. Dr. Whitehurst, a psychologist who has researched the effectiveness of the Head Start program, will lead the new **Institute of Education Services**. He is also in the process of setting up the What Works Clearinghouse, a body that will establish standards for research and then determine which of thousands of studies on class-size reduction, peer tutoring, reading instruction and so on meet those standards. There is giddy talk in the research world of some day establishing the equivalent of the Food and Drug Administration, declaring educational doctrines safe and effective, or not.

The history of educational research is not necessarily encouraging to those who foresee a golden age of scientific clarity. Historians like Diane Ravitch have shown that American public schools have been battlefields of conflicting doctrine since their founding in the mid-19th century, but until recently those doctrines were too inchoate and varied too much from place to place for rigorous comparison. All that began to change in the 1960's, when the Johnson administration made the education of the poor one of the great social experiments of the War on Poverty. Both Head Start and the so-called Title I program were intended, among other things, to improve the academic performance of disadvantaged children. The federal government sponsored extensive research into the effectiveness of both, but the findings were painfully disappointing.

"The evidence came back that nothing worked," says Thomas D. Cook, a professor of sociology at Northwestern University and a veteran of educational research. And if nothing schools did helped failing children, he adds, there was not much point in further study. The moral drawn by people in the field, especially by professors of education, was that schools were such complex and singular institutions that reforms in the mass were unlikely to work. And so scholars turned away from such top-down programs in favor of addressing the individual school, as if, Dr. Cook says, they were so many management consultants.

But the problem was not only that nothing worked -- the wrong thing worked. In 1968, the federal Office of Education commissioned a multiyear, \$500 million study to compare competing approaches to teaching basic skills in the early grades -- the first attempt to see what light "scientifically based research" could shed on different teaching methods. The Follow Through study, as it was called, ultimately involved nine approaches ranging from a highly progressive Open School model to an extremely structured design called Direct Instruction. The results, published in 1977, were stunning: only Direct Instruction significantly raised scores of third graders on a series of achievement tests. Children exposed to more progressive models did far worse than children at "control" schools. Direct Instruction was thus the first research-proven pedagogy.

But Direct Instruction, which involved breaking skills down to their smallest cognitive units and then teaching each subskill explicitly and repetitively, was wildly unpopular among educators, who found it almost robotic; rather than promote the one method and discourage the others, the Office of Education, absurdly, decided to certify most of the approaches as effective. At the time, scholars said that the entire study was methodologically flawed, though subsequent research tended to confirm the findings. "Apparently," the developer of Direct Instruction, Siegfried Engelmann, later bitterly wrote, "decision makers had a greater investment in romantic notions about children than in the gritty details of actual practice or the fact that some things work well." Here one comes to a crucial distinction between education and medicine: in education, a priori beliefs about the way children ought to learn or about the relative value of different kinds of knowledge seem to have tremendous force in shaping judgments about effectiveness. Direct Instruction could not be deemed uniquely effective because, according to the progressive model then widely embraced, it wasn't supposed to be effective. One can still find fierce rebuttals of the Follow Through results in contemporary defenses of progressive education like Alfie Kohn's "Schools Our Children Deserve." Nor is it simply a matter of disputing results. Many progressive educators, including influential figures like Howard Gardner of Harvard University, argue that education should lead to forms of deep

understanding that cannot be properly measured by standardized tests. (This is what Mr. Engelmann meant by "romantic notions about children.") In other words, they don't accept the very premise of the What Works Clearinghouse, or for that matter of No Child Left Behind. This is a problem that the F.D.A. does not have to contend with. And so it is probably safe to say that ideology has done as much to retard the rise of scientifically based research as the skittishness of researchers themselves. The pattern of traditional teaching methods faring better in rigorous comparisons than more open-ended ones, and then of the open-ended ones flourishing nevertheless, has repeated itself many times over. The best-known instance of the phenomenon is probably the endless battle between the proponents of phonics and of whole language instruction. Virtually every impartial effort to analyze the hundreds of studies on the subject, most recently by the Reading Panel of the National Institutes of Health, has found that the step-by-step approach of phonics is more effective, especially with poor children. But phonics, which the Bush administration unabashedly promotes, is still a four-letter word in progressive reaches of the educational world, where it is widely held that children can learn to read through immersion in language rather than through memorizing letters and sounds. No Child Left Behind may mark a turning point in this battle between educational folk wisdom and social science. From now on, classroom practices will have to "work" to gain wide acceptance (and federal grants), and the criteria for "work" will be explicitly defined. Education researchers are increasingly turning to what is known in medicine as the randomized-control trial, in which large populations of patients are randomly assigned to receive either the treatment being tested or whatever they would have received otherwise. The F.D.A. will not normally approve new drugs or therapies without evidence from such large-scale experiments. Randomly assigned trials are still unusual in education, a field where, for perfectly good reasons, the treatment comes first and the study later. Even a study as sophisticated as Follow Through did not involve random assignment, and for that reason has been dismissed by some social scientists. But such experiments are now carried out on a wide range of educational practices, including teacher development, peer tutoring and voucher programs. Probably the most highly regarded of all educational studies is the experiment in class-size reduction begun in 1985 by the state of Tennessee, which offered schools extra funds if they agreed to randomly assign teachers and students to classes of 15 or 22 children. Students in smaller classes enjoyed significant gains in reading and math scores, though gains faded over time. And because the experiment was carried out with such care, the merits of small classes are now widely accepted. Frederick Mosteller, a renowned statistician at Harvard, compared the study to the Salk vaccine trials as a seminal moment in the history of research. And yet while the polio vaccine trials led to a universal treatment, the class-size trials certainly have not. California was moved by Tennessee's experience to spend billions of dollars hiring new teachers, but the results were much less impressive than Tennessee's. Partisans of reducing class size blame California's implementation -- too many incompetent teachers hired too fast -- but it may also be that small classes on their own are a less effective treatment than the polio vaccine. Here, too, ideology intervenes, because liberals point to the benefits of reducing class size as proof that more money should be spent on schools, while conservatives who think that money is not the answer point to California's experience. Eric A. Hanushek, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and a leading critic of additional school spending, recently wrote, "Despite the political popularity of overall class-size reduction, the scientific support for such policies is weak to nonexistent." In an essay in January for the Hoover Institution, E.D. Hirsch Jr., founder of Core Knowledge, a whole-school reform model that re-envision curriculum and structure, wrote that the continuing debate over class-size reduction as well as over whole-school reforms showed that even the most rigorously designed experiments would never cut the Gordian knots. Virtually no study, he wrote, offers a plausible account of why a particular practice does or doesn't raise student achievement, so scholars cannot draw a firm line from specific findings to the reform. And so many variables go into learning, he suggested, that classroom data is inherently ungeneralizable. It may be that the wish for an objective answer to the question of what works in education is a will-o'-the-wisp. It may not be possible to remove the elements of subjectivity, of values, of differing conceptions of the good, which make education different from medicine (itself not value-free, of course). Why, in fact, would anyone wish to? Education is an ineluctably moral act. At the same time, we could attain a great deal more clarity than we have now about the effectiveness of the torrent of practices and theories washing all around us. Perhaps we will simply have to accept the fact that research will help us decide what is best but will never make those decisions for us. *James Traub is a contributing writer for The Times Magazine.*

District tossing program for poor readers *By Mary Ellen Flannery, Palm Beach Post Sunday, November 24, 2002* LAKE WORTH -- Crack! Third-grade teacher Cynthia Conley raps her pen on her desk, tapping

out the rhythm of words. The pen goes crack and the kids shout, "Buh!" *Crack!* "Itt!" *Crack!* "Err!" "First word?" she prompts. "Bitter," her class cries, in unison. "Bitter is a bad taste," Conley explains to her class at South Grade Elementary, a group of attentive third-graders, still learning English, who mostly read like first-graders. "If I take a lemon and bite into it, the lemon would taste bitter. I might look like this," Conley said, scrunching up her face.

But moments later, when Conley talks about the prescriptive reading program she has been using with these students, called Direct Instruction, she can't stop smiling. It works, she said, as she points to test scores bearing evidence. Last year, Conley started with 11 students, all reading at the kindergarten or first-grade level. By the end of the year, all but two had made it to the third-grade level." Can you tell I love this program?" Conley asked. "It just works. I can't say anything bad about it." Despite the success in Conley's small classroom, Palm Beach County school officials said this week they're not prepared to continue the program, which served about 200 students last year."

We need to be a system where empirical data drives our decisions," schools Superintendent Art Johnson said. A study done by a school district researcher last month showed no real difference in the rate of improvement between Direct Instruction students and other students who started the school year at the same low level. The study concluded that the district's "balanced literacy" program, which relies on a new reading series by Scott Foresman & Co., is just as effective. "If it had shown success, we would have jumped all over it," Johnson said. "I do like Direct Instruction. I think it can be extremely effective in certain areas, but I don't think it's enough to carry you to the level of reading achievement that's expected today."

So, with the grant money for Direct Instruction running out this year, Johnson said he doesn't intend to continue the program with the district's own money. Individual schools might want to spend school improvement money to continue it, but they would be offering the program on top of the Scott Foresman series.

Program has support That's not good enough for a handful of community leaders, who have met twice with Johnson this year to talk about expanding the program, not cutting it off. To make it as effective as possible, students should start Direct Instruction in kindergarten and stay with it for three years in a row, said the Rev. Donald Duncombe, co-president of PEACE -- People Engaged in Active Community Efforts, a group based in Riviera Beach. "We feel they're just giving us the runaround," Duncombe said. "All this talk about Scott Foresman, like it's some prima donna program.... I don't think they gave us a fair shake.

"It might be possible to get another grant to expand the program, suggested Aleem Fakir, a PEACE staff member. That might be an option, Johnson said. Direct Instruction, which has been in schools since 1968, came to Palm Beach County last year at the urging of PEACE. The group had won a \$257,000 state grant to train one teacher from each of a dozen D-graded schools to work with the worst third-grade readers. Conley, a nationally certified teacher, is one of the 12, and she'd already heard of the program in one of her graduate-level education classes. Her Florida Atlantic University professor had asked his students to read a study, commissioned by President Lyndon Johnson in 1968, that found Direct Instruction produced bigger gains than 20 other programs.

"I read this and thought, 'Here it is! Why aren't we using this?' " she recalled. The program relies on highly scripted instructional strategies. Every Direct Instruction classroom sounds basically the same. The teachers ask their students to read aloud, one by one, and stop them at each mistake. The teachers pace their lessons in the same way. Although some educators have scorned Direct Instruction because of its lock-step methods, a study published in the *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* in April reported that schools using Direct Instruction in Florida, Maryland and Texas are generally seeing gains in student learning. And many teachers say it helps with discipline because the students are constantly participating.

Houston sees success In Houston, where Palm Beach County PEACE members went to see Direct Instruction in action a few years ago, researchers concluded that students in schools with the program were learning to read faster than those in other schools with similar socioeconomic makeup. What's more, the students who had been longest in the program improved the most. But in Baltimore, as in Palm Beach

County, researchers couldn't say Direct Instruction worked any better than other programs. Students who began the program in kindergarten were reading on grade level by third grade. So were students in other poor schools, where teachers used systematic phonics instruction. Still, there's the evidence in Conley's classroom: Santos, Maria and Omar. After just three months in her classroom this year, they've jumped from pictures-only to two-syllable words. "Good job!" she tells them. mary_ellen_flannery@pbpost.com

Rising from the Ashes By Bernice Whelchel, Baltimore, Md. <http://www.nclb.gov/Newsletter/TheAchiever> is published by the Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs, U.S. Department of Education (ED). **September 15, 2002 • Vol.1, No. 1**

"A phoenix rising from the ashes" was the hopeful description of City Springs Elementary School at the beginning of the 1997 school year. We had embarked upon our second year of school-wide reform efforts, and the jury was still out as to whether or not we would succeed. As a first-time principal, I was attempting to turn around a school widely believed to be one of the worst in Baltimore.

When we began our efforts, City Springs was not a safe place. Children and parents roamed the halls freely, teachers were threatened and often struggled just to get through the day. Student achievement had reached an all-time low and the school was under threat of state takeover. None of our students scored at the satisfactory level in reading and math on Maryland's state assessment, and we ranked 114 out of 115 on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS).

Last year, six years after our efforts began, we were one of only two schools in Baltimore in the last 10 years to be removed from the state's watch list. Our overall state assessment scores rose to sixth in the city! Our median score for first-graders was in the 92nd percentile! We have the same student population as we did before: 98 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. We are still in an area of Baltimore that is plagued by crime and drugs—but we are not the same school. If I hadn't experienced firsthand the painstaking efforts of our staff and students, I would call this turnaround nothing short of miraculous.

It is therefore with great excitement and satisfaction that we enter the 2002-2003 school year. We have high expectations for all students. Our school already meets many of the demands of *No Child Left Behind*. We have seen these reforms work, and we know they can work. President Bush, Secretary Paige and the U.S. Congress have united to bring new expectations, and that's encouraging. Until our school achieved such clear success during the last couple of years, we often felt that we were "renegades" for using direct instruction programs, in spite of their proven effectiveness. We had to resist pressure from various state and local agencies to enact teaching practices or curricula that we knew would be counterproductive to our students' progress. We knew that what we were doing worked, and we didn't want to risk our success on well-intentioned but unproven fads.

No Child Left Behind gives this inner-city principal hope. Hope that this country will no longer accept the failure of poor children. Hope that educators will come to understand that we have enough examples of successful schools serving poor students to actually know what has to be in place for at-risk students to succeed. And, hope that, truly, no child will be left behind.

Bernice Whelchel, an educator for 32 years, is principal of City Springs Elementary School in Baltimore, Md. Last winter Whelchel served as a panelist on U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige's Reading Leadership Academy to share how a research-based curriculum turned a failing school into a successful one. Today begins a new era, a new time for public education in our country. Our schools will have higher expectations—we believe every child can learn. From this day forward, all students will have a better chance to learn, to excel, and to live out their dreams." —President Bush, at the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act on January 8, 2002

DI List June 27 2002

Great news. I got a joyous phone call from the principal (Dan Grounard) at Cumberland Middle School. I worked with these guys on their school-wide implementation of Corrective Reading. Each 6th, 7th, and a cohort of 8th graders received 90 min of CR (45 comp; 45 decoding) a day.

They also implemented parts of Expressive Writing, Power Writing, and Cortez Math.

This is their first year of full implementation, so I cautioned them that the results might be minimal. Well they just got their Virginia Standards for Learning scores back (SOL = Virginia's high stake assessments).

Here is a break down of their scores

AREA	Last Year % passing	This Years % passing
Science	70	87
Computer/Tech	48	75
Math	52	100
English	48	80 (combination of writing and reading)
History	50	67

Currently there is only one middle school in Virginia's region 8 that is fully accredited. To receive full accreditation a school must have a pass rate of 70 % in each academic area. We missed full accreditation by 3 percentage points on the history assessment!!!

I have to sing the praises of Paul Mckinney and Ed Schaeffer of Educational Resources Inc. Paul set up the program and provided the bulk of the coaching. We are truly indebted to his professionalism..... I highly encourage anyone who is even thinking about school-wide implementation to contact these guys.

We are going to work now on teasing out the data to determine specific strengths. As you might expect the teachers are very excited.

Unfortunately, the Elementary school did not fair as well. They have rejected using DI in favor of Sing, Spell, Read, and Write from Curriculum Associates. They experienced significant negative growth in all but the kindergarten grades. In light of these scores they have given the green light to go school-wide with Reading Mastery Plus and CR in grades 3 - 5. I was hoping to get K-2 because as you know any true reform is going to take place in those grades.....maybe next year.

I just wanted to take the time to provide the list with yet another example of the power of DI.

Take care, Christopher D. Jones Longwood University Assistant Professor Of Special Education

City schools' test scores climb Most reading, math grades on standardized exam top last year's marks; Middle school progress lauded

By Erika Niedowski Baltimore Sun Staff Originally published June 25, 2002

The majority of Baltimore's first-graders scored above the national median for the second straight year on reading and math tests, while children in the city's troubled middle schools made solid gains this spring in both subjects.

Even with flat reading scores in several grades, school officials said the overall results of national standardized exams for first- through eighth-graders show the system is continuing to make steady progress in its effort to raise pupil achievement.

Scores on the TerraNova, formerly known as the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, went up in every grade in math.

First-grade performance in reading and math continued to improve, as it did a year ago when the majority scored above the national median for the first time in at least a decade. This year's reading score rose 4 percentile points to the 59th percentile; in math, the score increased 3 percentile points to the 54th percentile.

If a pupil ranks in the 50th percentile, he or she has scored better than 50 percent of all pupils who took the test. As a result, 50 is considered the national median.

"We are on the move in Baltimore," city school board Chairwoman Patricia L. Welch said yesterday at a celebration of the results at school system headquarters. "It's because of good teaching, good support and a belief in the children of Baltimore."

Reading scores were flat in grades two and three and dipped slightly in grade five - a change from a year ago, when gains were made in every elementary grade.

But school officials highlighted improvements in the city's chronically underperforming middle schools, saying that reform efforts undertaken during the past academic year have begun to make a difference.

The city's sixth-graders, for example, though still lagging behind their counterparts across the country, increased their reading score from a year ago by 8 percentile points, to the 30th percentile.

Eighth-graders increased their score in math by 11 percentile points, to the 32nd percentile, over fall 2000.

This was the first year eighth-graders took the TerraNova in the spring; other grades have always taken the standardized test then.

"Our middle schools have really done us proud," said Carmen V. Russo, chief executive officer for the school system. "Imagine what they're going to do next year."

Several schools in the "CEO's district," which were singled out for extra attention and additional resources in an effort to speed improvement, posted significant increases in reading and math in some grades. Officials had not yet evaluated, however, whether that district performed better overall than the city as a whole.

Westport Elementary-Middle School, a CEO's district school being run by Victory Schools, a private, for-profit company, had mixed results. But scores for grade one were particularly disappointing, with a 25-point drop in reading and a 3-point decline in math from a year ago.

Citywide, Baltimore schools have made remarkable progress on the national exams since 1997, when the city and state launched a landmark partnership to overhaul a school system in dire academic straits. In exchange for giving up partial control of the schools, the city got a pledge for more than \$250 million in new state aid over five years.

The bulk of it was put toward elementary reforms, including reducing class sizes, establishing a districtwide curriculum and giving teachers more training in reading and math. The school system also expanded pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs.

Slowly but surely, the efforts have paid off: Since 1998, the first-grade TerraNova reading score has climbed 34 percentile points, while the third-grade math score has increased 22 percentile points.

"That's the heart and soul of this announcement today," state schools Superintendent Nancy S. Grasmick said yesterday. "Not a singular year where things look good, but sustained progress over time."

City school board member Sam Stringfield praised state legislators for providing the school system with the extra funding, as well as for agreeing to provide millions more. The so-called Thornton legislation passed by the General Assembly during the last session calls for a \$1.3 billion increase statewide in public education spending over the next six years, and includes a large boost for Baltimore.

"We should say they are getting a return on their investment," Stringfield said.

This year, 70 of 112 elementary schools increased their first-grade reading score, while 38 slipped and four stayed the same. The percentage of schools with first-graders scoring above the 50th percentile in reading increased to 67 percent from 57 percent a year ago.

First graders at Elmer A. Henderson Elementary scored at the 85th percentile in reading and the 89th percentile in math.

Principal Jamie M. Brown attributed the math score - the city's highest for that grade - to a combination of factors, including unusually small class size, an instructional-support teacher solely for math, daily monitoring of and immediate feedback to teachers, and a range of remedial programs before school, after school and on Saturdays.

"With success, it breeds success," Brown said. "So children just feeling good about the fact that they were getting good grades just pushed it along."

Lakeland Elementary/Middle School was recognized as one of the most improved schools in reading: During the last two years, its sixth-grade score jumped 26 percentile points, from the 23rd percentile to the 49th percentile.

Lakeland's first-graders also did well this year, reaching the national median for the first time. Jacqueline Ferris, the principal, said all-day kindergarten has helped prepare children better. A phonics-based reading curriculum, after-school programs and an 18-to-1 pupil-to-teacher ratio in the early grades has made a difference - as has good old-fashioned teaching by her staff, she said.

"So many of them go beyond the call of duty for everything," Ferris said. "Kudos to them."

School officials will use the latest test results to help determine how well certain initiatives are working as the district continues its reform drive. **Two models that have generally been successful are Achievement First, which emphasizes literacy, in-classroom teacher training and support for principals, and Direct Instruction, which takes a tightly scripted, drill-heavy approach.**

Mary E. Yakimowski, the system's chief of educational accountability, said nine of the 10 schools in the CEO's district showed overall gains on the Total Battery - a combination of reading, language arts and math scores. The average gain in reading across all grades in the special district was 2 percentile points, while the average gain in math was 4 points, she said.

One school in the CEO's district, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary, saw its reading scores drop in every grade and its math scores drop in every grade but third.

Russo said she would have liked to see larger overall gains in her district, particularly in reading, but that she considered the first year of the three-year effort a success.

"It's only one year. It takes time for new staff and principals to gel," she said. "I would have liked to see higher, but I still think that we have made a wonderful start." 2002, The Baltimore Sun

Eight Different Schools or Districts Share the Secrets of their Success in Raising Reading Achievement
NEW YORK--(BUSINESS WIRE)— June 6, 2002

Effective Reading Mastery Program Cited As Primary Reason for Beating the Odds

A report issued today sheds new light on how eight different schools or districts across the country made significant improvements in reading achievement.

The report, "Results with Reading Mastery," documents how the direct instruction teaching methodology led to improved test scores among students facing significant challenges. In many cases, these improvements were dramatic and took place in a short amount of time. The new report is the third in a series of RESULTS documents developed by McGraw-Hill Education.

All eight schools or districts in the study are comprised of high percentages of disadvantaged students, and many include large numbers of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students who speak English as a second language. Most of the schools are located in poverty-stricken communities. Despite these challenges, the eight schools or districts highlighted in the study have turned around student performance in reading in large part by implementing the Reading Mastery program in their classrooms. Each of the schools previously had some of the lowest achievement scores in their districts, states and even the nation. Now they're posting some of the highest scores.

Both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) applauded the results of the report, which provides important information to educators about an early literacy program that is working in even our most challenged schools.

"We must continue to spotlight reading programs that are making a positive difference on students," said Sandra Feldman, president of AFT. "Reading Mastery has been proven effective in teaching students to read, particularly students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds."

The schools and school districts profiled in the report include: -- Portland Elementary School in Portland, Arkansas -- Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas -- Wilson Primary School in Phoenix, Arizona -- Lebanon School District in Lebanon, Pennsylvania -- Park Forest-Chicago Heights School District in Suburban Chicago, Illinois -- Roland Park Elementary/Middle School in Baltimore, Maryland -- City Springs Elementary School in Baltimore, Maryland -- Eshelman Avenue Elementary in Lomita, California

The Numbers In each of the report's highlighted schools and districts, test scores have increased since implementation of Reading Mastery. For example, test scores at Portland Elementary School in Portland, Arkansas, which had for years scored near the bottom of the district, now exceed the performance of students not only in Arkansas, but also in the Southeastern U.S. and the nation, only five years after the adoption of Reading Mastery. Similarly, scores at Roland Park Elementary School in Baltimore dramatically increased following the introduction of Reading Mastery. In 1998, Roland Park first graders had a mean national percentile of 54.5 on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). In 2000, their mean national ranking skyrocketed to 82, a growth of almost 28 points. The school also saw an increase in reading scores across each of its grade levels.

"Whatever your philosophy is on reading," said Mariale Hardiman, principal of Roland Park Elementary School in Baltimore, "our scores clearly indicated that the Reading Mastery program is successful."

In 1994, City Springs Elementary School in Baltimore did not have a single student in fifth grade who scored 'satisfactory or above' on the Maryland Schools Proficiency Assessment Program (MSPAP). In 2000, four years after adopting Reading Mastery, 16.4 percent of City Springs' fifth grade students earned the 'excellent' mark in Language Usage on the MSPAP, a dramatic improvement.

Recently, 32 schools that use Reading Mastery in the Fort Worth Independent School District received an Exemplary or a Recognized rating from the Texas Education Agency based on their test scores from the spring 2000 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The coveted Exemplary rating is only given to schools where 90 percent of the school's students pass the reading, math and writing portion of TAAS. Dr.

Thomas Tocco, superintendent of the Fort Worth Independent School District, said about the increased test scores in his district, "The message is clear. Our students are reading. The gap is closing, and not at the expense of any Fort Worth student."

Beyond The Numbers In addition to higher test scores, the principals and teachers in the highlighted schools and districts report a profound influence on student behavior. Since implementing Reading Mastery, the schools have had fewer disciplinary problems and fewer referrals to special education programs.

Because the program offers structure and discipline and carefully groups students by ability, students do not become frustrated with their pace of learning. As students demonstrate mastery of a reading lesson, they then move on to the next level. Teachers can easily move students into different groups, based on their accomplishments. In this way, students who learn quickly are able to receive accelerated instruction, and those who need extra help, receive it.

According to teachers in these schools, the students are not only learning how to read but they are also beginning to enjoy reading. Some schools indicated that the ability to read has contributed to improvements in students' self-esteem. Eshelman Avenue Elementary School principal Winnie Washington states, "The kids feel better about themselves because they are successful."

Finally, schools report improved grades across subject areas from science to social studies to math. School officials attribute this overall increased achievement to students' ability to better and more quickly read and comprehend homework and test questions in these subjects.

"The 'Results with Reading Mastery' report provides solid examples of how a research-based reading program is turning around struggling schools," said Vince Ferrandino, executive director of NAESP. "This is exactly the type of information educators need in order to make informed curricular decisions for their own schools."

A Commitment to Professional Development At each of the Reading Mastery schools, consultants train the staff and then visit the schools on an ongoing basis during the implementation process to provide intensive professional development support. The consultants conduct informal and formal observations of classroom instruction and then provide teachers and administrators with continual feedback.

"The Reading Mastery consultants made sure we didn't stray off course," said Principal Mariale Hardiman. "They provided the training our teachers needed to ensure the program was implemented properly and was a success."

Reading Mastery is offered through SRA/McGraw-Hill, a unit of McGraw-Hill Education. The Reading Mastery report is the third in a series of RESULTS reports developed by McGraw-Hill Education. The first report, "Results with Open Court," examined literacy achievement at a diverse group of schools that had implemented the Open Court Reading program. The second report, "Shared Responsibility for Results: Breakthrough to Literacy," focused on reading improvements in two urban school districts, Norfolk, Virginia and School City of East Chicago, Indiana, where the Breakthrough to Literacy program has been adopted.

All three of these reports can be downloaded at www.mheducation.com. To request printed copies of any or all of these reports, contact Charlotte Frank, vice president of McGraw-Hill Education Research and Development, at (212) 512-6512 or charlotte-frank@mcgraw-hill.com.

About AFT The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) represents more than 1.2 million pre-K through 12th grade teachers, paraprofessionals and other school support employees; higher education faculty; nurses and other healthcare workers; and state and local government employees.

About NAESP Established in 1921, the National Association of Elementary School Principals serves 28,500 elementary and middle school principals in the U.S., Canada and overseas.

Today's News On The Net – Business Wire's full file on the Internet with Hyperlinks to your home page.
URL: <http://www.businesswire.com> 06/06/2002 10:06 EASTERN

9/5/02 DI Listmates, I just got some good news today and I wanted to share it with you guys. The middle school I am working with implemented Corrective Reading, Expressive Writing, and Power writing to all 6th 7th, and a cohort of 8th graders. They just received their Virginia SOL scores back from the writing test and they jumped from 41 percent pass rate last year to a 63 percent pass rate. Not bad for the first year! We hope that the rest of the scores mirror the writing test increase.....these guys have been working very hard, so I feel cautiously optimistic. And while we know that this is a 5 year investment, I hope they get validated for their hard work

Unfortunately, the news from the elem. school that has solidly rejected any DI intervention is not as uplifting. They dropped from a 45 percent pass rate to a 36 percent pass rate on the fifth grade writing SOL. I continue to hope that the elem. school will open up a bit to the possibilities of using DI.

Chris Jones Assistant Professor of Special Education Longwood University

April 17, 2002 Studies Cite Learning Gains In Direct Instruction Schools By Debra Viadero © 2002
Editorial Projects in Education Vol. 21, number 31, page 15

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=31direct.h21> Schools using Direct Instruction, a teaching method sometimes criticized for its tightly scripted teaching lessons, are generally seeing gains in student learning, according to a new package of studies that tracked the program in Florida, Maryland, and Texas.

The studies, published this month in the Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, are important, experts said, because they represent the first published empirical research on the program, or adaptations of it, in more than a decade.

They look at districts in four locations—Baltimore; Broward County, Fla.; Fort Worth, Texas; and Houston—in which anywhere from six to 30 schools began using the program in the 1990s.

"Direct Instruction is a powerful tool, and educators have a right to know it's out there. Some may choose it and some may not," said Muriel V. Berkeley, the president of the Baltimore Curriculum Project, a nonprofit group supporting efforts to put the program in place in 16 schools in that city.

As promising as the test-score gains look, however, commentators on both the pro and con sides of the debate over the controversial school improvement program said they are not the last word on the program's effectiveness.

The findings are inconclusive, educators said, for a variety of reasons. In Broward County, results were hard to disentangle because the program was combined with other educational innovations. Other studies either focused only on the early elementary grades or looked at programs that were not implemented as faithfully as program developers might have hoped, experts said.

"We do the best we can with what we've got, and we don't give up because we don't have perfect studies," said Martha Abele Mac Iver, who helped edit the special issue and was a co-author of one of the studies in it.

Developed more than 30 years ago by Sigfried Engelmann, Direct Instruction is used in thousands of schools nationwide. It is one of only a handful of comprehensive school reform models cited for having a solid research base. Critics up until now, however, have complained that many of the studies were old. ("A Direct Challenge," March 17, 1999.)

Better Than What? In her study, which was conducted with Elizabeth Kemper, a researcher at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, Ms. Mac Iver focused on Baltimore, where six of the city's lowest-achieving schools began using Direct Instruction programs in the fall of 1996.

The researchers found that students who started in the program as kindergartners that year were reading on grade level by the end of 3rd grade, and children who came to Direct Instruction in 2nd grade were reading close to grade level by 5th grade.

But so were children in six other demographically matched schools that were using a different reading curriculum with systematic phonics instruction.

"There's evidence here that Direct Instruction is definitely helping some of the students," said Ms. Mac Iver, an associate research scientist at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. "The issue we still need to ferret out is whether they're doing significantly better than students getting other types of instruction."

Ms. Berkeley noted, however, that the numbers don't tell the whole story in Baltimore, where the program's implementation and success rates have varied from school to school—especially in the early implementation years.

At poverty-ridden City Springs Elementary School, one of the first such schools, reading scores have climbed from among the district's lowest to its fifth highest. In others, the program seems to have had less of an impact.

In Houston, on the other hand, where some of the district's most disadvantaged schools began using Direct Instruction reading techniques with pupils in kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade through a program called Rodeo Institute for Teacher Excellence, or RITE, the positive results seemed clearer. The number of schools using the program in that city grew from six in the fall of 1996 to 20 in 2001.

As part of their evaluation, researchers from the Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics at the University of Houston compared the gains that program students made on state reading tests and other measures with those for children in other schools with the same socioeconomic makeups.

They concluded that the RITE program accelerated the pace of students' prereading and reading skills in kindergarten and 1st grade. What's more, the students whose scores improved the most were those who had been in the program the longest.

Even though the rate of growth for the program participants slowed in 2nd grade, the researchers noted, the nonprogram students still had not caught up to them by the end of that year.

Researchers documented similar gains in Fort Worth, where 61 schools in 1998 adopted either Direct Instruction reading programs or the Open Court reading program, a commercial program that also teaches reading systematically. Compared with students in more traditional reading classes, the study found, kindergarten and 1st grade students in both of the new reading programs did better on nationally normed reading tests.

Testing Caveats However, in a commentary on all of the studies, Barak Rosenshine suggests the two Texas studies didn't go far enough because they assessed students only through 2nd grade.

Testing should go through 3rd or 4th grade, when students move from simply decoding words to understanding what they mean, said Mr. Rosenshine, a professor emeritus of educational psychology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Both studies are ongoing, and findings for later years are yet to come.

Jerry Silbert, who wrote college textbooks on Direct Instruction and has helped implement its use, said that some of the districts studied were using only a narrow slice of the more comprehensive Direct Instruction model, which now spans a wide range of subjects and grade levels. He also noted that in Fort Worth, teachers only received one-fifth of the level of coaching that program developers recommend.

The Journal of Direct Instruction, published by Association for Direct Instruction, provides articles and research on Direct Instruction teaching methods and programs.

In September 1996, the Chicago-based school-reform journal Catalyst published a special issue on using Direct Instruction learning techniques. Articles include, "Direct Instruction Making Waves," and "So What's a School to do?"

Read "Six Promising Schoolwide Programs for Raising Student Achievement: Direct Instruction," an examination of the Direct Instruction programs and related research and statistics, from the American Federation of Teachers. © 2002 Editorial Projects in Education Vol. 21, number 31, page 15

By Jay Mathews Washington Post Staff Writer Tuesday, April 9, 2002; Page A11
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16662-2002Apr8.html>

When North Dallas High School switched in the 1980s to what some considered old-fashioned mathematics books full of drills and review, achievement levels for many of the low-income and low-performing students at the Texas school soared.

"I used to hate math," Nelly Fernandez said shortly after graduating a decade ago, but "the repetition really helps sink it in as opposed to other books that introduce one concept and then jump to another."

When Mamaroneck High School introduced a very non traditional exploratory humanities program for ninth-graders in the 1990s, emphasizing individual research projects and oral presentations, students and parents in the suburban New York school embraced the idea. The so-called student-directed learning "was much more interesting than listening to the teacher lecture," a consultant's report concluded.

Drills or projects, teacher-led or student-led lessons, traditional or progressive education -- the terms denote two learning styles that have divided American educators for almost a century.

On one side are traditionalists who say children need to know the basics -- letter sounds, multiplication facts, history dates -- before they can tackle more complicated concepts with confidence and success. On the other side are progressives who say the basics are more easily and more deeply learned if absorbed in the course of student research into concepts that interest them.

Increasingly, many educators believe that the type of learning should depend on the type of learner: Students from low-income backgrounds with little preparation at home -- like many of those in North Dallas -- should be drilled on basics. Others who are better prepared, such as the middle-class students in New York, can benefit from a more exploratory curriculum.

"Those who need to go over the basics and to learn how to read should get that attention," said New York University educational historian Diane Ravitch, whose recent book, "Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms," eviscerates many progressive theorists. "Those who know the basics and are ready for projects and activities should get that level of challenge."

But others worry that such an approach could short change the students who need the most help and, in certain instances, amount to racial profiling in education.

"How do you know whether a particular instructional strategy is effectively addressing the unique style of a student or merely fulfilling a teacher's prejudicial prophecy of how that student learns?" asked Jim Kohlmoos, president of the D.C.-based National Education Knowledge Industry Association.

Joe DiMartino, program director for student-centered learning at Brown University's Education Alliance, said, "The idea that our predominantly minority low-income kids need something less than our predominantly white middle- and upper-income kids need is at the very least classist if not racist."

But at Cameron Elementary School in Fairfax County, Principal George Towery said he is tired of hearing people who "have only one opinion" criticize the heavily structured and repetitive lessons he gives many of his low-income students from non-English-speaking families. "You have to teach the foundation before constructing the rest of the building," he said.

The program he uses, Direct Instruction, received the highest rating for evidence of positive effects in a 1999 national study by the Washington-based American Institutes for Research. Cameron's passing rates on the Virginia Standards of Learning tests have increased significantly in the past three years, from 53 percent to 71 percent in third-grade English and 59 percent to 81 percent in third-grade math.

But Towery, in keeping with the trend, does not use the basic program with all his pupils. Those whose test scores are at or above grade level have a different curriculum with less drill and repetition.

The same is true in California's Elk Grove school district. Former state education secretary Gary K. Hart said the district near Sacramento has had success giving struggling students in low-income schools more teacher-led instruction while providing "a more inquiry-based curriculum for students who demonstrate test scores at the 50th-60th percentiles" and who agree to do more in-depth work.

The danger, experts say, is that tailoring different styles for different students can become an excuse for neglect. "When middle-class high school students meet what could easily be considered an age-appropriate intellectual ceiling, we ignore it. We give them even more of Morrison, Pope, Ellison, Conrad and Joyce," said Carlton Jordan, a senior associate with the Washington-based Education Trust. "When low-income high school students hit a ceiling, we simply stop, and rarely push beyond it."

There are still many traditionalists who say progressive methods, at least as commonly used in schools, don't work. Many progressives say the same about traditional methods. DiMartino, a progressive, said he has visited "literally hundreds of mostly high school classrooms in urban, suburban and rural settings" and found that, at most, 20 percent of the lessons encourage student inquiry. "This is detrimental to adolescent learning," he said.

He said he would like 80 percent of the lessons to reflect student inquiry, but "this cannot be easily accomplished without a substantial investment in professional development of our teachers."

Traditionalists, on the other hand, say the progressive approach is too confusing and frustrating to work in most schools and leaves low-income students worse off than ever. Middle-class students "are less harmed by it because of their awareness and financial ability to compensate" with tutoring, said Wayne Bishop, a mathematics professor and progressive education critic at California State University at Los Angeles.

Daniel A. Domenech, superintendent of Fairfax County schools, said he has listened to the debate for years and concluded that neither side has the advantage. He praised Cameron Elementary's success with Direct Instruction but said another Fairfax school with many disadvantaged students, Pine Spring Elementary, used a very different program and also improved significantly.

When he was a superintendent on Long Island, N.Y., Domenech allowed teachers at one high school to use both the traditional Saxon math program -- the one that brought success to North Dallas High -- and a much more inquiry-based state program. "After three years of implementation," he said, "it was a draw. No significant difference between the two approaches.

"There is no sure-fire program for the poor kids and no sure-fire program for the rich kids," he said. "There is a program that will work with any child if the teacher believes in it and knows what he or she is doing."

Lynne Cheney pays a visit to City Springs Elementary -----

'Second lady' praises pupils for test scores

By Mike Bowler Sun Staff

February 13, 2002

Lynne Cheney, wife of Vice President Dick Cheney, visited one of Baltimore's improving elementary schools yesterday to spread congratulations and promote Direct Instruction, the curriculum credited with bolstering the school's test scores.

Cheney paid a morning call on City Springs Elementary, fielding questions at an assembly and then visiting first-grade reading and fifth-grade history classes.

Teachers at the East Baltimore school, in one of the city's poorest neighborhoods, tried to carry on a normal schedule as Cheney and aides, reporters, city school officials and Secret Service agents marched through the school.

Children had prepared with bright questions for the "second lady," and in the case of the history class, they demonstrated a good deal of knowledge about the president and his Cabinet, rattling off the names of Cabinet secretaries.

"It looks like you know more than grown-ups if I went out on the street and asked these questions," Cheney told the fifth-graders.

Steadily improving scores, especially on the national Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, earned City Springs a removal from the state's list of failing schools. CTBS scores increased impressively - in some cases trebling - between 1998 and 2001 in reading and math and in all five grades.

City Springs and Pimlico Elementary are the only city schools of 85 on the failing list to earn their way to academic respectability.

Cheney, an author, historian and former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, credited Direct Instruction for much of City Springs' success. Direct Instruction is a highly scripted method of teaching that uses fast-paced lessons and group responses to teachers' commands.

"Direct Instruction assumes that drill and memorization can be helpful in learning, and it relies on frequent testing," Cheney said. "It has a whole body of research, a whole lot of facts that prove it's effective, but unfortunately, it's not looked upon with favor in most education schools."

Asked if Direct Instruction can lead to teacher stress because of its fast pace and scripted nature, Cheney said, "I'm not sure there isn't more stress with whole language. The most stress of all is when a teacher comes into a classroom without the foggiest idea how to teach a child to read."

Cheney, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute think tank, spent about two hours at City Springs before returning to Washington.

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Link to the article: <http://www.sunspot.net/bal-md.cheney1>

Teaching method makes the grade Tests: Elementaries that have used a highly structured program for the past five years have greatly improved performance. Originally published May 27, 2001 Mike Bowler 2001, The Baltimore Sun

IN THE RECENT flurry of news about school testing locally and nationally, one accomplishment might have been missed, and it's worth noting: *Direct instruction* passed the five-year test in Baltimore with flying colors. In the 1990s, when the highly scripted, phonics-based program began making waves in Baltimore,

there were many doubters. *Direct instruction* - DI, for short - went against the teaching practices recommended by much of the education establishment. It was considered too regimented. Teachers hated it. Under another name (DISTAR), it had been tried here in the 1970s but had not lasted. And, like an earlier plan to install the private Calvert School curriculum at a Baltimore public school, it had the disadvantage of having been introduced, promoted and partially funded not by the folks who run the school system, but by well-meaning outsiders.

Give us five years, said DI's sponsors. That's the minimum that should be afforded any school reform. If we can't show sustained progress by 2001, we should fold our tents and go away. Well, we're still lacking fifth-year results from this spring's Maryland state school performance testing, but the five original DI elementary schools - Hampstead Hill, Roland Park, City Springs, General Wolfe and Arundel - don't have to leave camp. According to results of a national standardized test released last week, they have half a decade of growth to brag about, and the 12 other DI schools in the city are pulling ahead of citywide averages on those same tests.

In reading, all five of the original DI schools outpaced citywide averages on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, taken in March, and in four of five grades their kids scored above the national median. (The fourth grade, for reasons no one can explain, is a problem everywhere.) City Springs Elementary, smack in the middle of one of the city's poorest neighborhoods, is a case in point.

If Baltimore schools in general have done well on the CTBS, City Springs has performed even better, improving reading scores by 54 percentage points in the first grade and 53 points in the fifth since *Direct instruction* arrived. During the same period, citywide median percentile scores increased by 29 and 25 percentage points, respectively. "The proof is in the pudding," says Bernice E. Whelchel, completing her sixth year as City Springs' principal. And she's not just talking about test scores, which these days fly around like spring pollen. Even those of us who are crazy enough to watch scores closely become overwhelmed. Is a school to be judged "good" or "bad" strictly on the basis of how its pupils score on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program or CTBS? No, the way to judge the difference at City Springs is to visit - and to remember five years ago.

The city has imploded the nearby East Baltimore high-rise projects since then, and enrollment is down from the high 300s to 290. That's helped, but it doesn't fully explain the new atmosphere: Out of chaos, there is order and respect. Many more parents are participating. Upstairs, a U.S. history class is eagerly discussing a recent field trip to Monticello, President Thomas Jefferson's home in Virginia. One of the raps against DI is that while it might do a good job at teaching the mechanics of reading with its highly scripted instruction, it falls down when it comes to comprehension. I saw no evidence of that among the fifth- and fourth-graders in the stuffy U.S. history classroom. They had done their reading with understanding; they knew about the Lewis and Clark expedition, about slavery and even about Jefferson's gardens.

I've heard first-graders at City Springs reading with evident understanding, but that hasn't silenced the critics who charge that DI is simply "rote learning." The program's founder and leader, Siegfried "Ziggy" Engelmann, says he believes that children fail to learn when instruction is unclear or poorly organized. So DI is systematic and highly structured. It's a "step-by-step procedure," says Whelchel, "so that no child can possibly fall through the cracks. You have to be a purist as far as implementing *Direct instruction*." Given the success of DI at City Springs and elsewhere, you would think that city school officials would embrace it enthusiastically - and you would think wrongly. Other programs, after all, also are working in city schools, and these allow more teacher flexibility. Moreover, success among the DI schools is uneven. If DI were to lose foundation support, it might go the way of so many other promising city school reforms. But Whelchel isn't worried about that just now: "Next year, we're going to knock the socks off the ... tests again."

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City Springs Elementary School The American Enterprise; Washington; Jan/Feb 2001; Martin Morse Wooster; Volume: 12 Issue: 1 Start Page: 40-42

Abstract: City Springs Elementary School in Baltimore Maryland teaches according to the methods of Direct Instruction, an especially firm, ordered, and precise way of teaching. Direct Instruction students are constantly tested to enable good students to move forward more rapidly.

It's 1:30 on a Friday afternoon, and I'm standing on the stairs in front of the main hallway of City Springs Elementary in Baltimore, trying to get a good photograph of the school's lime-green walls. As I walk up and down looking for the best I angle for my photo, I realize something's missing: It's amazingly quiet.

Fumbling with my camera, I run across teacher Anayezuka Ahidiana, who's heading to her class. "The only sound you hear," she says, "is of children learning."

You might have heard many sounds five years ago-crying, bawling, the curt commands of discipline. But the City Springs of 1996 was a violent, lawless place where very little education took place. None of the school's third graders passed the statewide reading test. Only five fifth graders were reading at grade level-and by the standards City Springs uses today, even those five would be a year behind. The school was on the verge of being taken over by the state board of education. "When I first saw City Springs," Ahidiana says, "it was wild. You had lots of people wandering in off the street."

Today City Springs is being transformed, and three elements are involved: a tough-minded principal, a generous local foundation, and a controversial but successful method of education called Direct Instruction.

In many states, City Springs would be a charter school. But Maryland's powerful teachers' unions have ensured that the state's heavily Democratic legislature has never passed a bill legalizing charters. So City Springs is a "new school, and explaining that requires a bit of history.

A rising number of Baltimoreans know the city's inflexible bureaucracy has doomed Baltimore's poorest students to mediocrity and failure. Leading the effort to bring some fresh variety to local schools is the Abell Foundation, whose wealth comes from the family that started the Baltimore Sun. Abell grants helped bring the Calvert curriculum to some Baltimore public schools beginning in 1990 (see page 22). This experiment was so successful that in 1996 the Baltimore school board offered to make Calvert materials the core of the Baltimore elementary school curriculum. Calvert declined because such an effort would tax its limited resources.

After this disappointment, Abell Foundation president Robert Embry reported, they decided to look for other curricula as rigorous as Calvert's. The foundation's staff investigated and found Direct Instruction was one of the few elementary school curricula with a proven record.

"We went to the city and said, 'We'll fund six schools for five years, one wealthy, one poor, the rest in-between,'" said Embry. "We're simply saying, 'Here is something that does work '" The Abell Foundation provided a five-year grant at \$1.2 million per year to support the Direct Instruction project, beginning in the 1996-97 school year. The foundation created the Baltimore Curriculum Project to oversee the program and ensure its funds did not leach into the city school bureaucracy.

Since then, the number of schools involved has grown to 18. Seventeen of these are regular public schools with an Abellfunded Direct Instruction consultant. The eighteenth school is City Springs.

City Springs is a "new school." The idea, Abell president Embry said, came from the work of University of Washington public policy professor Paul T. Hill, who argues that the best way for public schools to improve is if their operations are contracted out to nonprofit operators.

In theory, the Baltimore Curriculum Project runs City Springs. But because the school is not a charter, in practice it's a lot more complicated. The project has no power to hire or fire, for example, although the Project's Muriel Berkeley says that if principal Bernice Whelchel is removed, "we'd have a pretty substantial say" in who would replace her.

Baltimore Curriculum Project executive director Chris Doherty explains that City Springs has more freedom to set its own curriculum, as long as it doesn't do anything that would upset school bureaucrats. When dealing with those in authority, Doherty says, "we don't ask for things, we ask for exemptions from things." He's been able to obtain some flexibility; his greatest triumph was ensuring that City Springs and the other Direct Instruction schools reported to their own assistant superintendent.

Given the freedom to set curriculum, City Springs now teaches according to the methods of Direct Instruction, a mode of teaching created by University of Oregon education professor Siegfried Englemann and his associates in the 1960s. Direct Instruction has been described as "a way of life." That's overdoing it, but it's fair to say Direct Instruction is an especially firm, ordered, and precise way of teaching.

All students in City Springs study the same subjects at the same time. Everyone does reading at 8:55, language at 10:30, lunch at 11:45, writing at 12:30, math at 12:45, more reading at 1:55, more writing at 2:55, then dismissal at 3:15. There aren't any bells to signify when subjects change; the students and teachers know when it's time to shift gears.

Direct Instruction uses a uniform series of workbooks. Most controversially, these workbooks have scripts (what educators call "rubrics") which teachers read from. The method for each lesson is the same: The teacher reads a sentence or two, shouts, "Get ready!", snaps her fingers, and the students then shout out the response.

Here's a Direct Instruction lesson from a fifth-grade math class. The students are doing lesson 20 from Siegfried Englemann and Douglas Carmine's *Understanding Math Concepts*. "The dog has 99 fleas and wants to get rid of 70 fleas," the teacher says. "How many fleas did the dog have?"

"NINETY-NINE FLEAS!" the students shout. "Would you add or subtract?"

'SUBTRACT.'

They then take out their lined workbooks and write the problem down, separating the parts of the problem with thick lines:

"NINE MINUS ZERO IS NINE! NINE MINUS SEVEN IS TWO!"

"Read the whole problem!"

'NINETY-NINE MINUS SEVENTY EQUALS 29!'

The students then move on to lesson 21.

The students chant their answers, in a tone somewhere between a recitation in church and soldiers counting cadence. They do this 100 times a day, five days a week.

Student behavior is also tightly regulated. When a student is sitting at a desk, he isn't just sitting; he's in the "listening-learning position" or LLP-feet firmly on the floor, back square in the seat, arms crossed on the desk. Students don't run down the halls to the bathroom or to the cafeteria; they line up and march, walking with their arms crossed to prevent "inappropriate touching." Even the old "dunce's corner" has been reformed; students who misbehave are still sent to a corner, but it's now called the "timeout corner," and the bad student's desk faces the teacher, so he can keep learning even when being disciplined.

The teacher also gives plenty of positive encouragement. When a class does a lesson particularly well, the teacher says, "You're super smart!" Another form of praise is the "silent cheer"-the class all waving their arms up in the air at the same time. But this praise isn't the cheap currency of self-esteem; it's only given when a student does well at his lessons.

Direct Instruction students are constantly tested, as many as two or three times a week. This enables good students to move forward more rapidly, but also enables the school to determine who the poor students are who need more work. No one at City Springs is socially promoted; from the earliest grades, the worst students are drilled again and again until they get it right.

Enlarge 200% Enlarge 400%

City Springs Elementary School in Baltimore.

Before coming to Baltimore, Chris Doherty taught Direct Instruction in Chicago and tested students there. He explains that testing is very important because it can't be assumed that students from the inner city have the same vocabularies as their wealthier suburban counterparts. Inner-city five-year-olds, for example, might know fewer than 200 words. "They knew what 'under' meant, but not 'over'" Doherty says, "They could point to their ear, but not their ears, because they didn't know what plurals meant.'

Because the Direct Instructions are so organized-each year's curriculum is neatly divided into 150 lessons-City Springs administrators know precisely how well their students are doing. In October, for example, Vanessa Merrick, who oversees teaching at City Springs, could look on a chart (updated every day) posted outside a combined third-fourth grade classroom and see that students in the class are doing well in reading-one group has done two-thirds of the third-grade curriculum, while the other has done 20 percent of the fourth grade material-but that both classes are one-half to one year behind on spelling.

Direct Instruction is controversial. In a recent New Yorker, Elizabeth Kolbert listed two of the more common criticisms: (1) It makes inner-city kids spend their days in drill, while suburban kids using other curricula get to play and explore; (2) Direct Instruction is "teacher-proof," since anyone can read a script.

The advocates of Direct Instruction counter that it's not teacherproof but a subtle technique that must be mastered. Moreover, unlike more free-form instruction, the teacher can't have any bad days; if the student is marching through his lessons every day, the teacher has to keep marching, too. "It's a lot harder to teach Direct Instruction than traditional free-form lessons," Doherty says. "With Direct Instruction, there's no place to hide:'

Direct Instruction supporters also believe everyone can use their curriculum, particularly in the early grades where children need to learn phonics and math. Robert Embry sends his own daughters to Roland Park Elementary, one of the schools in his Abell Foundation Direct Instruction experiment, and is quite pleased.

Moreover, there's plenty of time for play. The students have onehour art classes every week; the day I visited, first-graders were being taught how to draw flowers. There are regular field trips to the zoo and state parks. And one period a day City Springs teaches science from the less structured Core Knowledge curriculum created by E.D. Hirsch (although the school has temporarily suspended Core Knowledge to provide an extra hour of reading).

How is City Springs doing? Judged by its character (student deportment, eagerness to learn, discipline), the school is doing well. Judging from scores on statewide math and reading tests, however, results are only marginally improved from the miserable outcomes that existed in the mid- 1990s before Direct Instruction was put into place. Complicating comparisons, notes Johns Hopkins researcher Sam Stringfield, who is studying the school, is the fact that City Springs has an average student turnover of 30 percent per year among its almost entirely minority student population. And the exam itself is quite controversial. An Abell Foundation report by Hoover Institution fellow Williamson Evers argued that the exam is designed to measure how well students worked together in groups, not what they actually learned in school.

In any event, Embry admits "there hasn't been the dramatic improvements that we'd like." He holds Baltimore's school bureaucracy partially at fault. "There's a difference between what we want to do and what the system wants to do." The school does seem to be transforming itself into a place where students come to learn. Principal Bernice Whelchel is particularly proud of the way her students have turned into eager

readers. "When I first came here," she says, "children wouldn't pick up a book" In the 1997-98 school year she challenged the school to read 1,000 books. They read 1,900, and she danced the macarena on the roof during a carnival. In the 1999-2000 school year, Whelchel raised her challenge to 5,000 books. When they read 12,000 books, she put on a bunny suit and hopped through the halls.

It's best to see City Springs as a work in progress. Anayezuka Ahidiana has been teaching in Baltimore public schools since 1965, and she takes the long view. "Baltimore City schools have not done what they need to do for these children for three generations," she says. "We're giving these students a better education than we gave their parents. Then their children should do better than they did. If we do what we need to do, in three generations we can get students back to where they should have been" before Baltimore public schools began to break down.

-Martin Morse Wooster

Seminar promotes a strategy to teaching reading 7/8/01 The heavily scripted "direct instruction" focuses on phonics. Educators met in Cherry Hill to hear testimonials to its use. By Connie Langland
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER Some educators are taking a closer look at *direct instruction*, a reading program that is both tinged with controversy and hailed as the salvation of failing schools, a conference on the subject was told yesterday. "The myth that poor children can't learn, won't learn - that myth is shattered," Zoe Athanson, a principal who led the turnaround of a school in Hartford, Conn., said during a keynote address to about 100 teachers attending the three-day conference at the Cherry Hill Hilton. The event is sponsored by an association that promotes the teaching philosophy, also known as DI. Hartford's schools have been chronically poor performers on state tests - 11 of the city's 30 elementary schools are on a state watch list - but Kennelly Elementary School students met state goals when teachers switched to *direct instruction*. "Our story is a story of success. We left the other schools behind," Athanson said. "And word is spreading - DI is taking off." The method employed by schools using *direct instruction* also is the source of its controversy. Lessons are highly scripted. All teachers offer the same instruction, reading from the script on the page. For example, the script calls for the teacher to write the letter S on the blackboard, then point to the S. Then the teacher is supposed to say: "This sound is sss. What sound?"

Students are to respond by saying the sound. Or, the teacher is to say to the students: "Listen. sss-lll-aaa-mmm. Say it fast." And the students are to respond: "Slam." Even praise is scripted. For instance, at the end of a task, the teacher is prompted to say: "Good. You said all the sounds." Critics say the method relegates teachers to the role of readers and squashes creativity in the classroom. Some skeptics are put off by the program's emphasis on phonics, or decoding, in which the student learns to read words by learning to pull together the parts of the word. Those educators believe students learn to read by exposure to good children's literature plus mechanics. But the creators of *direct instruction* say it is a matter of quality control: Scripting the programs ensures that students receive the same instruction no matter what teacher they have or the school they attend.

The approach was developed in 1969 by Siegfried Engelmann and fellow researchers at the University of Oregon. *Direct instruction* materials continue to be developed by the Engelmann-Becker firm in Eugene, Ore., and published by SRA, a division of McGraw-Hill. "There's plenty of room for creativity in the classroom," but not in beginning reading, said Patrice Riggan, a second-grade teacher in Lewes, Del., who supports *direct instruction*. "There is a way to teach reading well, and this is it." Alvin Doyle Jr., a principal with the YALE (Young Adolescents Learning Experience) alternative schools in New Jersey, said some students gain one or two years of reading skills in seven months. "We're using *direct instruction* with a tremendous effect. These results are overwhelming," Doyle said.

The conference, sponsored by the Oregon-based Association for *Direct instruction*, ends tomorrow. Connie Langland's e-mail address is clangland@phillynews.com. Jimmy Kilpatrick, Editor EducationNews.org <http://www.EducationNews.org>

The direct approach: Two Hillsborough schools try a new way to teach reading. Some ask: Why not more? By MELANIE AVE © St. Petersburg Times, published May 7, 2001

http://www.sptimes.com/News/050701/Hillsborough/The_direct_approach.shtml

TAMPA -- Step inside Denise Cantrell's first-grade classroom at Egypt Lake Elementary in north Tampa a moment and look at the book she holds in her hands. Watch as her finger moves under the words written in bold. "Okay, get ready," she says. "Read these words the fast way. Get ready." She slaps her hand on the book and nine boys and girls thrust their shoulders back and shout in rapid-fire unison: "Magic! "Please! "Touched!" "Next word," the teacher says. "Get ready." Another slap, and like a chorus the children read and repeat: "Could! "Open!" And on it goes for 30 minutes. Denise Cantrell leads the children through one- and two-syllable words, asking them to slowly sound out words and repeat them when they make mistakes.

These children are in the middle of a simmering reading war in Hillsborough County. For decades, parents and schools have argued how best to teach children to read. Much of the controversy has centered around traditional phonics, or word sounds, versus the newer whole language approach that emphasizes word meanings and literature. Phonics asks children to sound out letters to discover words, like C-A-T, but with whole language, they figure out unfamiliar words by thinking about what else is happening in the story, what makes sense, what's in the pictures. In Hillsborough, the debate is about a phonics-based approach known as *direct instruction*, with the school district on one side and a community group on the other. Reluctant to change as overall reading scores have climbed, the district prefers its own mixed philosophy of teaching reading using a combination of whole language and phonics.

Two schools, Egypt Lake and Oak Park Elementary, however, began testing *direct instruction* this year in some of their kindergarten, first- and second-grade classes at the request of principals and teachers. "It was an option available, so we decided to try it on a very small scale," said Egypt Lake principal Sherry Orr. But with 13 of the 104 elementary schools in Hillsborough last year receiving D's from the Department of Education and state money available for *direct instruction*, members of the Hillsborough Organization for Progress and Equality, or HOPE, want to know why it's not being tried at more schools. The activist group of churches wonders why Hillsborough has spent only \$60,648 of a \$920,720 state grant that expires June 30, 2002. "All I'm asking is give us a chance," said the Rev. W.F. Leonard of Peace Progressive Missionary Baptist Church, the president of HOPE. "They try other programs. Are we really about children learning to read?" Research shows the method, known formally as *Direct Instructional System for Teaching and Remediation*, can be effective in teaching children to read, especially those from poor households. By the same token, a panel of experts with the National Research Council noted in 1998, after two years of study, that beginning readers should be taught using both methods.

In Pinellas County, *direct instruction* is used in special education classes. Critics of *direct instruction* say it is regimented, limits creativity and assumes all children learn one way. Developed in the late 1960s by Siegfried Engelmann at the University of Oregon, *direct instruction* relies heavily on phonics. Teachers use a script and verbal and visual cues, such as clapping, pointing and the words "Get ready" to drill students. Students are taught to memorize 40 sounds of the spoken language and how they blend to make words. Each lesson builds upon the last. In Hillsborough there is a reluctance to embrace *direct instruction*, despite \$7.25-million made available last year to the state's poorest performing elementary schools to use the method. Administrators point to their preferred method of reading instruction, which they call "balanced literacy," used at schools such as Dunbar Elementary.

On Friday, first-grade teacher Mary Beth Laiti read aloud a book about dinosaurs, purposely covering up selected words and asking the children to figure out the missing word by looking at the pictures and surrounding words -- a whole language concept. Then she peeled back the first letter, a G, and asked them to sound out possibilities for the sentence: "Some BLANK dinosaurs like Tyrannosaurus rex, liked to eat meat." "Maybe it's giant," answered Cheryl Chermian, sitting cross-legged on the floor. "You mean to tell me a G has a ja-ja-ja sound?" Laiti asked. "Get your mouth ready," she told the children, as Chermian walked to the board and took the paper off the missing word and gleefully said "giant, giant. It's giant." Complicating the *direct instruction* issue is a steady increase in overall reading scores in Hillsborough. Between 1997 and 2000, second-grade reading scores on the Stanford Achievement Test increased from a

percentile rank of 50 to 56, considered above average. "That's why principals are so hesitant to stop what they're doing and go in another direction," said Joyce Haines, Hillsborough's general director of elementary schools. "They feel comfortable and confident that we have a strong reading program."

But not all schools are improving. Reading scores at 45 schools, many of them with large numbers of minority students, dropped between 1999 and 2000. Most schools use the county-adopted reading curriculum, but Haines said it is up to each principal to decide whether to use *direct instruction* in some classrooms. She said few have expressed interest in it, despite the HOPE group's efforts. "We don't see ourselves in an adversarial position at all," she said. "They have strong convictions, and we appreciate their support for students. We feel our program . . . goes above and beyond." Since 1998, members of HOPE have lobbied the school system to implement *direct instruction* in schools where reading scores trail. They've met with Superintendent Earl Lennard, held teacher seminars, sponsored community meetings and visited Houston's Wesley Elementary, which claims great success with *direct instruction*.

Eighty-nine percent of students at the mostly black school receive free or reduced-price lunches, yet student reading scores on standardized tests are well above average, some even as high as the 99th percentile. Two weeks ago, about 100 parents, children and ministers showed up at a School Board meeting to make a public plea for *direct instruction*. "We want the kids to learn to read," said HOPE's Sharon Streater. "There are at least 18 schools in this district, second-graders, where 60 to 80 percent of children are not reading to grade level. We should have every tool available, and this is an excellent tool." While Leonard of HOPE is pleased *direct instruction* is in some schools, he believes it's not being encouraged as much as possible. "I don't know what the deal is with the district," he said. "All of us should be working for all kids regardless of race, color, creed or whatever, instead of arguing and fighting about what program to use." School Board member Glenn Barrington supports the method but knows he's in the minority. "Some people say it's rote," he said. "Well, a lot of things are rote, like multiplication tables." It comes down to a difference in philosophy, said John Hummel, a professor at Valdosta State University in Georgia who has seen *direct instruction* work over and over. But it can't be forced upon schools. "Unless teachers buy into it and commit to implementing the program with fidelity, they can screw it all up," he said. "Unless the faculty and administrators at the schools adopt it more than half way, you won't get gains in achievement." –

Times researcher John Martin contributed to this report. Melanie Ave covers education Back to Tampa area news © Copyright 2001 St. Petersburg Times.

Below is an article about a community group which is advocating the use of DI in Tampa. Below is the address to write to the editors of the two papers in Tampa. letters@sptimes.com tribletters@tampatrib.com

Activists press schools to use reading program By MELANIE AVE © St. Petersburg Times, published April 18, 2001 TAMPA – They carried posters, wore ribbons and spoke bluntly about the need to expand a controversial reading program for poor children. About 100 members of the Hillsborough Organization for Progress and Equality, known as HOPE, vented their growing frustration to School Board members Tuesday.

They said the district, having spent only \$200,000 of the \$920,000 set aside by the Legislature last year to place the program in D and F schools, has done little to encourage the reading method known as *direct instruction*. "What I don't understand is why we in Hillsborough County are dragging our feet in implementing this program," said Loretta Rogers, who has nieces in the public schools. "We know this program works. Let us try the program." After Rogers spoke, the audience erupted in applause. Children waved signs saying: "*Direct instruction* Works" and "The Reading Gap Widens."

"The children of Hillsborough County need a chance to succeed," Sami Al Arian told the board. *Direct instruction* is a phonics-based method of reading in which students are taught to sound out letters to identify unfamiliar words. Developed in the 1960s by an Oregon professor, *direct instruction* uses a certain set of cues and scripts for teachers and students. Some studies have shown *direct instruction* to be effective in teaching poor children to read when other methods have failed.

Joyce Haines, the district's director of elementary education, said the method was used unsuccessfully at Sulphur Springs Elementary School several years ago. It was eventually phased out there after the school's test scores dropped. Districtwide, schools use a variety of methods to teach children to read, including phonics and others that stress literacy and writing. "There isn't any one best way to teach children to read," Haines said.

Each school can choose its own methods, said district spokesman Mark Hart. But the district has not encouraged schools to use the *direct instruction* method as it should, said the Rev. W.F. Leonard, president of HOPE. Seven classrooms at Oak Park and Egypt Lake elementary schools began using the method in the fall. The schools were among the 13 elementary schools to earn D's on the state's accountability report. But HOPE members said in one Oak Park kindergarten classroom, 88 percent of the students were reading at a first- or second-grade level within five months. However, Haines said the district is studying the method at the two schools and has yet to determine its success there. School Board member Glenn Barrington said the district needs to try the *direct instruction* method.

"It's ready aim, aim, aim and we never fire," he said. "We'll never know if we've hit the target if we don't pull the trigger." Superintendent Earl Lennard, urged by board member Doris Ross Reddick to respond to the criticism, gave the method a lukewarm endorsement, calling it a "viable means to teach reading. We will not overlook any method to teach reading," he said. HOPE members said they will wait to see if more schools buy into the method. "We know *direct instruction* works if teachers are given the opportunity," HOPE member Sharon Streater said. "We're not trying to force it down their throats. We're just tired of failure."

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Teaching kids to read early is 'RITE' thing to do **By JIM WINDHAM**
<http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/story.hts/editorial/817937>

WHEN should a child learn to read? How should he learn -- with phonics or whole language? The issues have been debated for 30 years. It's time to put the arguments to rest. A 1994 Johns Hopkins University study concluded that a person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by the end of third grade is quite unlikely to graduate from high school. Our work force plunges headlong into workplace requirements demanding skills and knowledge advancing at an almost incomprehensible pace. Meanwhile, all the federal Title I funding notwithstanding, the pace of adopting early reading programs geared to the needs of our most vulnerable students remains stagnant. Let's get on with it -- let's give the teachers the appropriate tools and let's teach all children to read as soon as possible.

Who are these at-risk youngsters? No one regularly reads with them or provides them with writing materials. Rarely are they challenged to identify objects, or involved in an exchange of ideas. People hear them, but no one really listens. These youngsters enter the classroom lacking language skills that are common to their more socially enriched counterparts. At-risk children, a majority in most urban schools including the Houston Independent School District, are expected to cope in an increasingly competitive environment. We cannot deny them reading skills in the name of developmentally appropriate socializing. Teaching at-risk, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children how to read is an absolute necessity essential to survival and success. It should begin in time to have them reading at first-grade level by the end of first grade.

The Rodeo Institute for Teacher Excellence, or RITE, now in its fourth year, provides reading intervention for HISD's most at-risk pre-K through second grade students. The Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo spent \$3.4 million over the last three years to introduce the program in 20 schools and 247 classrooms, and has committed an additional \$4.6 million for the next three years. RITE's goal is to assist with the objective announced by Dr. Rod Paige last year: to ensure that all children read at grade level by the end of first grade. The first step is to train, mentor and coach the teachers in instructing these children how to read. The program uses *Direct instruction* methodology and practices in the classroom that were developed over the past 30 years at Wesley Elementary School under the leadership of Dr. Thaddeus Lott. The teaching method combines vocabulary, language usage and phonics with a consistent classroom management system.

In RITE schools, children as young as 4 years old thrive in a world opened to them through language; 7-year-olds are discussing the wonders of science, historical events and lessons in literature. Last April, a U.S. Department of Education three-year study stated that from kindergarten the greatest improvements in reading were seen from systematic phonics instruction. And that teachers must be provided with appropriate and intensive training to ensure that they know when and how to teach specific strategies. In short, we know what works, and this is exactly what RITE provides. Proposed expansion into 368 classrooms within three years means 8,000 more of Houston's most at-risk children will have the chance to read and learn. RITE will give new and experienced elementary teachers a sure-fire method of reading instruction to ensure Houston's least-prepared children can secure their futures and that of the community. The program is on the mark. According to the University of Houston's Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation and Statistics, the most profound effects of the RITE program are seen in the first two years of the program beginning in kindergarten. At the end of first grade, children with two years in the program out perform *all* their peers. Pre-K and kindergarten students who play and wait for literacy skills are underserved by their school district and their community. Teachers without the hands-on tools are at a disadvantage in the classroom. Let's give these teachers and at-risk children the primary tools for these students to learn to read by first grade, and then let's demand accountability for results. *Windham is chairman of the Rodeo Institute for Teacher Excellence, a program of the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo.* <http://www.sunspot.net/news/local/bal-te.md.instruction30jul30.story?coll=ba>

Method works, but how well? Regimen: Direct Instruction's success leads to praise and questions. By Liz Bowie Sun Staff July 30, 2001

In her first week as principal of City Springs Elementary in 1995, Bernice Whelchel knew it was time for drastic measures. Children ran wildly through the halls. The entire third grade had failed the state reading test. Many teachers had given up on the kids, nearly all of whom were poor. Desperate, Whelchel decided to try *Direct instruction*, an unorthodox, highly structured curriculum used successfully in other cities but criticized as taking the creativity out of learning.

At a time when the school system was at a recent low, *Direct instruction* offered a return to basics and a chance to turn around poor schools like City Springs and improve more affluent ones such as Roland Park. Six elementary schools signed on when the program was first offered in Baltimore in 1996-1997 as a five-year experiment by the nonprofit Baltimore Curriculum Project, run by the Abell Foundation.

Five years later, this closely studied experiment has produced mixed results. Some schools have been transformed, others have just improved. Collectively, test scores from schools using *Direct instruction* were higher than the citywide averages in first and second grade this year.

Although the program is not a panacea, educators seem to agree that it has worked in Baltimore at least as well as the two other phonics-based curriculums that are raising achievement in city elementaries. The program, which expanded over the years, seems here to stay in 16 of the city's 117 elementary schools.

Direct instruction is a regimented method of teaching math and reading that ensures pupils master a skill before moving on. Like actors on a stage, teachers are given a script from which to teach their lessons each day. Their lines are printed in red, the rest of the instructions in black. At times they snap their fingers with metronome precision to keep the pace moving. Dozens of times a day, pupils respond in unison when their teacher asks a question. In reading, the teacher underlines a group of letters or a word, and pupils read it together, again and again. In the last week of school this year, City Springs held a graduation for its kindergartners, who marched around the auditorium chanting, "Education. Knowledge. We like it. We love it. We want more of it."

Their parents beamed. Nearly all of these 5-year-olds were reading. Their older peers -- the first-graders -- scored in the 82nd percentile on national standardized tests, one of the highest scores of any first grade in the city this spring. Scores in all grades have increased significantly in five years. "It looked like the dinosaur age; now we are in the 21st century," Whelchel said of the school's five-year triumph.

The story of City Springs -- closely documented by The Sun in a yearlong series in 1997 and 1998 and in a Public Broadcasting Service television special -- has had a dramatic conclusion. A once hopeless school is now full of promise. City Springs' success might have garnered more attention if schools across the city -- most of which did not use *Direct instruction* -- hadn't made impressive gains in the past three years.

In 1998, 29 percent of first-graders citywide read at or above national average for their grade. This past school year, 56 percent did. The question educators have asked is not whether *Direct instruction* works, but whether it works any better than other programs.

At Dallas Nicholas Elementary, which follows the city's regular curriculum, second-grade reading scores have risen from the 28th percentile to the 70th percentile in four years. And some *Direct instruction* schools have not had the success of City Springs. Scores at Arundel Elementary have risen steadily, but only incrementally. Its fifth-graders scored in the 31st percentile in reading nationally in May up from the 19th percentile in 1998.

Robert C. Embry, president of the Abell Foundation, which has spent \$5 million over the past five years in supporting the introduction of *Direct instruction*, says that it has worked well enough that he will continue to provide some financial support. The question, he believes, is whether the remarkable City Spring success can be reproduced in other schools.

Baltimore school chief Carmen V. Russo arrived from the Broward County, Florida, school system, which had dozens of *Direct instruction* schools. She supports the use of it here as one of three phonics-based approaches to reading.

In 1996, each of the city's elementary schools was allowed to choose its own reading curriculum. Some chose to teach reading with phonics; others chose whole language. Phonics teaches children how to sound out letters and put those sounds together to form words. Whole language tries to build pupils' love of reading by immersing them in literature, but often skips systematic instruction in phonics in the belief that children will pick it up naturally.

With such a disparity in approaches around the city, children who transferred from one school to another -- and they were many -- might find themselves in a classroom where the rules of learning were different. Embry, along with other educators, believed the city needed a more structured curriculum, and the Abell Foundation's Baltimore Curriculum Project went in search of an approach that had been found to work in many schools. *Direct instruction* was established in the 1960s by Siegfried Englemann, who directs a national institute for *Direct instruction* in Eugene, Ore.

Of all the methods to teach reading and math, *Direct instruction* was one of the few that studies showed helped produce improved test scores. But it was not without critics.

"Militaristic, abusive, counterproductive. Those are the words that come to mind," said Alfie Kohn, author of *The Schools Our Children Deserve*. A critic of national standardized testing, Kohn believes that more than scores should be used to determine whether *Direct instruction* has been successful. From his point of view, the teaching is so tedious and repetitive that it can "undermine children's underlying curiosity."

Clinetta Hill was worried when she became a kindergarten teacher at City Springs four years ago. "Initially, I felt DI was very limited because it is so rigid," said Hill. "I thought the creative part of teaching was gone." But after time, she said, she began to see how effective it was and that it made a difference in how much children could achieve. "It works. It really works," she said.

It is an approach to teaching that often makes people uneasy, said Gary Thrift, a city school administrator who oversees *Direct instruction* schools. "It goes against the grain of the democratic, liberal, anything-goes practice." Once the theory behind the technique is understood and educators see the results, Thrift said, they become more comfortable with it.

Thrift supports the program, he said, because it prevents children from falling through the cracks. Every child is evaluated and put into a group at the same level. A first-grader who learns quickly could be placed in a group of mostly second-graders, and a fourth-grader who moves slowly might be in a third-grade group. Few children are held back, and pupils who aren't grasping the concepts are quickly identified and given extra help.

Since reform of the city system began in 1997, officials have decided to give schools a choice of using *Direct instruction* or two other reading and math programs, Success For All and Open Court, that stress phonics. Three schools use Success For All, the remainder use the city's standard reading program, written by Open Court Publishing Co.

Officials have bragged that in schools using Open Court, most teachers in a particular grade are on the same page on the same day. The difference between that and *Direct instruction* is that teachers are given more leeway. The three approaches to instruction, many educators believe, have been responsible for a significant increase across the city in math and reading scores each of the past three years.

Direct instruction's effectiveness has been studied the past five years by the Johns Hopkins University researchers, who concluded that after the fourth year it did as well as the other curriculums and should be considered as "one of several reform options." This year, first-graders at the 16 *Direct instruction* schools had higher reading scores on average than those across the city. Martha Abele Mac Iver, a Hopkins researcher, said the question is whether those first-graders will continue to do well. Citywide, third- and fourth-graders using the other curriculums did better than *Direct instruction*.

Engelmann, who runs a *Direct instruction* institute in Oregon, believes Baltimore's experiment with his program has produced disappointing results, with the exception of City Springs and Hampstead Hill Elementary. The problem, he said, is that teachers and principals weren't faithful to what the program required.

But to those who lived through the years of struggle, there is much to be pleased about. Arundel Elementary School Principal Shuronia B. Jacox says she believes her kindergartners and first-graders have gotten a foundation far stronger than was available before the program came to town. First graders scored in the 65th percentile in 2001, up from the 21st percentile in 1998.

"We are looking at our first-graders who really seemed to soar," said Jacox. Copyright © 2001, The Baltimore Sun

"They Never Learn," William Raspberry from May 12, 2000, wherein he discusses Carnine's Fordam report on why a proven program – DI – isn't proliferating. His last sentence echoes your last post, "*So DI isn't proliferating. But the demand for vouchers, charter schools and other choice arrangements is. Can you guess why?*" There is a groundswell among minorities for school choice via vouchers or charters: Roy Innis, National Chairman of C.O.R.E., for example; and a newly formed organization call the Black Alliance for Educational Options – www.baeo.org - whose slogan is "School choice is widespread – unless you're poor." Their web site contains the ads and tv spots that they have been running nationally for the past year. Perhaps ADI could co-sponsor some ads with them? Of the North Carolina charter schools, 30% are black-run and overall in the mid-state and coastal areas 80% of all charter students are minority. Some of the largest are all-DI schools: Rocky Mount Charter (about 500) in Rocky Mount, Sugar Creek Charter (700) in Charlotte, and Charter Day/Roger Bacon (about 160) come to mind. Baker Mitchell, The Roger Bacon Academy, Leland, NC 'proven program - Carnine'iam Raspberry clippings on education, here is a column from

They Never Learn By William Raspberry Friday, May 12, 2000; Page A47 No one is surprised that Regis Philbin has become a household name, and every TV network worthy of the name has some version of ABC's "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." If one network hits it big with a show about witches or doctors or contentious law practices, the others will follow. So why are so many of our schools still mired in unsuccessful practices, seemingly oblivious to the demonstrated success of their similarly situated

colleagues? Don't they want to succeed? It's a question Douglas Carnine explores in a recent Fordham Foundation monograph, titled "Why Education Experts Resist Effective Practices." There's no question in Carnine's mind about what works. The University of Oregon education professor and director of the National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators (NCITE) is an unabashed fan of *Direct instruction* and similar highly scripted approaches to teaching. But it is, he insists, not merely a question of pedagogic faith. He cites the federal Project Follow Through, perhaps the most thoroughgoing investigation in the history of education research, lasting from 1967 to 1976 and beyond and involving 70,000 students in 180 schools using a variety of teaching techniques. "In only one approach, the *Direct instruction* model, were participating students near or at national norms in math and language and close to national norms in reading," Carnine reports. "Students in all four of the other Follow Through approaches--discovery learning, language experience, developmentally appropriate practices, and open education--often performed worse than the control group." But there has been no widespread adoption of *Direct instruction* and its look-alikes, despite its remarkably, startlingly better results. A Department of Education panel reviewed the Follow Through results. But as Carnine reports, it recommended all the programs, successful and failed alike, for dissemination to school districts. "The *Direct instruction* model was not specially promoted or encouraged in any way. In fact, extra federal dollars were directed toward the less effective models in an effort to improve their results."

In TV terms, that would be like pouring millions into "Cop Rock" instead of aping "NYPD Blue" or "Hill Street Blues." But why? Carnine says it's because the other programs are supported by what amounts to a closed circle of true believers--educators and educationists--for whom evidence is less important than faith. I know it sounds absurd, but listen to the quotes Carnine offers--all from highly respected educators--to make his point: "A program could be judged effective if it had a positive impact on individuals other than students." "DI is the answer only if we want our children to swallow whole whatever they are told and focus more on consumption than citizenship." DI is harmful for all children, but it "is even worse for disadvantaged children, because it imprints them with a rote-learning style that could be damaging later on." Never mind that these disadvantaged children were the very ones who demonstrated such striking gains under *Direct instruction* and similar programs. The defenses of the favored (but clearly outdistanced) approaches recall Mark Twain's defense of Wagner's music as "much better than it sounds." Perhaps the better analogy is to the medical community's response to the low-carbohydrate Dr. Atkins-type diets.

There may be unforeseen problems associated with carbohydrate avoidance, but one does tire of hearing doctors and other health professionals speak as though they know full well the extent and dire nature of the problems--even though it is perfectly clear they are speaking from theory, not experience. But the diets are not merely dangerous, the medical wisdom goes; they don't work. I've just come back from the lab, where I learned that my cholesterol--still higher than I'd like--is down two or three points, the rest of the indicators are either improved or within normal limits and my weight is down by 23 pounds. Not bad for a diet that cannot work and is dangerous to boot. There is this difference: The medical people can't keep me from risking the low-carb diet, but the education people can keep public school children from trying *Direct instruction* and other programs of that ilk. So DI isn't proliferating. But the demand for vouchers, charter schools and other choice arrangements is. Can you guess why? © 2000 The Washington Post Company

'Direct Instruction' Paying Off Education: The highly structured curriculum is credited with raising test scores of students at risk of failing. But some say it stifles creativity. By MARTHA GROVES, TIMES EDUCATION WRITER

Eshelman Avenue Elementary School in Lomita would appear to have the cards stacked against it: Most pupils come from low-income households, and many speak little or no English at home. So how did the school handily outscore its peers statewide on the Stanford 9?

Principal Winnie Washington gives much of the credit to "*direct instruction*," a highly structured, step-by-step curriculum that requires teachers and students to follow interactive scripts. Many teachers complain that it squeezes the creativity out of teaching--and learning--but the approach is winning kudos from many schools for improving the skills of pupils at risk of academic failure.

As schools in California and across the nation look for techniques to help boost student achievement in these test-driven times, many are turning to such prescriptive programs in reading and math. Educators stress that many different methods can improve scores and that *direct instruction* doesn't work everywhere. Still, schools relying on the method produced some very dramatic gains in the Stanford 9 scores, released last week.

Direct instruction requires teachers to snap their fingers or clap their hands to keep children moving--much as a metronome prods a pianist. Teachers point at letters or words in their "scripts" and repeatedly say, "Get ready." Then they wait as pupils say the sounds or pronounce the words. The youngsters respond in unison so teachers can hear whether anyone is falling behind. If a single student misses a beat, all repeat the task until everyone gets it right. Then the teacher moves on to the next page.

It isn't just for schools with high numbers of struggling students. Even the high-performing Manhattan Beach Unified School District is finding that *direct instruction* can be a safety net. In Baltimore, where Johns Hopkins University researchers are doing a five-year study of *direct instruction*, results have been promising. It has proved as effective or more so than other reforms. And at one of the poorest urban schools, students have shown remarkable gains.

Nationwide, the program can be found at hundreds of schools. In many cases, it is used to teach special education students and students from low-income families. The American Federation of Teachers endorsed the program in 1998, recognizing it as one of several worthy methods. At the core of such programs is the notion that a teacher should tightly *direct instruction*, rather than serve as a facilitator as children introduce ideas and topics of their own--what educators call "discovery learning."

Among the structured programs gaining steam in California is Reading Mastery, which is based on the original *direct instruction* program developed at the University of Illinois in the 1960s. Another is the Saxon math program, which constantly reviews older concepts as it introduces new ones. Both programs are used at Eshelman.

Open Court, a reading program that the Los Angeles Unified School District introduced in most elementary schools last year, also is a *direct instruction* program. Many district elementary schools using Open Court showed solid gains on scores this year. Under the program, teachers also follow a script and have children respond aloud, but Open Court gives teachers more leeway than Reading Mastery. Teachers don't have to cover a set amount of ground on a given day.

The gains at Eshelman, which uses Reading Mastery, have been substantial. Students in second, third and fourth grades outpaced their counterparts statewide in reading and math on this year's Stanford 9 basic skills exam. The school now has 54% of its fourth-graders reading at or above the national average, seven percentage points better than the statewide average and 25 points ahead of Los Angeles Unified's fourth-grade average.

In 1998, the first year of the testing program, just 18% of Eshelman's fourth-graders were at or above the national average, compared with 40% of fourth-graders statewide and 21% for the district. The gains in math have been even more startling, with 63% of fourth-graders scoring at or above the national average, up from 20% in 1998. Joanne Vegher, a kindergarten teacher at Eshelman, initially feared that the scripted approach would stifle her creativity and undermine her usual technique of adjusting instruction to pupils' various levels. But now she is a believer.

"It has structure but within that structure there is a great deal of flexibility," she said. "You are able to reinforce daily what you've taught before. . . . If children need to move to another group, either up or down, it's easy to move them gracefully." Eshelman's principal cites other benefits. "You see kids on task," Washington said. "There are no more disciplinary problems."

Still, many academicians frown on the method. Some call it "militaristic" or "drill and kill." Others note that the program's creator, Siegfried E. Engelmann, lacks professional credentials. He has no education degree

and was working as an advertising executive in Chicago when he stumbled onto the method he named *Direct instruction* 40 years ago.

Unable in the 1960s to find reliable research on how children learn, he began his own studies, working with lagging students. Engelmann and his colleagues found that learning stuck when children were drilled in a highly structured way. His *Direct instruction* program has been copyrighted, but the noncapitalized term is widely used to describe variations of the method.

The concept holds particular appeal for many districts in less affluent communities because of its success in imparting basic skills that students might not be gaining at home. Over the last four years, the Bassett Unified School District, a small, working-class district that is heavily Latino, has seen its scores reach or exceed the national average for math. They have soared by 30 or more points in second through fifth grades. Scores also have gone up in reading, although less dramatically. Bassett's superintendent, Robert Nero, said Saxon and Open Court are key reasons for the gains. Teachers in Manhattan Beach also have found much to like in the Saxon program after a pilot program helped boost performance in kindergarten through second grade last year. It was so successful that teachers pushed to have the district approve Saxon for kindergarten through sixth grade next year.

"There was a core group of children who were not getting the basics," said Michelle Mangan, a second-grade teacher at Meadows Elementary School in the coastal community. Still, educators say *direct instruction* is far from the only path to success.

At Balboa Gifted and High Ability Magnet in Northridge, one of the 10 highest-scoring elementary schools in California on this year's Stanford 9, teachers prefer to rely on their own creativity. "I don't think *direct instruction* would work at Balboa," said Principal Raj Schindl.

Though acknowledging that *direct instruction* is producing good results in some schools, Schindl said, "I don't think the program would meet the needs of our students. Kids here work at a very accelerated pace."

Likewise, administrators said *direct instruction* had nothing to do with phenomenal test score improvements in Santa Ana, where nearly two-thirds of the district's 61,000 students struggle with speaking and reading English. Rather, said Chief Academic Officer Linda Kaminsky, district officials have encouraged teachers to do a better job of figuring out where individual students struggle and tailor their lessons accordingly.

"When we honor what teachers bring to their field, and when we support them in continuing to grow," she said, "then we end up with children who are being served because their unique needs are being met."

Contributing to this story were Times staff writers Richard Lee Colvin in Los Angeles, Jessica Garrison in Orange County and Karima A. Haynes in the San Fernando Valley. Data analyst Sandra Poindexter also contributed. For information about reprinting this article, go to <http://www.lats.com/rights/register.htm>
Vancouver Sun

Two inner-city Vancouver schools report Reading Mastery has produced phenomenal results with children.
BASICS READING PROGRAM 'AMAZING' JANET STEFFENHAGEN Special to the Sun

Two Vancouver principals say their inner-city schools have been transformed by back-to-basics reading programs that have produced phenomenal results for children who are poor, are native Indians, are in English as a second language programs, or have special needs. "It's an amazing program," John Perpich, principal of east-side Seymour elementary said of Reading Mastery, one of several U.S. phonics-based reading programs that have recently made their way into a few B.C. schools. "It has turned this school around."

Three years ago, before Reading Mastery was introduced, only 10 to 20 per cent of Seymour students were reading at grade level. Now that situation is reversed, with fewer than 20 per cent of the children below standards. In the Grade 3 class, where students have had the greatest exposure to the highly structured

program, 68 per cent of students are reading at the expected level and 25 per cent are better than grade level. Only seven per cent are still lagging, and that's because they are new immigrants.

"They can actually read," enthused teacher Carrie Gelson. "These kids, who are just as capable, as eager and as bright as anyone else, are now being given the tools [to learn]." While such a turnaround in reading is remarkable, it's not the only benefit. Perpich says conduct has also improved since 1998, when an average of 20 children would be sent to his office each day for serious misbehaviour. This year, he has had to deal with only 10 such cases since September.

Part of that is undoubtedly because of bully-proofing in the school, Perpich said. But he also believes the children are better behaved because they are more successful academically. "They aren't so frustrated, irritated or angry anymore," he explained.

Over at Grandview/Uuqinak'uuh, principal Jock McLauchlan reports similar changes as a result of another highly structured, phonics-based program called Open Court, which has won accolades from the B.C. education ministry for its success in Chase, B.C., especially with First Nations children. Before Open Court was introduced at Grandview as a pilot project, 91 per cent of kindergarten children, 89 per cent of children in Grade 1 and 87 per cent of Grade 2s couldn't read at expected levels. Year-over-year improvements were dramatic, despite a transient population and heavy staff turnover, and 70 per cent of students in the school are now capable readers.

Of the four Vancouver schools that have embraced these programs, three are designated inner-city: Seymour and Britannia are using Reading Mastery while Grandview uses Open Court. Bruce elementary, which isn't technically an inner-city school but has significant numbers of ESL, native Indian and special-needs kids, has just started using Open Court. "Students love the program and are definitely improving," said principal Patty Neibel. "Parents are raving [about it]."

While it is particularly effective with children who have had little exposure to reading before starting school, McLauchlan said he believes the program would benefit all children. But it is highly * expensive and only those schools with extremely troubling literacy levels have decided to go that route. Jan Wells, primary consultant for the Vancouver school board, said her two complaints about the programs, both products of SRA/McGraw-Hill-Ryerson, are the cost -- \$7,000 per class -- and the American content.

Those who use the programs say they are successful because they are highly structured, are taught by committed teachers working as teams, are consistent from year to year and are taught to small numbers of children grouped according to ability rather than grade. There is a heavy emphasis on phonics and children must learn one set of skills before proceeding to the next. Large chunks of time each day are devoted to language arts. At Grandview, all students are engaged in reading, writing and spelling from 9:40 a.m. until noon every day of the week.

These programs are not welcomed by everyone, particularly because they include a prescribed teaching style, leaving little room for individual creativity. Seymour and Grandview have lost some teachers and turned away others because they wouldn't accept those restrictions. The emphasis on phonics is greater than in other schools, which still teach reading according to the whole language philosophy ingrained in the B.C. curriculum. Generally, whole language enthusiasts say learning to read is a natural process like learning to speak and happens best through unstructured immersion. Phonics proponents says learning to read is like learning Morse code, in that one must learn to decode the symbols first.

Wells said the key for educators is to recognize which children * need what style. Students' pre-school experience with literacy determines which ones enter kindergarten ready to read and which ones need more basic instruction. "My fear is that Reading Mastery will be seen as a magic bullet, and everyone will want to buy it," she said. "To say these programs are a magic bullet for all our schools . . . would be a mistake because not all children have the same needs."

* But many Vancouver schools are working to improve literacy, taking the best elements from these programs -- the teamwork, individual student assessment and professional development -- and incorporating them with the best parts of whole language. While whole language is losing favour in some circles, Wells said that's because it isn't easily understood, adding that its best aspects will never be replaced. "Those are the things that make children want to read, love to read and become life-long readers."

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WHOLE LANGUAGE Focuses on total immersion, or osmosis where children are surrounded by books and language. Children can figure out what words mean by seeing them in context. Children are encouraged to skip unfamiliar words. Over-all understanding, not word-by-word accuracy, is the goal. Teachers foster the children's enjoyment of reading without emphasizing their mistakes in spelling, reversed letters or punctuation. Children glean information from the visual clues in the story without need for word and spelling drills.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Children to learn to read naturally -- the way they learn to speak. Emphasises literature. Makes reading more fun. Increases over-all understanding of text. **CRITICS SAY:** It sacrifices accuracy and correctness. A child might be awarded high marks for "over-all language use," but may never fully decode the alphabet.

PHONICS Focuses on learning to decode words through mastering the alphabet, learning to connect the way letters sound with their corresponding shapes and symbols. Relies on the association of sounds with letters. Heavy emphasis on teaching word decoding skills as a way to sound out unfamiliar words. **SUPPORTERS SAY:** Builds better pronunciation and word recognition. Phonics formulas can be applied again and again, so children learn strategies for decoding words they've never seen. **CRITICS SAY:** Turns kids into "repeat-after-me-robots." Children taught only by phonics may have difficulty understanding the full meaning of a text. Rules and rote learning make reading a chore rather than a joy. **HISTORY:** Memorization, phonics and beyond Dick and Jane ... 1700s - mid 1800s: Children are taught to read through memorization of the alphabet. Primary text: the Bible. 1783: Noah Webster publishes *The American Spelling Book*, used for almost 100 years. Phonics reigns as primary method of reading instruction for next 150 years. Late 1930s: Introduction of the Dick and Jane series. John Dewey and others promote whole word reading rather than phonics. Emphasis on "sight reading" a limited list of words and word guessing. "Look-Say" method of reading instruction gains wide-spread use. 1955: *Why Johnny Can't Read* by Rudolf Flesch, attacks look-say instruction, urges a return to phonics. 1980s Reading Recovery programme in New Zealand inspires teachers who are uncomfortable with rote learning aspects of phonics. "Whole Language" becomes the new faith. 1988: More than half of B.C.'s primary school teachers in British Columbia have adopted "whole language" instruction. Province proposes curriculum changes that emphasize whole language approach. 1990: Growing numbers of parents demand "back to basics" approach including phonics instruction. Rise of private "traditional" schools. 1995: California's "ABC" laws require instructional materials to include "systematic, explicit phonics, spelling and basic computational skills." North Carolina and Ohio follow suit. Whole language remains primary method of instruction in British Columbia.

WHOLE LANGUAGE FACTS » Children are encouraged to skip unfamiliar words. » Children glean information from the visual clues in the story » Children can figure out what words mean by seeing them in context. » **PHONICS FACTS** » Learning to connect the way letters sound with their corresponding shapes and symbols. » Decoding words through mastering the alphabet

Against all odds, elementary school beat's national reading score gains Unique partnership with nuclear plant key to rural school system

(Erwin, Tenn.) Plagued by a local school system budget crisis, a school population with 80 percent of its students from disadvantaged households in a state ranking near the bottom in its support for public education, little Temple Hill Elementary School has quickly become a model for reading instruction.

"The program we are piloting is a tremendous tool in making sure that no child falls through the cracks when it comes to learning how to read," said school principal Larry Rose. "*Direct instruction* is a very focused, phonics-based, method of teaching."

In a small east Tennessee mountain community best known for its trout streams and smoky mountain vistas, Temple Hill outshines most elementary schools in the nation when judged on the gains in the reading skills of its students. In the first year of the pilot program using *direct instruction*, students scored 74 percent above the national gain score in reading for 2001. That score is compared to gains 17 percent below the national norm in 1999 at the school.

Direct instruction requires a total commitment by the school, its students and their parents. At Temple Hill an hour is reserved each morning for a program of intensely-focused group learning. Students are assigned to one of 12 groups, based on their reading skills. In the lower grade levels, words are sounded out, by the letter, until the sound of the word is formed and understood. Coupled with discussion on the meaning of the word and how it might be used, the group learns as a team. No child is overlooked or left behind.

As students advance in their mastery, rhythm and speed exercises assure that the instruction is focused, but fun. "It is about recognizing letters and how they come together to make sounds," explained Cathy Francis, a fourth-grade teacher. "The students move from recognizing letters to words, what they mean and how they are used. It builds self-confidence in students and can really accelerate learning."

With nearly 70 percent of America's inner city fourth graders unable to read at a basic level and no improvement in fourth grade national reading scores since 1992, *direct instruction* is an important tool for educational improvement. The U.S. Department of Education agrees. An evaluation of 22 teaching methods involving 180 schools and 20,000 students found that *direct instruction* is the most effective in improving student achievement in reading, math and spelling. So why aren't more schools adopting *direct instruction*.

"At first I viewed the method as too disciplined, too strict in its approach," admits kindergarten teacher Terry Engle. "The method requires that every lesson be followed to the letter and in the same way as every other teacher in the school. That means there is very little flexibility for the teacher. However, when done correctly, *direct instruction* assures that everybody learns the basics and that is what is important. I'm convinced the method can do the most in assuring life-long achievement."

Business brought *direct instruction* to Temple Hill. Dwight Ferguson pushed the school system to pilot *direct instruction* after immersing himself into what's wrong with today's public education. Ferguson's company, Nuclear Fuel Services, Inc. (NFS), is a high technology manufacturer of nuclear material to power U.S. Navy submarines and aircraft carriers. Yet Ferguson's passion has turned to the often low-tech approach to improving the achievement of students in public education.

"There's simply not enough focus on basic skills at the elementary level," explained Ferguson. "There is nothing more important in education than ensuring that every elementary school student masters reading and math skills by the sixth grade. Once American educators get serious about the most formative years in a person's learning experience, we'll see overall student achievement improve. *Direct instruction* is the best tool we have to make that happen."

Located only a few miles from NFS' plant, some of Temple Hill's parents are company employees. About half of its employees are residents of the county. "We consider improving public education or top priority in the community," concluded Ferguson. "I'm proud to say I think the students have benefited from our involvement."

County economic development director and state representative Zane Whitson believes NFS is absolutely essential. "This county relies on NFS for many things, but its support of education may be one of the most important."

Ferguson and the employees of his company are the driving force in the small school system bereft with paltry funding by the state and county for education. The company has adopted two of the county's four elementary schools by paying for reading programs and upgrading and networking school computers. The company helped enhance the vocational school's computer technology program to teach schools valuable job skills by assembling computers for the schools.

Ferguson helped institute a math skills mastery program called Calculating Caterpillar in the school system and pushed for the pilot reading program at Temple Hill. The company has donated more than nearly \$500,000 to support public education in Unicoi and other Tennessee counties since 1988. NFS employees have donated their time and nearly \$30,000 from their paycheck toward two county elementary schools they have adopted.

For the efforts, the Tennessee Senate recently passed resolution recognizing Ferguson and Nuclear Fuel Services employees for their leadership in supporting public education.

"*Direct instruction* has a lot of promise for improving basic reading skills for students in all of our elementary schools," said county schools director Dr. John Payne. "I'm convinced it's a powerful tool, yet money in this school system is our biggest challenge. The reading program's teaching materials are produced and sold by McGraw-Hill. The materials typically cost about \$135 per student. For us, that's more than we can afford." McGraw-Hill helped with the pilot program at Temple Hill providing a \$10,000 discount.

Great expectations, greater results: Clarke Street School uses orderly approach, achieves stellar scores By ALAN J. BORSUK of the Journal Sentinel staff: Nov. 17, 2001

From the heart of a neighborhood filled with poverty and marred by crime, from the roots of a school district with one of the worst records in America for black students graduating from high school, from the third-floor gym of a 99-year-old school building, hear the voices of third-graders at Clarke Street Elementary School, in chorus: Back-to-basics Education Brains are working, wheels are turning, Now we're ready, now we're learning. Of course, it's not that simple. You don't just sing a song at the school's quarterly honors assembly and get results. But do what is being done as a whole at Clarke Street, and you get results, year after year, test after test.

You get 90% of fourth-graders at Clarke Street scoring proficient or better in reading on last spring's state standardized tests. For Wisconsin as a whole, 78% reached those levels; nationwide the figure was 63%; for Milwaukee Public Schools, it was 54%. You get 89% of students scoring proficient or better in math. In Wisconsin, the total was 65%; across the U.S., 54%; for MPS, 36%. You get the same kind of results in language arts (Clarke was 49 percentage points above the MPS average), for science (45 points above MPS as a whole) and social studies (41 points above the MPS average).

Results like those make this 470-student neighborhood school in Metcalfe Park an important front in the biggest struggle in American education today. At a time when the goal of raising the performance of students in central-city schools is at the heart of much of the national debate about education, Clarke Street School may be able to teach lessons not only to its students but to anyone who cares to debate how to raise performance across the board. If the recipe for Clarke Street's success were easy to duplicate, more schools would be succeeding.

You can't just decree that a school have good chemistry among its staff, good leadership from a principal or a culture that demands success. But a series of visits to Clarke over several years, including six school days this fall, yields a list of ingredients in the recipe. Describing eight of them sheds light on what works in the school: High standards, clear goals: Kerry Lozano, an upper-grade teacher who grew up on a farm near Campbellsport, formerly taught in Houston, where, she said, a teacher's goals were just to make it through the day and keep the place from getting out of control. When she started at Clarke Street six years ago, she was surprised: "What? Inner-city kids and you have to teach them, too?" The answer is yes, an answer that appears to be shared throughout the school.

Principal Keith Posley says the school's central goal is for every student to learn fundamental skills in what he calls "the big three" - reading, writing and math. The pursuit of that goal brings to mind phrases such as straight-on, no excuses and no frills. Milwaukee School Superintendent Spence Korte says, "They have defined their goals as clearly and unequivocally as anyone, and everything in that school is aimed at those goals." Pushing the basics: You won't see much at Clarke Street of education practices such as cooperative learning or other student-directed intellectual explorations educational experts advocate. And there is no specialty program that would attract an above-average cut of students. In large part, this is a drills-and-repetition zone, using many of the educational techniques that appeal to the more conservative side of educators' debates. *Direct instruction* - a teaching technique that emphasizes phonics and relies heavily on teachers and students literally following a script provided by the publisher - is used heavily for reading.

But other systems are used also, including another phonics technique and the popular "Accelerated Reader" program that involves students reading books and then taking computerized quizzes to win prizes. Denise Johnson, parent coordinator for the school, gives her answer why the school is successful: "They drill the kids." That starts in kindergarten classes such the one taught by Camilla Wakeman, a 60-year-old, first-year teacher. Wakeman's class is broken into small groups for reading instruction. One recent morning, she started with eight students - the Dolphins, as the group is named. She sat on the inside of a semicircular table, with the students around the outside. They sounded out long E's and short A's, M's and S's, as she held up a workbook and each student followed her finger. They said each sound as a group, then individually as she called on them, following the script. They sounded short words like "fun," first slowly, then quickly, together and then individually.

The repetition is rhythmic, almost monotonous. Most of the kids are staying with the exercise; the attention of a few wavers. But it would be tough for any of them to walk away from the table not knowing that M makes an mmm sound. A stable staff, strong on teamwork: First-grade teacher Rebecca Feider was a student teacher at Clarke Street a year ago. After spending time in five schools during her training, she was eager to return to Clarke this year, her first full year of teaching. "I've never seen a school that had such a bond and cared for the kids so much," she says. "The teachers are so dedicated here. That's how I always envisioned teaching." Unlike many central-city schools, there is relatively little staff turnover. Reading resource teacher Sherrion Perkins is in her 31st year at the school; librarian and math specialist Michael Turck is in his 30th. Nancy Maney-Meer, in her 11th year, says, "We're a good team." Strong leadership: A top-quality principal is just about mandatory if you want a top-quality school.

Clarke Street had a principal who was regarded as a star, Diane Neicheril. Many of the programs and philosophies at the school were brought in under her leadership, and the school's reputation for high results was established under her. When she retired in 1999, people such as Korte wondered if the school would slip. It hasn't. That has quickly vaulted Posley into the front ranks of Milwaukee principals. Posley grew up in a small town in Mississippi and was recruited out of college to come to Milwaukee, starting in 1989 as a gym teacher at Ben Franklin School. He later became an assistant principal at Forest Home Elementary School, before being named to succeed Neicheril. He does the job differently than Neicheril - more emphasis on basics and strict enforcement of discipline, less experimenting - but the school culture of success continues.

Many teachers describe him as supportive and eager to help them get training. Korte says Clarke Street has shown "absolutely consistent leadership now across two principals, with an unrelenting commitment to student performance." Small-group learning: You almost never see a class at Clarke Street where there is only one adult present. Sometimes, there are as many as four present at the same time. Especially with reading work in young grades, almost everything is done in small groups, with no more than eight students working with a staff member. For years, Clarke Street has been part of the state's P-5 program, which provides extra resources to schools with a high proportion of low-income students. In general, Clarke Street has used the P-5 money to hire people and not buy things.

There is no computer lab and relatively few computers throughout the school, for example. But there are three faculty members called "focus teachers," who rotate through several classes to strengthen work on

specific subjects, and the staff includes a relatively high 18 positions for educational assistants. Structure, structure, structure: Everything seems to be highly structured at the school. Class time is firmly scheduled. Walking in the halls is covered by strict, enforced rules. During the one recess each day, specific areas are designated for specific activities, and a lot of staff monitor what's going on. Staff members say that the children, many of whom lead very unstructured lives outside school, need, like and benefit from structure. Teachers tell heartbreaking stories about what goes on in the lives of some of their students - lives shaped by poverty, crime, drugs, alcohol, severe dysfunction at home. School, especially for such children, is the safest, steadiest place in their lives.

Second-grade teacher Carolyn Davis, in her 11th year at Clarke Street, says, "The number one thing is being organized and structured. These children need a lot of it." Firm discipline, starting with small things: Take two stairs in one step, leave your homework at home, throw your coat down on the playground, and you're likely to be spending recess standing against a wall, answering stern questions from Posley. Discipline is tight and strongly enforced at Clarke Street, starting with things that many would regard as minor. Posley says, "I'm a firm believer that you nail kids for little things, they don't become big things." The school treats recess as a privilege, earned by good behavior. Break a rule, and you can bet you'll be spending recess with your back against a wall in a large entrance area that leads to the playground. And you'll be there as long as 10 days in a row. Posley holds court in the entrance area, pacing the middle of the open area while kids line the walls on three sides.

The usually affable principal is stern, even cold as he grills students. "Why are you on this wall?" he demands of one student. The boy says he doesn't know why. Posley challenges the answer. They repeat the dialogue. The student finally admits it's because he balled up his fist when he was angry at another student. Posley overhears a boy outside on the playground say something out of line. He opens the door and shouts: "Take your hat off and get in here. You're with me now. I heard your mouth." To another child, he asks, with a tone of wonderment, "You're in fifth grade? And you're talking in class?" The students stand silently, sometimes sullenly, as Posley proceeds through the roster of offenders. But they know the rules and know they'll be enforced. The faculty appears to strongly back the strict approach. Rewards and incentives: The flip side of tight rule enforcement is a broad program of incentives. Show up for school, turn in your homework, act politely, and you can earn "dollars" with Posley's picture on them.

They can be redeemed for prizes, ranging up to bicycles and boomboxes. The quarterly awards program is one of the key incentives. In two shifts, all the students gather in the gym. They are instructed to sit cross-legged on the floor, hands folded, quiet. Compliance is quite good. Posley announces that school officials are bestowing high honors today - things like "that wonderful Most Improved pencil," and the opportunity to be called to stand in front of most of the school and have Posley and your teachers shake your hand for receiving a "good citizenship" award. Five students among those with strong records of being on time to school are picked to choose among a set of prizes such as sports equipment or art kits, donated by the North Shore Rotary Club. The room that wins the best-attendance award gets to display a trophy and a banner and have a party. Posley ends the assembly with a pep talk: If students read everything they can, come to school every day, and do their classwork and homework, they will earn honors in school and beyond. "I want you to get used to coming up and having someone shake your hand and say congratulations," he tells them.

The school does not benefit from one of the normal pillars of strong schools, parent involvement. The school undertakes efforts to get parents or guardians involved. But, as at many urban schools, participation is far below the ideal. Even with incentives for parents, such as a chance to win a night's stay at the downtown Hilton, several teachers said they met with parents representing well below half of their students at recent conferences, and those were usually from their "better" kids. But the school's philosophy is clearly that the tough realities of life for students aren't a reason why they can't learn. Posley says none of the disadvantages of central-city children such as poverty or coming from households not conducive to success in school, have anything to do with how their brains work. "We have to believe in our children and expect from our children what everyone else expects from their children," he says. "Our students can stand up against anyone in the state, anyone in the nation. We're right there with them. I've never had any shadow of a doubt that our students could do it."

Testing's role While test results are the signature of the school's success, the school staff is conflicted about the role of testing. Many agree that test scores reflect only part of what students ought to accomplish in school, and they would be hugely relieved if they weren't under pressure to produce good scores. Some say they would teach more creatively. Teachers say they don't "teach to the test," but the existence of the tests shapes much of their work. They frequently present material to students in formats used on tests, such as by using reading passages followed by multiple-choice or short-answer questions. Staff members say one key to getting high scores is carefully picking the atmosphere in which kids take tests, emphasizing small groups and quiet settings. Posley says the school closely monitors the performance of individual students and intervenes early with those who are not doing well, particularly in reading. "These children are going to read, read, read," he says. Some get three reading sessions a day, including one in the after-school program in the building. A large majority of the school's students also attend six weeks of summer school in the building, which almost surely helps reduce the widespread problem of children's performance levels regressing over summer vacations. Lozano laughs at those who want to know the secret of Clarke's test score results. "There's no magic potion, there's nothing we sprinkle on the kids before the tests," she says. "It's just a lot of hard work. . . . We expect - and they rise to it."

Critic sees 'mindless obedience' But schools such as Clarke Street - and there are a handful of them around the country - have strong critics. Alfie Kohn, a widely known author and commentator from Massachusetts, said in an interview, "There is a dismaying tendency to subject low-income kids of color to an environment that is rigid, harshly punitive, competitive, characterized by low-level 'bunch o' facts' teaching. . . . If we are looking to produce mindless obedience and better scores on bad tests, then that may make sense. If we're looking to help kids become responsible and compassionate human beings, who love learning and think deeply, then this model should be avoided like the plague." One of Kohn's books is titled "Punished by Rewards." He says reward-and-punishment plans such as the one at Clarke Street ultimately discourage the behavior they are meant to encourage. As for the school's reliance on highly structured rules for behavior, he says, "You're not describing structure, you're describing control. Many times, educators will invoke the idea of structure to justify an environment of top-down control. The latter is what makes it harder for kids to learn to be good decision makers and enthusiastic learners and decent people." No one has done an analysis of how students from Clarke Street do in middle school, high school or beyond. While the assumption is that students with strong skills at the end of elementary school do better in the future, that is unproven, and it is clear that the forces of the street and of adolescence in general mean the long-term Clarke Street record is far from perfect. Asked about what becomes of her students, Lozano says, "I've attended some of their graduations, and I've attended some of their funerals." Korte says that the success of Clarke Street School demonstrates "it is possible to take the most challenged kids and bring them to a level of excellence." That, he says, leads to an obvious question: If it can be done at one school - or at a handful, including other relatively strong performers in Milwaukee - why not at many others? "Why not every place in the city?" he asks. Appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on Nov. 18, 2001.

Quotable We have to believe in our children and expect from our children what everyone else expects from their children. - Keith Posley, principal of Clarke St. School

There's no magic potion, there's nothing we sprinkle on the kids before the tests. It's just a lot of hard work. . . . We expect - and they rise to it. - Kerry Lozano, teacher

Keys to Success High standards, clear goals Pushing the basics A stable staff, strong on teamwork Strong leadership Small-group learning Structure Firm discipline, starting with small things Rewards and incentives Student testing: Topping the charts Students who misbehave or forget their homework often end up spending recess standing against a wall, answering stern questions from Principal Keith Posley. Discipline is tight and strongly enforced at Clarke Street, starting with things that many would regard as minor. 'I'm a firm believer,' Posley says, 'that you nail kids for little things, they don't become big things.' Focus teachers rotate through several classes to strengthen work on specific subjects. There are few classes at Clarke Street with only one adult present.

Teachers' Perception of Direct Instruction Teaching Frances B. Bessellieu New Hanover County Schools
Martin A. Kozloff John S. Rice Watson School of Education University of North Carolina at Wilmington
November, 2000 <http://www.uncwil.edu/people/kozloffm/teacherperceptdi.html>

The following are all of the responses of approximately 80 teachers to a questionnaire given either at the end of a three week summer school program or at the end of the first year DI was introduced to their school. Teachers knew that the questionnaire was anonymous and that their answers would be used to help decide whether DI would be implemented in the future.

How has using DI been beneficial for your students? "I feel I am really helping those children that already seem predestined to be 'below level' and 'at risk.'" "It has allowed them to become self-disciplined, better listeners and more self-confident learners. They are more willing to attack a word." "I have been impressed with how quickly children can learn with DI. I taught a group of children in Language for Learning during the first semester, and they didn't start Reading Mastery until just before Christmas. By January, some of these children were only on level 4 of running records, so in one semester, they grew at least 12 levels to level 16. I do think that it is best to start Reading Mastery at the beginning of first grade, if not before. If Language for Learning needs to be taught in first grade, it should be taught parallel to Reading Mastery." "I've also noticed my children using the skills they learned when reading other materials." "They are excited about reading, saying, 'Yeah!' when the lesson gets to story section." "It helps students focus as a group. Teaches them to learn to work together." "My students appreciate the improvement in their phonemic awareness, word recognition and fluency. They also work better together as a group as a result of DI." "I think it helps the children mentally because they feel successful and are reading more text; physically because they are moving to and from a group; and emotionally because they are successful with a group of children and not isolated." "It has vastly improved their phonics knowledge--and transference." "It not only has helped the children in reading, but their writing in their journals has been great!!" "I really like the program. I felt it left no gaps in learning. Covered great material. Consistent and successful." "I have seen positive growth in students who had very little self-esteem. It has been wonderful to witness." "Increased vocabulary and skills increased, for example, decoding." "I definitely see reading scores that have improved." "It helps the children focus and practice good listening skills." "It is a good tool for students with attention problems. The material in the comprehension book had many lessons that complemented our classroom curriculum." "I have charted the growth of these students and I have been very pleased with the progress. All children did learn to read." "I feel that DI has been beneficial to my students, because some of my non-readers are starting to gain the skills necessary to become readers. The students have expressed to me how good it feels to be able to read words. They truly look forward to their DI group time." "Better listening skills, can follow directions much better, reading skills improved, writing skills much improved, better group skills, and better recall of materials and ideas learned." "They seem to have gained a great deal of self-confidence through these lessons. They now listen more carefully and seem better able to understand certain concepts (i.e. analogies, synonyms, classification) much better." "DI has allowed my students to read!!! They can sound out words and have the confidence to even try. I see a major difference in the DI students from this year and students reading in previous years without DI." "DI is beneficial to students because it finally brings phonics back to reading! Poor readers need many tools to figure words, and DI brings the needed decoding. It teaches the children using positive reinforcement techniques, to replace their poor reading habits with successful habits." "Students really do seem much more aware of the phonemes in words and the blending process." "They understand now that all are expected to learn and to participate." "DI has enabled my non-EC students to experience success through sequential activities and controlled text. EC students were getting this previously. It has allowed many borderline students to explode in their overall abilities and self-confidence." "My students have greatly benefited from DI. They know letter sounds, can differentiate between letters/words/sentences. They are beginning to blend sounds and transfer to other activities (writing)." "DI has helped my at-risk-reading students immensely. Each one of the DI students in my class was at least on level 16 running record level by the end of the year. Level 16 is the at-grade-level point for first grade, so every child in my class can read at grade level going into second grade!" "DI has helped with confidence and improved reading and writing skills." "The students enjoy reading! They are learning how to decode as well as various spelling patterns. They are much more proficient at both. They really enjoy the stories. Their reading pace has picked up as well. It has given the children structure and routine to their reading." "They feel successful. They've learned "rules" to apply during word attack portions

of the lesson. They look forward to the lessons." "DI has given my students more confidence in reading, ex. sounding out words, not embarrassed to do so, follow along with finger when reading, overall confidence in attitude with group." "Most of the children have improved their reading level. The children have a lot more confidence in themselves." "The students and teacher bonded during our *direct instruction*. The methods of instruction can be incorporated throughout the instructional periods during the school day."

How has using DI been beneficial to you? "It has kept me very organized and helps make a more accurate assessment of the students. Provided me familiarity with the program. Daily interaction with students in an instructional rather than administrative role." "DI is the program I've been waiting for over my entire career of 27 years! I have always believed that repetition and high child involvement were keys for reading, especially for children having difficulty, but DI is the most efficient method I've seen." "It has given me another resource tool to teach reading, comprehension, and writing." "This program is good for the children who are below grade level and gives them a chance to be successful." "I was able to see in the smaller setting specific behaviors in children not noticed in a larger setting and concentrate on changing those behaviors that were obstacles to their learning." "It has been a sequential, organized program, building on the skills. It required children to be attentive." "DI has been beneficial to me because all the materials that I need for planning are in the presentation books. Also, the goals/objectives are located in T.G., which makes it easier to write my IEP's." "I loved the reading series presented with DI. I am better at keeping group attention and recognizing specific problems our children had. My skills as educator improved, especially my listening skills and presenting skills. Not only for DI but other subjects as well." "It has helped me see problems associated with comprehension and has taught me different ways of teaching skills and approaching problems." "DI has been beneficial to me with personal satisfaction in seeing growth and improvement for children who struggle with reading." "If my children benefit, I benefit! It has helped me make certain that every individual child is held accountable." "DI has been helpful in discriminating between at-risk learners who needed something different and those who need something different and much more. (i.e. specifically designed instruction!)." "DI has accomplished what I could never have done on my own - convinced teachers that effective research based reading practices (those that DI is based on) work!" "Easy planning? Smooth transitions." "I enjoyed working with a small group and watching their growth." "It had given another way to approach how to teach reading. All children don't learn the same way nor need the same approach. This is an easy to learn program to teach with some great strategies for producing strategic readers." "It has helped me to understand the need for structure in groups. It has also given me the chance to work with low achieving groups and to better understand their needs." "I feel like I've helped these children learn to read better and enjoy reading as well as improve their self-confidence and self-esteem." "I am an assistant, and it has been very beneficial with teaching sounds and reading words. I like the repeated use of DI for myself and I have taken DI to my classroom. I see it beneficial in my class for those that are not in DI groups." "I have enjoyed seeing my children progress in their reading. It's a joy to see the children feel more confident in themselves, and see that their reading has improved so much. They can read now!"

Can you see yourself using DI in the future? If so, why? If not, why not? "I loved it!! I saw more growth and felt as if I accomplished something every day!" "I am excited about using the program in my regular classroom situation. I have seen the progress that my children made in summer school in a matter of 18 days." "It provided me with a structured way to teach phonics/decoding. I spent less time planning." "I will use DI in the future. The children like the lesson and followed along very well. I feel that they learned how to form sentences and follow directions as well as how to stay on task." "Yes (I can see myself using DI in the future). I feel like the program can benefit a large number of students with different learning styles". "I've been able to use aspects of DI in my other lessons." "Yes (I can see myself using DI in the future). I feel like the program can benefit a large number of students with different learning styles." "I would like to use DI in the future with my students in addition to other reading programs." "Already I catch myself using some of the structure of DI in other subjects. It really works out well." "Yes, yes, yes!! The students were successful, confident, and proud!!!" "I can see myself using DI in the future because it really works." "Definitely? It is a great way to present skills in a sequential manner that does not assume skills are already present." "Yes, however, for many of my students I need to allow more time to supplement the curriculum with phonemic awareness skills and spelling as well as additional work in comprehension." "Yes? It works!" "Yes, I think it has been beneficial to the students." "Yes! It has worked. I don't believe every child needs it, but those with reading difficulties or that are "on the fence" can benefit from the program greatly." "Yes. I think the

Reading Mastery program helps the children get a better understanding for reading. I like to use the signals and verbal usage to get kids on task." "Yes, I love it! It works and I enjoy the program." "I would hope that DI would continue here at" "Yes? Because DI is great for the kids. They learn how to read when we use DI."

Comments Suggesting Difficulties Out of all of the comments, only five comments suggested difficulties. For example, "I found the children had a hard time waiting for the signal... They had to develop listening and watching skills..." "I feel their attention spans are too limited for this." "Children complained about so much repetition." These comments reflect improper placement. The children referred to in the first two comments had been placed at too high a level; they did not yet have the skills needed for effective participation. Students referred to in the third comment had been placed at too low a level. They did not need the repetition. Ordinarily, these misplacements would be caught early in a school year and corrected. However, given the short duration of summer school, these misplacements could not be detected until summer school was nearly completed.

EDUCATION: Reading right Editorial on DI in Jacksonville Monday, November 19, 2001 An objective evaluation of a reading program being used in some local public schools indicates that it is off to a good start and deserves further support. At the behest of the School Board, Serve Inc. is doing a three-year evaluation of the *Direct instruction* program currently being used in 15 schools. The first report covers the implementation of the program. The consultants found that most of the *Direct instruction* principals and teachers were overwhelmingly in favor of the phonics-based method of reading instruction used in the program because they have observed dramatic reading achievements among students. "Even teachers with many years of experience reported success in teaching reading that they had not had with other reading methods," the report said. This was supported by a statement from one teacher: "I support *Direct instruction* 110 percent. After 37 years, this is the first time I have seen 28 children make progress in reading and push themselves to their limit."

On the other hand, some teachers in other schools object to the program because it is highly "scripted," meaning that it has a fairly rigid format they must follow. Teachers in the program expressed concern that it might be overshadowed by the America's Choice school design program, or even abandoned. A few said they would find it difficult to stay in the district if that happened. "Teachers were mystified by the lack of enthusiastic public support, given the reading outcomes that they observed," the report said. The report recommended continuing the program and encouraged the school superintendent to increase his support for the program. The superintendent's position is that the choice of using *Direct instruction* is up to individual schools, and both phonics and other methods of reading instruction are used. Teaching children to read probably is the most important function of the public schools. This reading program so far has demonstrated that it is effective toward that end. Pending evidence to the contrary, strong support by school officials is indicated.

Sunday, November 18, 2001 Community coalition cites progress in various efforts **CLOUT pushed reading program now in 3 schools** - By Shannon Tagonan The Courier-Journal

Whether it was helping young people improve their reading skills or ensuring Clarksdale residents had a say in the housing complex's future, CLOUT, a community-action group, reported steady progress on several projects during its biennial convention yesterday. CLOUT, which stands for Citizens of Louisville Organized and United Together, met yesterday at R.E. Jones United Methodist Church on Algonquin Parkway. The coalition is made up of 28 area congregations and organizations. Some of the initiatives highlighted yesterday began and ended in 2001, while others -- improving community-police relations and reading skills of public school students -- have been in the works for years, said the Rev. Thomas Clark, CLOUT co-president and pastor of St. Timothy Catholic Church in Valley Station.

A lot of time was spent talking about "*direct instruction*," a reading program that is now in three Jefferson County public schools. CLOUT had urged the school system to try the program and successfully lobbied for state funding to support the program. Lincoln Elementary, which has used *direct instruction* since 1999, reported a 21.4point gain in its Commonwealth Accountability Testing System score. The scores were

released last month. "We're real proud of that," Clark said. Among those who addressed members was Jamie Christian, whose son Caleb had trouble reading. Caleb gained 2 1/2 reading levels within a year using *direct instruction*, she said, thanking the group for its work on the issue. "My son went to the third grade reading at the third-grade level."

Larry Hunt, co-chairman of CLOUT's education committee, said CLOUT hopes that *direct instruction* will eventually be used in at least one school in each cluster of the public school system. (A cluster is a group of linked elementary schools; students who live in the attendance area of one school in the cluster can apply to attend other schools in the cluster.) CLOUT also reported progress in community policing. Member Laura Curry sat on the Louisville police committee that presented a community-oriented policing plan to Mayor Dave Armstrong. Armstrong is expected to respond publicly to the plan by the end of the year. "CLOUT's preliminary assessment is that it contains good recommendations," she said. But there are lingering questions: "Will it be implemented effectively? How soon? And how will merger affect this?" Curry said.

CLOUT also highlighted projects that included working with the Jefferson County Health Department to cite owners of dilapidated buildings in Valley Station and attack a rat problem in the area. CLOUT helped residents of Clarksdale, east of downtown, reach an agreement with city leaders as they planned a major redevelopment. The agreement included a guarantee that residents would have the opportunity to return to the new complex or one of its satellites. The project has been put on hold indefinitely because the city could not secure a federal grant. CLOUT received a letter from Tim Barry of the Housing Authority of Louisville that said that the city is re-examining its options, but that "rest assured, we will honor the commitments made." Anita Whiteside Gaston, of Concerned Citizens of Clarksdale, said CLOUT's help was appreciated. Said Gaston: "They showed us by empowerment that we can do things for ourselves." Copyright 2001 The Courier-Journal.

Education boss wants Texas-style reading. Bush relies on Paige to push phonics, tests on nation of students By Mike Bowler Sun Staff April 11, 2001 <http://www.sunspot.net/news/nationworld/bal-te.paige11apr11.story?coll=bal-news-nation>

WASHINGTON - Four months after President Bush tapped fellow Texan Roderick R. Paige as education secretary, Paige has emerged as a champion of improved reading instruction - and to do that he intends to borrow liberally from programs forged in his home state.

Just as Paige did as Houston schools superintendent and Bush did as Texas governor, the new secretary says he'll appoint a top-level federal official to serve as a national reading czar - to give reading instruction higher visibility "and make sure the money the president is committing to reading is properly managed." Paige calls reading "a civil right that hasn't been getting the attention it deserves." He says stagnant national reading test scores - according to results released Friday, they haven't budged in nearly a decade - constitute "an emergency of the first order." And he wants federal grants to improve reading going toward "scientifically based programs, not fads."

Such programs were installed in Houston during Paige's seven-year superintendency, and some of the research pointing to their effectiveness was conducted by experts at the University of Texas-Houston Medical School. Paige declines to endorse any single instructional program, but the research he cites supports initial *direct instruction* in systematic phonics, as opposed to literature-oriented approaches, and most of it was financed by the National Institutes of Health. That agency's reading research director, G. Reid Lyon, has become a chief adviser to Bush and Paige and could become the administration's reading chief.

Several major national education groups - which tend to insist that many different approaches to reading instruction can be effective - are apt to be upset that Paige and the Bush administration intend to weigh in so heavily on one side of the decades-long reading wars between proponents of phonics and other methods. The new secretary says he expects resistance to his plans. "There's nothing more difficult than change," he says. "No matter how compelling the evidence, there are those vested in the current situation, and they're going to resist. But we're going to do what's right, and what's right isn't based on whimsy. It's based on 20 years of research."

Christopher Cross, president of the Council for Basic Education and former president of the Maryland state school board, says Paige's focus on reading is unprecedented for a U.S. education chief. "I'm impressed that he's targeted on reading," Cross says. "It's gutsy because though we've accumulated a lot of wisdom about reading in the last decade, there's still no agreement on how best to teach it."

Cross also notes that Paige is defying Washington convention. "He's crossing boundaries to elevate the work of another agency," Cross says, referring to the National Institutes of Health, which competes with the Education Department for federal funding. "When do you see that happening in Washington?"

Announced during the presidential campaign, Bush's "Reading First" initiative calls for "science-based" reading instruction in kindergarten through second grade and gives states \$5 billion over five years to put that in place. Some of this money is included in Bush's proposed 11.5 percent budget increase for the federal education agency for the next fiscal year, the largest increase of any department in Bush's first budget.

Similarly, Paige focused on reading teachers in Houston, and the state began training teachers for the first three grades, starting with 14,000 kindergarten teachers. The effort appears to have paid off: The percentage of Houston students passing Texas state tests rose from 44 percent to 64 percent during Paige's tenure.

He also wants more literacy instruction in Head Start, the federal antipoverty preschool program. "Head Start started out with a literacy focus," says the secretary, "but it gradually lost that focus."

He takes as his model a long-time friend, Thaddeus Lott, who elevated reading scores as principal of Wesley Elementary School in a high-poverty Houston neighborhood. Lott used *Direct instruction*, a heavily scripted program that includes intensive drills in systematic phonics. "Thaddeus and I had lunch together almost weekly," says Paige. "I call him a one-tracker, and that track is reading."

"When you broke out first-grade scores at Wesley, you could tell the kids Thaddeus had had for kindergarten and pre-K. Their scores looked pretty much like those in the middle-class bedroom community across town. But when you broke out the kids who had had kindergarten and pre-kindergarten but not at Thaddeus' school, they looked just like everybody else."

But Paige hastens to add that "it's not just the program that counts. It's the execution. It's the teaching. You can have a proven program like Open Court [used with success the last several years in Baltimore schools], but if it isn't carefully managed and monitored, you'll get poor results." For example, Paige says, Houston wasn't having success with Success For All, the elementary reading program developed at the Johns Hopkins University, "but it wasn't the fault of the program. It was our sloppy implementation."

Paige, 67, is the seventh U.S. education secretary and the first to be elevated from a local superintendency. The son of public school educators in Monticello, Miss., he speaks emotionally about his mission to improve education for poor and minority children: "If we fail at that, we fail at everything else." Predicts John H. Stevens, director of a business and education coalition in Austin, Texas: "He'll use his bully pulpit to create a sense of seriousness. He'll expect schools to succeed without making excuses. He's a stickler for accountability."

Wearing a business suit and cowboy boots during the interview, Paige leans forward intensely when asked about his call for testing in math and reading in grades three through eight, for which Bush has earmarked \$320 million in his 2002 budget. Aren't U.S. children being tested to death?

"That's a charge made by people who feel that testing is somehow external to teaching," Paige says. "But it isn't. It's the other side of the same coin. If you don't assess where you are, what the students have learned or not learned, you're teaching in the dark. That's analogous to driving at night without headlights. "Do you ever hear anyone say we're teaching them to death?"

The other controversy surrounding Paige and Bush is their endorsement of federally paid vouchers - good for tuition at public or private schools - to be given to children trapped in chronically failing schools. As the administration moves toward an apparent compromise, Paige says he's tiring of the debate. Any private agency that receives public money "should be held strictly accountable. That's what we did in Houston," he says.

Bush's selection of Paige was welcomed by big-city school proponents including Carmen V. Russo, Baltimore's chief executive officer, and Phyllis Hunter, Paige's reading manager for four years in Houston. "He's seen things from the ground level, and he has only one goal: that these kids from the cities get as good an education as the kids in the suburbs," says Hunter. Paige believes his experience in Houston will prove invaluable: "It's an advantage to have been there and to have seen it happen or not happen. And I know how to call and go see others who have had the same experience. Under my scalp - I can't call it hair any more - is the mind of a superintendent in a big city."

William J. Bennett, one of Paige's predecessors as secretary, once likened the job to being captain of a ship with fine officers' quarters and a good mess hall but a steering wheel attached to nothing. It may be more ceremonial than substantive. Paige, who took a \$118,000 pay cut to leave Houston for Washington, has obviously been pondering his role. The department he heads is only 21 years old, and Paige's Republican Party has spent much of that time trying to abolish it.

He's well aware of the irony. "I'll admit that you're not as directly connected as you are as a city superintendent," Paige says. "But this job is what you make of it. Look at somebody like C. Everett Koop [the crusading surgeon general of the 1980s]. Or somebody like Horace Mann. He didn't have any clout, either."

In the 1830s, Mann transformed Massachusetts' hodgepodge of charity schools for the poor into a great system of public education, all from a position - secretary of the nation's first state school board - with no authority to compel or enforce anything. Copyright © 2001, [The Baltimore Sun](http://www.baltimoresun.com)

Knowledge gap widens USA Today News <http://www.usatoday.com/usatoday/20010412/3227865s.htm>

Somehow, thousands of elementary students aren't being taught the simple skills of decoding language. Too few, for example, even realize the word "shell" consists of the sound units "sh/e/l." That shortcoming -- exposed within the past week by two separate education studies -- is often catastrophic. It accounts, for instance, for the studies' primary finding: that strong readers are growing stronger while weak readers are weakening further. It also means the weaker group -- generally the poor -- will pay a lifelong penalty, as will the society they join.

Those who don't learn to read by the end of third grade find themselves permanently limited in their ability to understand math and science textbooks. As a result, society loses the highly skilled workforce needed to sustain a 21st century economy. The roots of the reading problems identified by the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the National Education Goals Panel can be traced back to the unsettled reading wars that raged for years among educators. Eventually, reading experts attempted to paper over bitter arguments over whole-language instruction (teaching reading via word meanings) vs. phonics (teaching reading by sound bits). They settled on a "balanced" approach employing a little of each. But the best reading research in the country, done at the National Institutes of Health, concluded otherwise.

NIH researchers found that teaching reading requires an exact sequence of building word skills through sound bits -- not the simple "balance" too many teachers have been taught is OK. Most in need of this approach are poor children with slipping reading skills. Solving the problem requires revamping teacher education and using new early reading programs, such as President Bush's proposed \$5 billion Reading First Initiative.

The money would go toward screening children from ages 3 through third grade, detecting reading problems and heading them off with corrective programs. Here's the key: To receive a chunk of the \$5 billion, school

districts must prove they are using "science-based" reading programs. In short, that means using a program that draws on the findings from the National Institutes of Health.

This country already has an unhealthy and growing gap between rich and poor. The only thing worse than a wealth gap is a knowledge gap.

Backing phonics as a reading tool Change: A California school board member seeks to reform reading instruction with a "systematic, direct" approach rather than "whole language" philosophy. Baltimore Sun Education Beat: Mike Bowler Originally published Apr 8, 2001

MARION JOSEPH wasn't surprised by Friday's news that the nation's reading scores were still in the tank in 2000, virtually unchanged, on average, since the early 1990s. "What I see is a lot of activity," said the 74-year-old California school board member, who is perhaps the nation's foremost reading reformer, "but not activity that's clearly focused. Furthermore, there's been no change at all in the [teachers] colleges. So, frankly, I would have been shocked if there had been major improvement."

But Joseph is hopeful. In the Baltimore area a few days ago to speak to the Maryland branch of the International Dyslexia Association, the self-described pit bull - she stands about 5 feet tall and speaks her mind freely - said there's plenty going on in her home state besides the power crisis.

The California State Board of Education, of which Joseph is the senior member, has established tough, phonics-oriented standards in reading instruction. In January, the board will approve millions of dollars in textbook purchases, and Joseph said major publishers are offering books that promote "strong, systematic, direct" instruction. That's a major change for the better, Joseph said, but not unexpected in light of California's huge influence in the textbook market.

Meanwhile, Los Angeles and Oakland have joined Sacramento in tossing out the "whole language" philosophy and adopting phonics-based reading programs. For Joseph, January's textbook adoption will culminate a decade of campaigning that began when she discovered that her grandson (who lives with her in Menlo Park) couldn't read his schoolbooks. If the pendulum has swung nearly all the way along the arc from whole language to phonics, we can thank - or blame - Joseph.

In her Baltimore talk last month at a Timonium hotel, called "One Woman's Initiative," Joseph urged members of the dyslexia association to join her campaign. Keep a close eye on reading textbook adoptions like the one going on in Baltimore County, she urged. Follow the money from federal reading initiatives "to make sure it's spent on programs driven by research evidence." Put pressure on college and university education schools, which she said appear to be impervious to reform, at least in California.

Above all, she said, don't be afraid to speak out. "Ten years ago, we were working in unfurrowed ground, but now lots of things are growing. No one dreamed it would be this difficult." One woman asked Joseph whether the "people who don't get it are obstinate, evil or ignorant." "All of the above," Joseph smiled. "But mostly they're uninformed."

Littleton Prep Kindergarten and First Grade Score in Top 1% in Nation* Well, looks like we made it. I am pleased to announce that we have received our ITBS/CogAT scores, and Littleton Prep's first graders and kindergartners are now in the top 1% in the nation in reading, language, math, and other skills. Our kindergartners repeated and even improved upon the pattern of our first year in CogAT improvements, gaining 15 points and 33 percentile points (the CogAT is scored like an IQ test, and tracks to IQ very closely, so these gains are particularly significant). Children in kindergarten went from average CogAT's to well above average, gaining a full standard deviation in only seven months of school. Another way of looking at this picture is that four classes of children whose cognitive "abilities" are in the average range (or were originally in the average range) are now achieving at extraordinary levels. (When this year's 99th percentile students started two years ago, their CogAT scores were around the 35th percentile.)

At present, I am not aware of any school in the state of Colorado that equals these ITBS scores.

We have an amazing group of teachers working with these students, and I am incredibly proud of what they have accomplished. We also have an excellent curriculum. Our basic K-1 math program is a combination of Distar Arithmetic I and II with Primary Mathematics 1 and 2 (an excellent math program from Singapore; www.singaporemath.com). For reading, we use Reading Mastery and Horizons C-D, published by SRA. Language is taught with Language for Learning and Reasoning and Writing A, B, and C; spelling is taught with Spelling Mastery, also from SRA. We also use Connecting Math Concepts B and Connecting Math Concepts A, and Arthur Whimbey's Thinking Through Math Word Problems. We do lots of precision teaching in reading (our favorite technique is every-other-word paired reading) and in math, where we focus on math facts and number recognition. Science, history, geography, literature and other "content" areas use the Core Knowledge scope and sequence, with curriculum either developed by teachers or drawn from the Baltimore Curriculum Project and Engelmann-Becker Corporations "openers." Students spend the morning doing reading, writing, spelling, and math, then focus on the other areas during the afternoon. Nathan Crow
ESP Loop

List members might be interested in knowing that Cheyenne Mountain Charter School, in Colorado Springs, which is a DI-CK school, last year scored #1 in the state in seventh grade reading (this year I think they were #3), on the state's "CSAP" test. Cheyenne Mtn. started a couple of years before we did (this is our second year). Like us, they started with many, many students who had reading and other skill deficits. Although charters are a small proportion of schools here in Colorado, they consistently take half or more of the top places on the state assessment.

We also some very nice gains in our other grades, by the way. Our biggest change was the seventh grade, which increased 2.5 years on the core total (reading, writing, math). (Although 80% of these kids started in corrective reading, this spring they scored 34th in the state out of 335 schools reporting scores on the state assessment). By the way, my top 1% figure is derived from our score on the core total (average of reading, writing/language, math), national school norms, Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, form M, administered this May.

Thanks to list members for your many notes of congratulation. It's nice to know that someone besides members of our own school community cares, and cares this much. Nathan

Listmates, Great news. I have just wrapped up a meeting with a local school district. They are more than willing to host the current study that I proposed. I have found that utilizing action research over a 2-year period accelerates the implementation of DI programs school-wide. Many of you have dealt with the same issues that I have when we try to convince the local administrations to use DI. When I present the data on DI many of them discount it by saying they are not particularly interested in what is effective in Houston or Sacramento. I have found the following method effective with administrators:

- 1) Present the national DI research.
- 2) Present my local research from the surrounding counties.
- 3) Offer to pilot the program using Longwood college's resources and graduate students (using the bottom quartile performing students <-from the local schools not my graduate student >:). 4) Evaluate the findings from the initial program with the school administrators and teachers and set up a pilot DI classroom.
- 5) Evaluate the findings from the Pilot classroom and implement the DI programs school wide.

This action research model allows the teachers to use the data to guide their decisions.

The current study involves randomly assigning students to four groups: (1) 100 Easy Lessons (2) Reading Mastery Fast Cycle (3) A PALS program developed in the county (4) Regular classroom instruction

We will use the following pre- and post- measures: 1) PALS assessment (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening. 2) Words per Minute rates. 3) Errors per minute. 4) Sight word vocabulary recognition on a pre-primer primer and first grade level. * Longwood College SPED graduate students will implement the 100 easy lessons after receiving the training. * I will implement the Reading Mastery (FC) Component. * The PALS coordinator will implement the PALS program. * The regular teachers will teach the final cohort using their current instructional practices.

After we finish the 3-week intervention, we will evaluate the short-term gains. If the results demonstrate an accelerated score for the DI groups we will implement Reading Mastery and Language for Learning in the K class in November.

We just wrapped up a 15 session after-school model that was based on the same interventions, except the PALS program. The results indicated: * The traditional after-school program resulted in a 70% increase in WPM with a 9% increase in accuracy. * Teach Your kids to read in 100 Easy Lessons resulted in a 85% increase in WPM with a 14% increase in accuracy. * The Reading Mastery Level 1 group resulted in a 90% increase in WPM with a 16% increase in accuracy.

The sight word recognition tests also yielded some interesting results: * Reading Mastery Level 1 had an increase of 37% in SWR. * The traditional after-school program yielded a 42% increase in SWR. * 100 easy lessons yielded a 52% increase in SWR.

I felt very positive about these results. While the traditional after-school program did demonstrate superior SWR scores, the focus of their intervention was to teach sight-word vocabulary to their students. I thought it was interesting that the RM(FC) produced similar results and the 100 Easy Lessons surpassed them.

The next phase for this particular county is to set up a pilot classroom using Reading Mastery and Language for Learning at a K level. I hope that in a couple of years we can report data similar to Littleton Preps'. Chris Jones Longwood College

Palmaffy, T. (1998). No Excuses: Houston educator Thaddeus Lott puts failing schools to shame. Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation. [On Line] Available: <http://www.noexcuses.org/articles/shame.html>

Houston educator Thaddeus Lott puts failing schools to shame January-February, 1998 Number 87
Published by The Heritage Foundation

Gayle Fallon wanted to give her 10-year-old godson a measure of stability in life. With a father who had compiled a long record of felony convictions and a mother imprisoned for shoplifting after two prior convictions for drug possession, the boy had shuffled in and out of foster care since birth. To worsen matters, he was languishing in the chaotic environment of a dismal urban school. Fallon, the president of the Houston Federation of Teachers, knew that without a decent education, her godson might stumble along the same destructive path his parents had followed. So in 1994 she secured him a spot at Mabel B. Wesley Elementary, an innovative public charter school on the outskirts of Houston.

"I love that program," Fallon says. "I wouldn't invest my godson in it if I didn't."

Fallons praise evokes a sun-dappled public school set against a leafy suburban backdrop. And so would Wesleys manicured lawn, pristine brick facade, and buffed floors if you ignored the barbed-wire fencing and boarded-up houses encircling the school. In fact, Wesley Elementary serves the violent, drug-infested Acres Homes section of Houston. All of its students qualify for federal Title I education funds earmarked for disadvantaged children, and its student body is 99 percent minority (93 percent black, 6 percent Hispanic). The lives of many closely mirror that of Fallons godson. We have come to expect mediocrity from schools whose students are saddled with such tragic circumstances. But since Thaddeus Lott became its principal in 1975, Wesley has graduated thousands of children whose reading and math scores rival those of their suburban peers. Before Lott introduced his educational philosophy, only 18 percent of Wesleys third-graders were scoring at or above grade level in reading comprehension on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. By 1980, 85 percent were achieving at or above grade level. In 1996, 100 percent of Wesleys third-graders passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in reading. Statewide, fewer than 70 percent of third-graders in schools with similar demographics passed.

To achieve this astounding turnaround, Lott eschewed popular nostrums—computers, school-to-work initiatives, parental involvement for the basics: a proven curriculum, rigorous teacher training, strict discipline, high expectations of teachers and students, and a fervent belief that any child can learn. "It's a myth," says Lott, "that if you're born in a poor community and your skin is a certain color that you can't achieve on a higher level."

Having succeeded at Wesley, Lott wanted to vindicate his beliefs at other troubled schools. In this desire the community saw an opportunity to have every Acres Homes child schooled by Lott. So its residents petitioned the Houston school board to allow Lott to manage Wesley and three neighboring schools as a separate district of charter schools. The contract was signed in spring 1995, making Lott's district the first charter-school arrangement of its kind in Texas, predating even the state law encouraging communities to establish charter schools. The charters goal: To have 70 percent of all children who have spent three years in the charter system scoring at or above grade level.

The charter gives Lott total freedom to train staff, develop a curriculum, and make hiring, firing, and promotion decisions at the four schools. The charter "allows us to feel like we're not committing a crime by doing things differently," says Lott. "It does not release us from accountability, though. We have a three-year contract, and the community expects results." As the equivalent of a district superintendent, Lott reports directly to the superintendent of Houston schools, enabling him to sidestep several layers of bureaucracy.

Only \$2,500 Per Child It is 8 a.m. at Wesley, and Mary O'Connors third-graders are in a hurry. They are leaving on a field trip at 9, and there's plenty of learning to do before then. Not a moment is wasted as they correct their math homework, recite vocabulary lists, and read from a novel, Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*. By 9 a.m., they have accomplished more than many classes do all morning.

This is the typical classroom at Wesley: The pace is quick, the goals are set high, and no disruptions are tolerated. "We have a lot of ground to cover," says Lott. "The success of these kids depends on the percentage of time they are on task. We can't let one or two students disrupt the educational experience." The first lesson Wesley kids learn is how to walk through the halls quietly, single-file with hands folded. Fighting is forbidden.

The pace is rooted in the curriculum. Upon entering Wesley as principal, Lott purchased the *Direct Instructional System for Teaching and Remediation (DISTAR)*, a program developed at the University of Illinois during the 1960s. Known now as *Reading Mastery and Connecting Math Concepts*, it is based on the direct-instruction model of teaching, in which students and teachers engage in a lively, interactive regimen of structured drills and sequential lessons, each building on the last. DISTAR's phonics-based reading lessons are literally scripted for the teacher, who is required to ask 200-300 questions per day, often in rapid-fire sequence. The children's high-decibel choral responses may sound like a high-school cheerleading squad hopped up on No-Doz, but they are learning the relationships between the sounds and the letters that constitute the English language. And there's no quibbling with the results at Wesley.

During Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty," the federal government began Project Follow Through, which spent \$500 million and many years investigating the most effective pedagogy for disadvantaged students. It concluded that *direct instruction* was the only method that even came close to elevating poor readers to the 50th percentile in achievement. Child-centered approaches that diminish the teacher's role in the classroom and reject the teaching of basic skills finished in the cellar. Ironically, researchers also found that *direct instruction* elevated students' self-esteem far more than the child-centered methods that ascribe a central role to high self-esteem and maintain that self-esteem suffers in heavily controlled, teacher-directed environments. Disadvantaged students succeed more often with *direct instruction*, however, and Lott knows that achievement builds self-esteem, not the other way around.

Direct instruction works so well that Lott steers just 3 percent of Wesley students into special-education classes. By comparison, 10 percent of all Houston schoolchildren are labeled special ed.

Houston schools can mask poor achievement by inflating their special-ed ranks because special-education children do not count toward a school's average TAAS scores. Lott refuses to engage in such subterfuge. By exempting only 3 percent of its students for special ed, Wesley's TAAS scores represent more than 90 percent of the student body (a small percentage of Hispanic children are exempted for taking the test in Spanish). Only five of 242 other Houston schools test more children; most test well below 70 percent.

"Other principals hire remedial teachers," says Phyllis Hunter, manager of reading instruction for the Houston school district. "Thaddeus hires teachers who keep kids out of remedial classes." In fact, Wesley retains just one special-ed teacher, which helps to trim its costs to an average of \$2,500 per child, nearly \$1,000 less than the district average. "We've always done more with less," boasts Lott.

Lott held to his faith in basic skills while his counterparts swooned over the now-discredited "whole-language" theory of reading, which disavows explicit phonics instruction and views teachers more as "learning facilitators" than instructors. "People started teaching without ever giving kids any decoding skills," Lott says. "They gave them a bunch of books and said, Read. That was the fallacy of the whole-language bandwagon."

So many educators jumped on this bandwagon that Lott, in the pre-charter era, had to run candy sales and forgo technology upgrades to purchase DISTAR because it was not on the state's list of approved curricula. Now the charter allows him to spend his precious curriculum dollars on whichever program he deems best.

Holding Teachers Accountable In fact, Lott defies convention at every turn. Tracking the practice of grouping students by skill level has been accused of pigeonholing students into rigid categories. The first action Lott took as principal was to test his students, rank them by instructional level, and place the top 22 students in one class, the next 22 in another, and so on. The students in each class comprise, at most, three skill levels, making it easier for teachers to tailor their lesson plans to the individual needs of their students.

"If you don't teach a child on his instructional level," Lott says, "you will teach him at his frustration level. A child's self-esteem and success at learning are determined by his having an opportunity to be taught at the rate and level that he is capable of being taught."

Moreover, few school districts rate teachers based on performance, yet Lott demands accountability. Early in his career he began testing children at the beginning and end of each school year. By breaking the scores down by classroom, he knows which teachers are succeeding. His personnel decisions and merit bonuses are based on the results. Often he will even post the average student scores achieved by each teacher. "Now that's peer pressure," says Karen Anastasio, a reading specialist at Wesley.

Teachers are also subject to unscheduled visits from Lott and current Wesley principal Suzie Rimes, who checks on each classroom at least once a day. On one of the days I spent at Wesley, Rimes found a teacher who had not checked her students' homework. "She's got a short-lived existence here," Rimes said. "If she can find a place to pay her to do what she wants to do, more power to her." New teachers, in particular, can expect to be observed two to three times a day.

"New teachers don't come equipped to teach" upon graduation from education schools, says Lott. "So we have a lot of training focused on teaching teachers how to teach. They get so little field practice in college."

Underlying these policies is Lott's conviction that if a child does not learn, it is the teacher's fault. "I'm in the education business," says Osborne Elementary principal Ann Davis, another of the Lott disciples in charge of the four charter schools under his management. "If I'm not doing my job, I need to be put out of business."

These lofty expectations would merely provoke resentment among teachers if Lott did not equip them with proven strategies. New teachers attend several days of training before school begins, and Lott will release them from classes for a week to observe an experienced teacher if they need to. "Teachers need to be trained," Lott insists. "They need to know that they are supported." The school year is replete with

opportunities for further training and time to share strategies with colleagues. "You can't as a teacher fail at Wesley unless you don't want to do the program," says Gayle Fallon, the head of the teachers union.

But Fallon warns prospective teachers that if they want to interpret their contracts literally, Wesley is not the place for them. "I tell them, You're going to work through lunch, past 5 p.m., and on Saturdays. But you're also going to get disciplinary support, the materials you need, and all the training you require," Fallon says. Wesley typically loses four to six teachers at the beginning of each year because they dislike the program or fail to meet Lott's standards of competence.

The workload is heavy because students must be graded in five subjects each day. And a linchpin of *direct instruction* is that students are tested often to ensure they have mastered the material before moving on. These measures enable teachers to give students feedback on their mistakes. It's no use, Lott says, to have kids practicing bad habits. Or to have them turning the page without having learned the previous lesson. But it also makes the job of teaching that much harder.

The demanding hours and pressure to perform take their toll. The majority of Wesley teachers have fewer than five years of teaching experience, while the average Houston teacher has spent 12 years in the same school. According to Lott, the problem is competition: "We're surrounded by plenty of less rigorous schools that love to take the teachers we've already trained." Several observers say this is integral to Lott's success: He trains young teachers his way before they become entrenched in another philosophy.

Franchising Success In terms of education policy, the key question is: Can the Wesley way become a model for widespread education reform? Can Lott succeed without devoting the amount of time to each of his four charter schools that he has always given to Wesley? Which is indispensable, the visionary leader or the approach he has championed?

It's too early to render a verdict on the charter experiment, but the initial signs are promising. Lott's first step at Highland Heights was to replace the principal (a power the charter gives him) with Sandra Cornelius, a former Wesley assistant principal. "The last principal was a joke," says Lott. "The place was a mess, and she wouldn't even show up on time." Cornelius shares his philosophy, and she began by beautifying the school, imposing a sense of order, and adopting the direct-instruction programs.

The results have been remarkable. In 1994-95, the year before Lott assumed responsibility for Highland Heights (where 94 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunches), 37 percent of its fourth graders had passed the TAAS in reading. Last spring, a whopping 100 percent passed. In math, 94 percent of the school's fourth graders passed the TAAS this year. Two years ago, the passage rate was 30 percent among fourth graders.

Osborne Elementary, the third elementary school now under Lott's management, has been improving steadily ever since Davis was hired as principal in 1993, several years before Lott took over. Fewer than 40 percent of its students had passed the TAAS in reading and math in 1993. Nowadays, more than 80 percent pass. Instead of DISTAR, Davis has chosen to use Success For All, a teaching model developed at Johns Hopkins University that incorporates direct-instruction techniques. Lott, for the most part, has left well enough alone. "All of [the principals] are free to do their own thing as long as they get results," Lott says.

Lott's most daunting challenge is to revamp M.C. Williams, the lone middle school (grades six through eight) in his care. He spent the first year of the charter battling the old principal, who disagreed with Lott philosophically and has since been replaced. This year the school has a new principal and a new look. Formerly dark hallways now have fluorescent lighting; a once perpetually dirty floor is swept and waxed daily; graffiti is cleaned up immediately; and new principal Roy Morgan himself donned an old sweatshirt one Saturday and painted the front doors bright blue.

Morgan is a constant presence in the hallways and classrooms, and teachers are assigned posts at high-traffic areas during breaks. Their mission: Maintain order. "The teachers and administrators have finally gotten control," says assistant principal Sylvia Jones. These initial renovations are revealing, for they reflect Lott's

priorities. Before attending to academics, Lott says, you must create an environment for learning. That means a clean school with cheery colors, a staff of professionals who treat students with respect, and students who understand what type of behavior is expected of them.

Test scores, however, have only seen minor improvements. Besides the turnover in leadership and the wasted year with an ineffective principal, Williams suffers from a more serious problem: Cherry-picking. Wesley graduates are technically zoned to attend Williams, but few actually enter. Most are accepted by magnet schools throughout Houston or wooed by private schools seeking high-achieving minority students. So Williams is left with hundreds of graduates of other local elementary schools starting well below grade level.

Lotts solution is to bring textbooks from Wesley into the middle school. "These kids dont know how to decode a word," he says. "Now were having to do what the elementary schools didnt do." The charter arrangement exempts Williams from regulations forbidding the use of below-level textbooks. A Failure To Replicate Lotts devotion springs from his deep roots in the community. His boyhood home stands just five blocks from Wesley, and as a child he attended Highland Heights. Back then Acres Homes was largely rural; his parents raised livestock and pumped water from a well. It was a different kind of community, too, "There were more families and they looked out for each others children," Lott laments. "My neighbor was as much a guardian as my parents. Now we have drugs, violence, babies having babies the whole nine yards."

Soon after graduating from Texas Southern University and becoming an educator, Lott and his wife built a home near Wesley. "I wanted my children to know their heritage," Lott says. "I wanted them to sit in their grandmothers rocking chair."

Even though Lott was told that he would never recoup the houses full value, it was important to him that Acres Homes kids hold high aspirations. "Children would pass the house and admire it," Lott says, "and say, You can come from Acres Homes and make a difference in the world. "

But living in Acres Homes meant his children had to attend Wesley. Finding the education lacking, he sent them to private school and vowed to take the job as principal at Wesley if it ever opened. "I knew what it was like to be a parent looking for a school that taught my kids as well as I was taught," Lott says. "For them to do less is criminal."

Opportunity knocked in 1975, and the swift and dramatic improvements at Wesley soon attracted notice. In 1980, the school district conducted a study of Wesley and 10 other schools with similar demographics. It attributed the sudden uptick in Wesleys scores to the use of DISTAR.

With these results in hand and a supportive superintendent, more than 300 Texas schools adopted DISTAR in the early 1980s. But since DISTAR had still not been approved by the state education board, public schools had to divert discretionary funds away from other endeavors to afford the program. When classroom computers became the latest rage, these schools largely abandoned DISTAR to purchase computer hardware.

The next superintendent, Joan Raymond, was an ardent whole-language acolyte. Lotts philosophy was anathema to her, and, according to Gayle Fallon, his success prompted many Houston school district administrators to question the validity of Wesleys scores. "They assumed that if minority kids were doing well on tests, they had to be cheating," Lott says. The district sent a pair of investigators into the school to look for evidence of foul play, but they came away empty-handed.

The baseless charges provoked an indignant backlash. "[Raymond] got to meet the entire Acres Homes community at the next school board meeting," says Fallon, smiling. The pivotal moment came when ABCs PrimeTime Live broadcast scenes of Lotts children reading two and three years above grade level. Raymond squirmed as reporter Chris Wallace questioned the districts lack of support for Lott and her own prejudices. It had all the elements of a juicy story a crusading hero, an intransigent bureaucracy, and childrens education in the balance and ABC ran it twice. Ultimately, it gave Lott an aura of invincibility and forced Raymond out of office.

It also brought a wave of requests from parents throughout the city desperate to enroll their children at Wesley. Some resorted to lying about where their children lived, providing the address of a vacant lot or of a relative within Lotts district. While most schools take pains to expose such fraud, Lott does not. If they want to come and don't cause any trouble, he is glad to educate them.

Now Lott has a supportive superintendent in Rod Paige (the two are good friends) along with an adoring community and a national reputation. When Paige impaneled a blue-ribbon commission to settle the reading-instruction debate in Houston, Lott was one of the experts called to serve. The charter-school arrangement sprung from Paige's desire to "create an environment in which a renegade principal like Lott could flourish," he says. Observers visit Wesley from across the country. And despite the pressures Lott places on his teachers, even the national office of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has published approving stories on *direct instruction* and Wesley in its journal *American Teacher*.

The most important lessons, however, have yet to be learned. Lott's direct-instruction programs are still not a part of Texas's approved curriculum; schools that want to use the programs must either gain charter status or use precious discretionary funds to buy the textbooks. The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is contributing \$4.4 million over the next three years to bring Reading Mastery (formerly DISTAR) into six low-performing Houston schools, but the school district has made little effort to find out what makes Lott's program work and encourage other schools to follow it. The resistance to adopting *direct instruction* is an apt metaphor for the problems and promise of our decentralized system of public education. Current thought in education circles emphasizes "child-centered" classrooms and collaborative learning groups, values the learning "process" over correct answers, and disavows the teaching of basic skills in math and reading (although phonics has experienced a resurgence as of late). These trends place control over curriculum content largely in teachers' hands.

Direct-instruction programs do the opposite. Their scripted lessons leave the teacher with little freedom, although Wesley teachers say that having ready-made lesson plans leaves them more time to develop creative supplements. In *direct instruction*, the teacher runs the classroom and the students focus initially on acquiring basic skills; the primary goal is measurable student achievement. How much a teacher likes the program is of little concern. Most teachers blanch at having their instructional methods dictated so heavily by the curriculum.

Moreover, longstanding traditions of local control in education prevent any superintendent from imposing a curriculum like *direct instruction* on an entire district. Although that means not everyone will adopt misguided reforms (as happened in California when the state education board mandated whole language statewide and repealed it several years later after a fierce public outcry), it also means not everyone will adopt the right ones. Lott has the pleasure of managing only four schools whose principals were either trained by him or believe in his approach. Imagine attempting to impose a curriculum on 242 Houston principals and their staff, all of whom possess their own educational philosophies.

The failure to replicate Lott's program reveals another vexing matter in education: Hero worship. Whether it's Thaddeus Lott, Joe Clark of New Jersey, or Jaime Escalante of California, the latter two made famous by popular Hollywood films, when we elevate educators to the height of myth we place their achievements seemingly beyond reach. For example, when asked why the school district had not tried to replicate *direct instruction* in other schools, Paige answered, "The error in your premise is that it's the methodology that makes [Lott] succeed. If I had to choose any single foundation of his success, it is his intense desire to cause children to learn."

Yet Thaddeus Lott spends most of his day in meetings. Although he should be applauded for ensuring that teachers have a well-designed curriculum and the training they need, they ultimately bear the responsibility for whether the children learn. "That's what bothers me," Lott says, "the people who say you need to have a Thaddeus Lott to change things. No, you don't."

To prove that there's nothing unique about *direct instruction*, Paiges office provided TAAS scores from 22 Houston schools with demographics and achievement levels comparable to Wesleys, only a few of which use *direct instruction*. The office neglected to supply until asked a list including the percentage of children in each school who actually took the test.

Of the 22 schools, only two tested more than 70 percent of their kids and one of the two was Highland Heights, which uses *direct instruction*. Ten of the 22 actually tested less than 50 percent of their students. No schools had tested more than 80 percent of their students, while Wesley tested 93 percent. Lott does not need to hide low-performing students to prove that *direct instruction* works.

To be sure, Houston has made great strides in the area of reading the blue-ribbon committee overhauled the districts curriculum to include a focus on early systematic phonics, and TAAS passage rates are way up under Paiges watch. The school districts accountability system, in which each school is given a grade for its TAAS passage rate, has forced principals to show marked improvement or risk losing their jobs. But schools are also exempting more and more of their students from the TAAS by labeling them special education or giving them the test in Spanish.

The districts policy of benign neglect toward a man like Thaddeus Lott may allow him to "flourish," in Paiges words, but education reform demands replicable models for improving entire districts, not just a tiny subset of schools. Lotts success with *direct instruction*, and even Daviss record with Success For All, suggest effective reforms. "*Direct instruction* will certainly give us a lot more success than we have right now," says Lovely Billups, the director of field services for educational issues at the AFT.

It's a measure of how low our expectations in education have sunk when a sense of mystique surrounds a man who brought in common-sense reforms such as choosing a research-based curriculum, measuring teacher performance, conducting an on-going effort to train those teachers, and expecting children to master subjects before moving on. Should we really expect anything less? Tyce Palmaffy is the assistant editor of Policy Review: The Journal of American Citizenship.

Education: What Works and What Doesn't **David Coffey for Tennessee Politics**

Everybody is concerned about Tennessee's schools -- and almost everyone has an idea about what needs to be fixed. We may not agree about religion, political party, the death penalty or taxes, but we all want better educations for our kids. The good news is that educators know how to do it. The bad news is that very few schools bother to use the proven techniques. As a teacher pointed out to me, you can see what works at: www.aasa.org/reform/index.htm

Here's the bottom line: Of 24 different school reform approaches, only three are proven effective. That means there are more "fad" games being played to experiment with your kids than you can keep up with.

And the winners are (drum roll, trumpets): 1) *Direct instruction* (K-6) 2) High Schools That Work (9-12) 3) Success for All (PreK-6)

That's it; the other twenty-one programs are experiments. Let them experiment with someone else's kids! Never mind what the details of these programs are (educators know or can look at the web site), we need only know that they are available and they work. You can believe these results. The careful research, concluded in 1999, was conducted by the American Institute for Research and sponsored by: Amer. Assn. of School Administrators American Federation of Teachers Nat'l. Assn of Elementary School Principals Nat'l. Assn of Secondary School Principals National Education Association.

Now, why would any school not use these scientifically proven programs? Well, all teachers and principals don't believe "measurable achievement" is all that important. The study is prefaced, "Due to the nature of this review, quantitative achievement measures are highlighted. This is not to discount the validity of qualitative research or the importance of such outcomes as a more positive school atmosphere and increased

student satisfaction. However, it is through measurable achievement outcomes - test scores, grades, graduation rates - that students and their schools are held accountable."

A second reason is that our Legislature has dictated class size limits and other requirements that have soaked up all the money that could have been used for these effective programs. In fact, the 1992 Education Improvement Act adds more than \$1 billion per year to K-12 schools with little effect on academic achievement. Any or all of these programs would cost less than one-quarter of that.

So we struggle on, waiting for the bright light of reason to shine in Tennessee and across America. Just this week the Legislature (House Education Committee) has voted down a Charter Public School bill that would allow only a few schools to be different and offer some choice to desperate parents who beg for a choice. No way, the teachers' union owns our mediocre schools. Diogenes' search for truth could not have been more difficult. David Coffey is a former Tennessee State Legislator and noted columnist.

THE BATTLE OF CITY SPRINGS PBS will air "The Battle of City Springs" on September 29 2001 The Battle of City Springs features a year in the life of City Springs, a chronically failing Baltimore elementary school serving a poor, African-American community. Currently in the educational equivalent of bankruptcy, City Springs may be shut down if it continues to fail. But this year there is some hope. City Springs is one of a dozen schools introducing a radical and controversial curriculum called *Direct instruction*. Will this new curriculum and the determination of its tough new principal, Bernice Whelchel, be enough to turn City Springs around? Or are the problems just too great to overcome in a year? -----

Education has risen to the top of the political agenda. There is widespread concern about the quality of American schools: concern that large sectors of American children are failing to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills; concern that our students are failing to match the performance of children in other nations; concern that our schools are not producing a workforce with the necessary skills to compete in the 21st Century. For all this concern, few people have much idea of what is involved in turning a failing school into a successful one. The Battle of City Springs lays bare the wrenching process of school reform.

The film is set in City Springs, a K-5 Elementary School serving a poor, largely African-American community in Baltimore's inner-city. City Springs is one of six inner-city Baltimore schools introducing a radical new curriculum called *Direct instruction* (DI). The hope is that this curriculum will turn around these failing schools and serve as a model for reform. By reputation, City Springs is the worst of these six and one of the toughest schools in the city. Currently in the educational equivalent of bankruptcy, City Springs may be shut down if it continues to fail.

The film follows the school over the course of one academic year, showing in graphic detail how the school negotiates crisis after crisis in its efforts to succeed. The principal of City Springs, Bernice Whelchel, is in her third year. She is determined to change the low expectations that many of her staff and students have, and she is committed to turning the school around. The problems she faces, however, are immense. Most of the fifth graders are three years behind in math and language arts. Many of these students, bound for middle school, can barely decode simple words. While there are some experienced and good teachers, others lack, themselves, the knowledge to teach math past the third grade. A few of them are barely literate. As the school finds it hard to attract new staff to the inner-city, Bernice must make the best of what she has.

Special emphasis is placed in the school (and in the film) on the first grade and kindergarten. If the school is to change, Bernice reasons, she must get all of these beginning students above grade level. This means that she expects all first graders and virtually all kindergartners to be reading by the end of the year. *Direct instruction*, a highly structured, scripted program, written by University of Oregon professor Siegfried Engelmann, has shown impressive results with at risk children. If *Direct instruction* is taught correctly, says Engelmann, success is guaranteed. But DI is unlike anything the teachers have encountered and some don't like it. In DI, children respond hundreds of times a lesson to questions, giving unison responses. In DI, teachers don't prepare their own lessons but follow scripts. In DI, children are grouped not by age but by ability.

Direct instruction is controversial and unpopular among education school professors who accuse it of being too rote. But Bernice, impressed by the underlying research, believes that DI is the kind of strong medicine City Springs needs. While most of the staff are African American, Ms. Robyn Shaw who is Caucasian and a graduate from the University of Oregon, the home of DI, is starting her first job. Enthusiastic and fluent in DI, she nevertheless runs into trouble. By six weeks into the year, her first grade class has become unruly. Her behavior management skills, which were fine for a small suburban school system, prove inadequate. Bernice removes Ms. Shaw from her class for a week, putting in Ms. Merrick (a master at managing student behavior) to restore order. Ms. Shaw is grilled and grilled about "consistency" and giving her students "clear expectations". She returns to her class and after a month or so starts to do very well. By the end of the year 90% of her students are reading at or above grade level, some very well.

The two kindergarten teachers, Ms. Hill and Ms. Sampson, arrive at City Springs expecting that their kids will do "kindergarten activities": paint, sing, and, at most, "get ready for reading". Bernice lets them know that she is expecting them to follow the DI program to the letter and that she expects the children to be reading by the end of the year. After a reasonable start, things begin to fall apart. The children's behavior disintegrates, the teachers lose control. Bernice puts more man power in the room: teaching assistants, aids, volunteers. But even with eight people in the room, behavior continues to get worse and very little academic work is getting done. Hill and Sampson's training lead them to explain this chaos in a rather different way to their principal. They think the chaos reflects the children's frustrations at being unable to meet unrealistic expectations. They question whether such young children (especially children who come in with deficient language skills) are ready to learn reading. Bernice on the other hand, refuses to change her expectations or to "think of the kids as babies". To her mind, the failure must be laid on Ms. Hill and Ms. Sampson who just can't or won't get it.

In February, a discipline expert, Trish O'Hara, is called in to sort out the class. After a frantic week, most of the children are better able to sit in their seats and follow routines. But after she leaves, Bernice is still not satisfied with her teachers' performance. Academically, the students are way behind her schedule. Determined to convince them that kindergarten children are not babies and that they are capable of academic achievement, Bernice takes Ms. Hill and Ms. Sampson to Houston, Texas to view Wesley Elementary School, a school that has been using DI for 16 years. For Bernice, this school is the promised land. While just as poor and disadvantaged as the City Springs students, Wesley kindergartners can read at the second grade level, multiply by 11's and know all the states. They even know who the country's vice president is. Ms. Hill and Ms. Sampson walk around the school open-mouthed.

After they return, now convinced their expectations were much too low, they really get moving. By the end of the year, most of their children are reading, some at first or second grade level; and they are disappointed they didn't do more math. It is a year that swings from happy moments (like the Christmas performance of the Nutcracker) to tragedy (when vandals burn down the school playground). But over this year, City Springs becomes the focal point around which a strong community begins to form; with teachers, parents, and students finally believing they can succeed and beat the odds. Using state-of-the-art light weight video equipment, this verite documentary presents a uniquely intimate portrait of a school which is a microcosm of the crisis facing American education

The following letter was written by the film producer who did the special PBS piece " Battle of City Springs" on the Baltimore School which was beginning to implement a research based reading program. The letter was written following visits made by the producer to three school systems in which research-based reading programs are being used to produce high levels of achievement in multiple schools serving low-income children. His insights about what brings about success from school to school within these projects, I believe, can be of help to us all.

I had a very interesting trip to the three districts. Here are some notes. All three systems use basically the same means to ensure excellence: All three use a research based curriculum: All have been motivated by key influential people (usually a superintendent) asking a simple question: if one or two schools in my district can be excellent why can't all of them be? In all three cases, the principals, teachers and administrators realized that simply buying a new program cannot guarantee results, success requires several other key

elements as well. Perhaps the overarching theme of all three cases is accountability (student, teacher, principal, superintendent) realized through training, continual monitoring and testing, analysis of data, immediate intervention, staff development, sharing of knowledge, and instructional leadership.

Here are the key commonalities. 1. Schools use a research-based reading program committed to developing phonemic awareness, systematic explicit phonics, fluency, comprehension etc

2. Schools must ensure teachers have ALL the materials that go with a program. Someone must be made responsible for guaranteeing this.

3. Teachers must be trained to teach the adopted programs and this training/coaching must be on going. All three systems used internal coaches/master teachers based in the school, but supervised at a system level-- rather than relying solely on outside consultants. They believe using their own people developed more of a sense of ownership and excitement. A key feature of all programs was the sharing of knowledge among teachers on a given grade level both within a given school and across a district. This reminded me of the Japanese "Quality Circles" where skills (tacit knowledge) was sought out. If everyone shares their "tricks", astonishing improvements are possible and (more importantly) quality across classes and schools becomes more consistent. In all three examples, coaches/master teachers from different schools meet frequently to share experiences and data. In one district, the systems 9 coaches actually went into one problem school for several weeks to raise the level to that of the other schools.

4. All three systems have aligned all the schools in their charge to a detailed curriculum. The sequence to teach essential skills is specified clearly in advance, using and augmenting the goals specified in the reading programs. In other words over the course of a year teachers are expected (and held accountable) to teach children a specified series of skills (to mastery) by a specified date. One district calls this a "time line". Any deviation from this time line is readily apparent. Early in the school year, adjustments can be made for children who are significantly above or below the performance level for their grade. Breaking down the year's goals into smaller units can facilitate training as well. Staff development is done sequentially throughout the year--rather than in one go at the beginning.

5. All three systems base their success or failure on data collected throughout the year. In some cases, systems use the assessments built in to the programs. One district goes to the trouble of writing special benchmark tests each year to be carried out in Fall and Spring These tests are written by the master teachers themselves who also agree the time line each year. They believe this is important for getting teachers to buy in to the program and also for making them more willing to share their knowledge. I guess it acknowledges that teachers are experts and part of the solution not the part of the problem. These assessments generate timely data measuring the performance of EVERY child on a range of targeted skills. What's impressive is how easy this data is to interpret. One district uses a color coded chart that shows at a glance which kids are struggling on which skills. Looked at another way the same chart shows which teachers need help and in which areas. Aggregate data shows at a glance which schools need help and in which areas.

6. Data underpins the entire accountability scheme. Data must not only be analyzed and used, it must be seen to be analyzed and used. All three programs stress the importance of the perception that the data will be seen by everyone—other teachers, the principal, the superintendent. The data--a measure of whether teachers are keeping to the time line/pacing schedule with kids mastering most of the material-- is also the trigger for intervention. This is a key point. Rather than waiting until the end of the year, here interventions follow immediately from the data.

First, struggling kids must get immediate help. In one district, they get immediate tutoring (day or weekend). In another, lessons need to be repeated. Next, teachers get specific help within their school. As data reaches the superintendent's office, principals may be called in to explain what they are doing to over come problems. The power of a systemic approach becomes apparent at this stage. The problems uncovered by testing can inform staff development. Coaches from different schools can share experiences and knowledge, teachers can help other teachers. In one district, they have (following each benchmark evaluation) a series of Teachers Teaching Teachers seminars.

One of the other districts does something similar. If, for example, classes are falling down on a particular skill, administrators seek out the handful of teachers who get very high scores on that sub-skill and ask them to share their wisdom with colleagues. This is a very powerful technique which leverages the knowledge base and experience of a school system. Finally, I should note that none of this works very well without the support of principals and superintendents. Everyone is looking for messages from their superiors to validate that this data really matters. Once this issue is resolved: "Yes it really matters", then the data becomes the key metric, the key reality check, the main method of quality control binding all members of the learning community together.

7. All systems have a way of coping with lower performing kids who can't keep up. One systems retains some kids in K (they call it Junior K) arguing that it is much better to do this early than late.

8. The superintendent of one district communicated that their goal was a school system where every class in every school was equally good. A place where a child's chances would not depend on the random draw of a particular teacher. A place where a child could move from one school to the other without skipping a beat, since each class on a given grade is doing the same thing, transitions would be seamless. While this vision is a small scale version of the French system of education, the positive spin is to see this as a way of delivering a constant service to a community. Imagine if only two out of 10 health centers gave adequate health care! Of course, this vision demands that new teachers get a lot of support and training by being paired with master teachers on their grade. All three systems produced impressive results (metric: percentage of kids on or above grade level) (In fact, the Second Grade Class in one district looked more impressive and advanced than my son Mateo's classroom in suburban Lexington, Mass.) All systems told me that measurable success comes very quickly--within a year or two. In some ways, it seems, reforming a district is easier than reforming a single school.

9. A key question is whether such initiatives are sustainable. Arguably, it is the link to a system with an instructional vision and a system of carrots and sticks that makes all the difference.

10. Conclusion It is clear that simply having a research-based curriculum is insufficient to ensure success in reading instruction. While this is an essential step, the existence of districts with one or two top performing schools surrounded by many poor performing schools indicates the limits of curriculum factors in school reform. Moreover, attempts to make curricula "teacher proof" or "principal proof" run the risk of alienating and diminishing the prime resource of school districts: their teachers. Half-hearted attempts at using outside consultants to carry out staff development and training also have a spotty record.

The three examples above highlight another model of district wide school reform, one which has enormous power. In this model schools are aligned to a schedule. As this schedule unfolds, teachers are given training and on-going coaching, and the students are regularly tested. The student performance measurement is the key metric which binds all the players together in a district-wide management plan. Data which identifies at a glance how each kid is doing, how each teacher is doing, how each school is doing, how the entire district is doing is "published" for all to see, and this triggers an immediate and measured response. In this model, every one is accountable, so, in a sense, everyone shares the blame if kids are not learning.

Everyone needs to do what they can to ensure that the kids are getting what they need. Struggling kids, teachers (and even schools) get immediate intervention. Staff development is modified to reflect the key instructional issues. And the specific skills of master teachers are leveraged by getting them to share their know-how across a grade and across the system. Human beings do not naturally come together in such units to produce consistent services and so this structure needs to be maintained with strong instructional leadership. Just as a business needs a CEO with a vision and clear measures of success and failure, so a school system needs to have a strong superintendent to set the tone, expectations and standards for a set of principals, who in turn will set those parameters for their teachers, who in turn will pass them on to their students.

Reading programs square off at school. Mukwonago district uses phonics, whole language to see which works best By Amy Hetzner of the Journal Sentinel staff April 26,

The Mukwonago school is using a program to compare methods of teaching pupils how to read. In the war over phonics - the teaching approach ardently embraced by some and bitterly derided by others - a Waukesha County school has declared a truce.

How long it lasts rests precariously on the outcome of a yearlong experiment in which phonics and the so-called whole language method are going head-to-head in an attempt to determine the best way to teach first-graders how to read. The Mukwonago School District this year put two reading programs under a microscope. In the project, the *Direct instruction* method - a controversial, drill-oriented way to teach phonics - is used in one classroom by a teacher and an aide; Mukwonago's existing reading program, a blend of whole language with some phonics, is taught in another by a teacher and an aide; and the Mukwonago program is taught by a teacher alone in a third, more typical, classroom.

The results will be monitored by three different methods of assessment, and statisticians from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater have been asked to analyze the results. Well aware that passions on the issue run high both locally and nationally, and acknowledging the benefits of both approaches, Clarendon Avenue Elementary School Principal John Shanahan notes: "There's more to all this than black and white."

Not to some parents whose children are involved in the district's reading experiment. "I love it," said Wendy Liska, whose daughter is in teacher Diane Kellogg's *Direct instruction* classroom, where carefully scripted lessons crafted from researchers' trial-and-error methods emphasize constant repetition to help students master letter sounds. "I really don't know how the other kids are doing, but Allison is doing really well. I can't believe how well she's reading right now," Liska said.

On the other side, parent Robin Yanzer predicted her son, Josh, would have been tested for learning disabilities by now had his reading not improved so much under the whole language instruction in teacher Nancy Kocejka's class. The district's reading curriculum uses a combination of phonics to help students identify word groupings and whole language to give them strategies on how to figure out words on their own.

"He has made so much improvement with the program (Kocejka) is using - using the sight words, the picture words and now moving into phonics," said Yanzer, a special education teacher at Waukesha West High School. "I think if Josh had just gotten phonics, we'd be testing him for learning disabilities." Mukwonago's pilot project was undertaken after parent Lisa Leppin recommended in February 1999 that the district adopt the phonics-heavy *Direct instruction* method of teaching reading.

The decades-old program was one of only three schoolwide reform models identified in a study conducted last year for a national coalition of teacher and school administrator groups as showing strong evidence of significantly improving student performance in low-performing schools, she pointed out in her recommendation to the board. *Direct instruction* also has a math component, which the Mukwonago district is not using. Like many parents raised when phonics instruction was the rule, Leppin is convinced that phonics is the best method to teach children to read. And she believes *Direct instruction* provides the most proven phonics program.

Leppin, whose son will be kindergarten-age in the fall, acknowledges the district already has a phonics component in its reading program, "but it's not the kind of phonics that research has shown works the best for all kids." While the district initially balked at Leppin's suggestion, saying its existing reading program already had proved itself, the board agreed to fund the three-classroom experiment with *Direct instruction* this school year, to the tune of \$25,000.

Mukwonago board member Rodell Singert, who supported the pilot program, prided the district in moving forward with the phonics experiment, unlike another Waukesha County school district - Muskego-Norway - where he had seen how bitter arguments over phonics had divided the School Board and district. "It was so

ugly," he said. "And I came back home and said to our superintendent, 'We don't have to get so ugly. We don't have to make a mountain of a molehill.' We just had to get some volunteers, train them, and compare one first-grade class to another and see if we can find any empirical evidence."

The evidence has yet to come. But Shanahan, who has been trained to teach the *Direct instruction* reading program, says there's probably a good place for it in his school. In particular, he said, fourth-grade teachers have been trained and are eager to use *Direct instruction* to help students struggling under the district's existing reading program. But he also predicts the experiment will prove that the current reading curriculum helps more students progress even further than does the phonics program.

Even one of the *Direct instruction* instructors, teacher aide Jodi Gebhard, is conflicted about which approach is best. She teaches the students in Kellogg's class who need the most help, those whom *Direct instruction* separates into the lowest-level reading group. But her daughter, Kaitlin, is a member of the Koceja's control class, against whom Gebhard and Kellogg's efforts and the *Direct instruction* method are being tested.

Gebhard said she has seen students in her class come a long way under the repetitive drills employed with *Direct instruction*. But she also is pleased with the district's reading curriculum and the progress her daughter has made under Koceja. "We as a district are just trying to do everything and anything to get our children to read," she said. "And isn't that what we want in our schools?"

Appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on April 27, 2000.

Tiny school bests big problems By Andrea Billups THE WASHINGTON TIMES March 28, 2000
<http://www.washtimes.com/national/default-2000328224742.htm>

PORTLAND, Ark. — Finding Portland Elementary School takes a bit of doing, as they say in this part of the country, but Principal Ernest Smith is getting used to giving directions. All sorts of folks, including the governor, have come calling. They're eager to discover just what makes this rural school in the heart of Arkansas' Delta region one of the state's educational gems.

Drive east then south out of Little Rock, the big city, for about 2 and 1/2 hours. When you come to Lake Village, take a right at the town's only stoplight, Mr. Smith instructs. Continue 12 miles through the sprawling cotton fields and shimmering catfish ponds near Bayou Bartholomew. Turn at the railroad tracks and drive straight. Pass the John Deere store, and you'll see the sign. The school is on the left.

"If you have any trouble, now, just call," urges the energetic Mr. Smith, a sharecropper's son and veteran educator who embraces Southern hospitality like a code of honor. At 65, he has been a teacher and principal for 43 years. But the last five, he confides, have been the most rewarding.

The reason: His school in this town of 600 residents has rebounded, even though 77 percent of his 150 students are from low-income homes. Half of them used to score two or more years below grade level on national tests. Now, under Mr. Smith's guidance and a demanding new curriculum, the school is setting benchmarks for academic success. "We believe that if the learner has not learned, the teacher has not taught," the principal says. The results are drawing news reporters from around the country and educators from six states. They come to see for themselves how tiny Portland Elementary is doing what many other schools can't: Making sure poor children excel.

Mr. Smith's "willingness to eschew politically fashionable but academically weak programs in favor of practices that get fast, measurable results is being emulated across America," wrote one reader to the Arkansas Democrat Gazette. Gov. Mike Huckabee, a Republican who visited Portland Elementary and successful sister school Wilmot Elementary in January, publicly touts Mr. Smith, calling him a hero and naming him Arkansas' Resident of the Week, or "Starkansan." The governor also regularly compliments the school's staff and students.

"Over 50 percent of its top-performing students are African-American and now even private school students are asking Mr. Smith to let them come to Portland," Mr. Huckabee said in a speech before the Republican Governors Association in November. "Why? Because he as a principal has insisted that poverty is no excuse for failure and skin color is no cause for underachievement." Hearing that assessment makes Mr. Smith shake his head in amazement. "We're so proud of our youngsters," he says, deflecting the accolades.

This series examines how Portland Elementary and two other public schools — an academy for seventh- to 12th-graders in Harlem, N.Y., and a charter school in tiny Durham, N.C. — succeed in encouraging children to excel despite their poverty. The Washington-based Heritage Foundation spotlighted the three schools as among the best in the country as part of the conservative think tank's "No Excuses" campaign advocating higher standards in public education.

'All children can learn' Central to the turnaround at Portland Elementary was its adoption of *Direct instruction*, called "Distar" when introduced in the 1960s. Aggressive, in-your-face and demanding for both teachers and students, DI — as Portland officials refer to it — is an intensely scripted and regimented teaching method with a strong track record of accelerating learning.

Children are grouped by skill level and tested every seven or eight days in reading, language, math and science until they master each subject. The assessments continue until each child is ready to move up to a higher level. DI has taught us that all children, when placed at their appropriate instructional level, can learn," Mr. Smith says.

Initially, Mr. Smith was leery of using *Direct instruction*. County school officials urged him to visit Wesley Elementary in Houston. There he met Thaddeus Lott, a celebrated educator on the scale of the legendary Jaime Escalante of California, who achieved unparalleled success using DI with his poor elementary students. After returning home and selling the program to his teachers, some of them reluctantly, Mr. Smith made a commitment to the new curriculum. He hired a New York consulting firm to train his staff and follow up with monthly visits.

No little robots The first year Portland Elementary used DI, things were rough. "By the end of the day, teachers were exhausted," Mr. Smith recalls. No wonder. Watching teacher's aide Charlotte Lassiter drill her youngsters in vocabulary is tiring, even to an adult visitor. Sitting in a semicircle, nearly touching the tall and curly-haired Mrs. Lassiter, tiny kindergartners reply eagerly in unison to her crisp commands. "What is a contraction?" she asks quickly. "Ready, go," she prompts from a DI script. "A contraction is two words put together with a letter or letters missing," the small ones say, their southeastern Arkansas accents pronounced as they linger over vowels that are long.

"Excellent," affirms Mrs. Lassiter, as dimples flare, tiny pony tails bob and excited giggles fill the room. In the second-grade classroom across the hallway, teacher Becky Smith puts her pupils through reading lessons. "Everybody touching," she commands, as the children use their fingers to mark where they will read aloud.

"Keep reading," she clips, snapping her fingers to create momentum as a small boy takes his turn. "One of the criticisms is that we're creating little robots, that this is so structured we take away any individuality," says Mr. Smith, observing this class on an unseasonably warm February morning. "But [teachers] ask a lot of open-ended questions, and the children have to think."

The turnaround Guidance counselor Sheila Greene says DI helps to raise self-esteem in struggling students. "There's a lot of positive reinforcement," she says. "They are not singled out to be ridiculed, and the students don't realize they are in a lower group ability-wise. They aren't stigmatized as underachievers."

Before DI was adopted in 1994, 18 percent of students were assigned to special-education classes. That percentage dropped to 5 percent. "Watching the turnaround at Portland has been amazing," Miss Greene says.

"Even to us, it's hard to imagine," she says of the national attention, which included an award in 1998 from the U.S. Department of Education for being a "Title 1 School of Distinction."

The guidance counselor credits Mr. Smith's vision and says area residents, including parents, actively raise money and help the school move ahead. A strong character education program, in use districtwide, complements this environment of achievement, she says. Violence is rare and church is central to the lives of children and their families. "We're beating the statistics with a lot of hard work," Miss Green says.

Accountability at the core The payoff has been enormous, particularly in lower grades where children have been exposed to *Direct instruction* for their entire academic careers. Last year, first- and second-graders scored in the 78th percentile in math on the Stanford-9 achievement test. Sixth-graders did equally well, scoring in the 72nd percentile in reading and the 84th percentile in math.

All students have risen to grade level or above and are improving five points annually on national tests.

"We do not do special things to prepare for the standardized tests," Mr. Smith says. "We teach our curriculum." Also key is a "no excuses" policy on learning, says Ray Simon, director of the Arkansas Department of Education. Portland and other high-achieving schools like it are leading the way for a statewide school reform effort, Smart Start, that Mr. Simon describes as focusing on learning the basics and having accountability at its core.

"I think the secret of their success is a strong belief that their children can achieve high standards and a commitment on the part of the staff to make that happen," Mr. Simon says. Portland, Mr. Huckabee says in an interview, "is a classic case study in proof that public schools can and do work and work very effectively when people refuse to make excuses. "That's the single reason that we've been so injured in education across the years," the governor says. "We have made excuses for poverty, race and geography." Not yet satisfied Mr. Huckabee suggests an "attitude adjustment" for education. "It's not easy," he says, "but rather than assume our students can't succeed, we need to assume that they can and will succeed." Central to Portland's efforts, the governor adds, are parents who are buying into the vision that the highest standards are attainable, even at a small, rural school.

"My daughter comes home and she's teaching what she's learned to anyone who will listen," says Missy Hicks, 37, of her oldest child, Molly, 7. Molly started *Direct instruction* in pre-kindergarten at Portland and was reading by the time she entered kindergarten. She continued to do so well that she was able to bypass first grade, Mrs. Hicks says. Now a second-grader, Molly has no problems keeping up.

"It's because of Mr. Smith and the teachers. They take such an active role in being sure that they learn," Mrs. Hicks says. Like many other successful principals, Mr. Smith is not yet satisfied. "I tell them the 100th percentile is our goal," he says. Several variables have made all the difference at Portland, Mr. Smith explains. Those include intensive teacher training, a strong in-house pre-kindergarten program, academic kindergarten classes and increased time on task.

Unusual challenges Other schools around Arkansas now use DI, including Wilmot Elementary some 12 miles away. Mr. Smith hopes state legislators will be impressed enough to fund DI statewide. Bobby Harper, superintendent of the Hamburg district, is watching closely as both schools make enormous gains. He hopes to be able to bring the teaching method to other schools in his district, Arkansas' third-largest geographically and a place where one-hour rides on the school bus are common.

But though DI has rolled up an impressive track record for remediation and acceleration, the approach is not the only reason schools like Portland are doing well, Mr. Harper says. "This school was small enough, has a good staff and a good instructional leader," he says. "They never quit teaching all day long. They have looked at all variables that it takes to make a school successful and they have controlled many of them." Still, the Hamburg district faces unusual challenges in educating low-income children, many of whom come from farm families and never have traveled out of Ashley County. Most families do their shopping at the local Wal-Mart; the closest mall is 60 miles away.

On a field trip last year to Mud Island in Memphis, a group of schoolboys "did not know how to sleep between sheets on the bed because they had never slept on beds with two sheets," recalls Marilyn Chambers, the district's special programs director.

The money chase Finding money to recruit and hire strong teachers and start innovative programs is also hard. A new teacher earns about \$22,000 per year; \$32,000 is at the high end, says Mr. Smith, who makes about \$50,000 as principal. Most residents earn their living working crops, but education provides a stable income even though salaries are low.

"I'm always chasing money," Mr. Smith says of his vigorous search for grants. The district receives a little more than \$452,000 in federal Title 1 money, which funds programs for low-income children. "What Title 1 money has allowed us to do is incorporate some programs that are very expensive, like *Direct instruction*," Mrs. Chambers says. In its first year at Portland and Wilmot, DI cost about \$80,000, which covered the costs of consultants as well as materials for 300 students. Was it worth the expense? "It's taken ordinary teachers and made them extraordinary teachers," Mrs. Chambers says.

Signs of success DI also brought hope to the lives of children like Salud Torres, 8, the daughter of migrant farm workers. Two years ago, Salud spoke no English. Neither did anyone in her home. Her chances of academic success in a new country looked dim. On paper, she was at risk.

Taught only in English, today Salud reads a year above grade level. She is able to master accelerated reading programs on the computer, which she demonstrates without help from a teacher. Reading is her favorite subject, Salud — hair in braids, brown eyes wide — softly tells a visitor. "I take books home and read them and bring them back to school and read them again," she explains as Mr. Smith beams.

"Isn't she great?" he asks minutes later as Salud skips down the hallway from the library to her class, knowing her skills have been recognized. He sighs, shaking his head in disbelief that his no-frills school, in a tiny farm town in southwest Arkansas, is beating the odds. "This," Mr. Smith says, "is the most exciting period of my life. I have no intention of retiring anytime soon." A Direct Challenge By Debra Viadero <http://www.edweek.org/ew/vol-18/27direct.h18> Baltimore

When an independent research group evaluated the research backing up 24 popular school reform models this year, it found two surprises. The first surprise was that only three programs could point to strong evidence that they were effective in improving student achievement. The second surprise was that Direct Instruction, a program long scorned by many educators and academics for its lock-step structure, was one of them.

Direct Instruction grew out of studies on the teaching of beginning reading that Siegfried Engelmann began at the University of Illinois in the 1960s. Thirty years later, only 150 schools across the country use on a schoolwide basis the program he developed. By comparison, Success for All, another reform model with high marks for its solid research base, is used in more than 1,100 schools.

Thousands more schools, however, use Direct Instruction's commercially produced materials--usually in remedial classrooms, special education resource rooms, or special programs for disadvantaged students. "We were sort of like the plague for regular education," says Mr. Engelmann, now 67 and a professor at the University of Oregon. "Regular education would have nothing to do with us. It wasn't until the last few years that we started to break the mold."

Part of what has made his program so disliked in many quarters is that it requires teachers to adhere strictly to scripted, carefully sequenced lessons. Critics often accuse the program's developers of peddling "teacher proof" curricula. But Mr. Engelmann's theory is that students learn more if instructional presentations are clear. Those instructions, he believes, should rule out any misinterpretations and help students generalize skills in different contexts.

And Mr. Engelmann and his colleagues have devoted years of study to pinpointing where students make mistakes and how to avoid them. Some 30 experiments alone, Mr. Engelmann estimates, have focused on technical details of the program, such as the pacing of lessons. The program also emphasizes basic academic skills. The idea is that students must master the basics before they can move on to more-complex thinking activities.

Direct Instruction's first incarnation was a reading and mathematics program for pupils in kindergarten through 3rd grade, known as DISTAR or Direct Instructional System for Teaching and Remediation. The early programs have since been expanded to reach children in prekindergarten through 6th grade. And they have grown beyond reading and math to include lessons in social studies, science, writing, reasoning, and spelling.

Dozens of studies have found over the years that in head-to-head comparisons with traditional classroom instruction or other educational interventions, the winner is often Direct Instruction or DISTAR. The largest of those evaluations was a \$59 million study that from 1968 to 1976 compared 20 different programs used in the federal government's Follow Through initiative, a massive educational effort launched as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "war on poverty."

The researchers concluded that, of all the programs studied, Direct Instruction produced the biggest gains in students' basic skills and thinking abilities---even in their self-esteem. Other, smaller studies also suggest that the program improves students' chances of graduating from high school and attending college.

That kind of track record helped earn Direct Instruction its high rating from the American Institutes for Research, the Washington-based group that reviewed data on two dozen "whole school" reform models in a study released last month. Of the 14 Direct Instruction studies that met AIR's standards for scientific rigor, seven found gains in reading, 11 in mathematics, and nine in language. ("Researchers Rate Whole-School Reform Models," Feb. 17, 1999.)

The American Federation of Teachers, after a similar review last year, chose Direct Instruction as one of six schoolwide programs that showed promise in raising achievement. And the program also made its way onto a list suggesting research-backed models that schools could adopt to qualify for a share of \$150 million in new federal grants.

Findings Questioned The sudden attention, though, doesn't mean that Direct Instruction has completely shed its controversial reputation. "What happened with Project Follow Through was that it was a big, messy study," says Lawrence J. Schweinhart, the research-division chairman for the High/Scope Educational Foundation, which developed one of the preschool models compared with Direct Instruction in that study.

Mr. Schweinhart and his colleague David P. Weikart conducted their own study comparing Direct Instruction with other preschool programs. They tracked groups of poor children who had been randomly assigned to one of three different types of preschool classrooms: a Direct Instruction program, a traditional nursery school program, or their own High/Scope model, which calls for allowing children to plan and carry out their own learning activities.

All three models produced academic gains in the preschoolers, but the Direct Instruction pupils scored the highest. But in other areas of the children's development, the findings were less promising. By age 15, 46 percent of the Direct Instruction students had been identified as having emotional problems--a significantly higher percentage than children who had been in either of the other two programs. By age 23, the former Direct Instruction preschoolers had accumulated more felony arrests.

Mr. Schweinhart says the program's authoritarian structure and lack of attention to students' social and emotional needs may help explain the results. "I don't think there is any question that Direct Instruction is a great way to improve school achievement if that were the only goal in the world," he says. "But it isn't our only goal." Mr. Engelmann disputes those findings. He notes that, with only 68 students to begin with, the

study was too small to produce reliable results. He and his colleagues have also cited other technical problems with the data.

Other critics, however, point out that many of the positive studies on Direct Instruction were conducted by researchers associated with the program--a common caveat with many education studies. But Robert Slavin, a Johns Hopkins University researcher who also favorably reviewed the data on Direct Instruction for *Show Me the Evidence: Proven and Promising Programs for America's Schools*, a book he wrote last year with Olatokunbo S. Fashola, says that some of the criticism about evaluator bias could be a red herring.

"If you have 20 studies--and I'm just making that number up--and four are independent, that's a small proportion. But if all four are positive, that's impressive," he says. The same criticism, in fact, has also dogged *Success for All*, the program that Mr. Slavin developed.

But critics of Direct Instruction also note that many of the studies that shed a favorable light on the program are more than a decade old. In today's classrooms, the same conclusions might not hold up. "One of the problems is that to have proven programs, you have to have old programs," adds Richard L. Allington, the chairman of the reading department at the State University of New York at Albany. "Most of these Direct Instruction programs have been around 25 or 26 years, which is why there's more 'research' on them." If Direct Instruction looks good, Mr. Allington and others say, it may be because there is a dearth of effectiveness data on anything else.

Rigid Structure Like most recent graduates, Matthew Carpenter never heard of Direct Instruction when he was studying to be a teacher in Elmira College in Elmira, N.Y. His professors did, however, warn him against programs that emphasize the phonics method of reading instruction as strictly as Direct Instruction does.

But as a second-year teacher, Mr. Carpenter says the program's tight structure has benefited both himself and the disadvantaged students he teaches at Arundel Elementary School in Baltimore. "I like the structure," he says. "I think it's good for this group of kids." Mr. Carpenter's 6th graders last month were working on their reasoning and writing skills. Their task: Take two sentences and make a new sentence from them that begins with the word 'no' and uses the word 'only.' "The wolves howled and ate at night," Mr. Carpenter reads. "The wolves did not eat."

Fourteen youngsters bend over their papers, writing their answers as their teacher walks around checking their work. Direct Instruction theorists believe it's important to catch errors quickly before the mistakes imprint themselves on impressionable brains. "The answer is...?" Mr. Carpenter prompts. The students shout out in unison. "No, the wolves only howled at night." Similar chanting is also audible from classrooms down the hall.

A Return to the Basics After five more such exercises, the class moves on to the next task in its language arts textbook, which is to identify the parts of speech in a series of sentences. Mr. Carpenter reads the first one: "That last statement is very misleading."

"What's the noun in the subject?" he asks, reading from his script. He snaps his fingers and the students shout: "Statement!"

"What's the verb, everyone?" Fingers snap, students shout. "Is!"

"Good job," the teacher replies. So the lessons go. Except for one hour-long period, Mr. Carpenter uses Direct Instruction all day long.

The least structured of those classes is U.S. history, when students get a chance to ask as well as answer questions and to write the kinds of longer reports and essays not included in the fast-moving writing classes. In the history class, they are asked, for example, to draw connections between the Magna Carta and protests

over the stamp tax in Colonial America, and they ponder what life in the United States would be like if President Clinton were king. And this teacher and his students say it's their favorite subject.

Arundel Elementary sits atop a hill studded with housing projects and apartment complexes; 96 percent of its students come from families poor enough to qualify for federally subsidized lunches. It is one of 18 schools in Baltimore that use Direct Instruction with support from the Baltimore Curriculum Project, a private, nonprofit group. The group stumbled upon Direct Instruction in its search for a basic-skills curriculum similar to the program used by the Calvert School, a private, Baltimore-area school that has won acclaim for its high student achievement.

Now in its third year of implementing Direct Instruction, Arundel is a relative neophyte at it. And the 410-student school's scores on Maryland's tough, criterion-referenced state exams have yet to show across-the-board increases as a result of the program. Scores in the relatively young testing program have gone up and down in several poor schools, notes Muriel Berkeley, the director of the Baltimore Curriculum Project.

But Direct Instruction is credited with engineering a much-publicized turnaround at nearby City Springs Elementary School. Once considered one of the worst schools in Baltimore, City Springs now has orderly classrooms and higher test scores. "I think the better order comes because kids are more engaged in what they are doing," Ms. Berkeley says.

Schools in Texas and Utah also credit the program with raising test scores. In what is probably Direct Instruction's biggest success story, students at one of those schools--predominantly poor Wesley Elementary School in Houston--rank in the top tier of all elementary schools in the state.

'A Backbone' But, while nearly all of the Baltimore schools using the program serve poor students, Direct Instruction can also work in middle-class schools and in high-achieving classrooms, its proponents contend. "We make a lot of assumptions in education," Ms. Berkeley says. "A child looks bright or a child knows how to read, but we don't consider that the child may have some missing skills."

Direct Instruction, she argues, can fill any gaps: "What this gives you is a vertebrae--a backbone--to make sure you haven't skipped any skills." All the students in Mr. Carpenter's class, for example, are considered advanced. To move children through their lessons quickly and efficiently, Direct Instruction calls for placing students in groups based on their abilities. But the groups are also flexible, and when the class turns to U.S. history, six students go across the hall for extra language arts lessons. To enable that kind of cross-classroom grouping, schools that sign on to the program must require all their classrooms to teach the same subjects at the same time each day.

But in math, the advanced students also work ahead, outpacing Mr. Carpenter's ability to read the lessons, something the teacher says can be frustrating. "We already know this stuff," says Troy Mouzon, a 5th grader whose exceptional performance has put him with this 6th grade group. Such occurrences, Mr. Engelmann says, are a "no-no." Because the skills taught build on one another over time, even the most agile students need to stick with the lessons, he says.

Repetition is also part of the program's game plan. Students do not really master a skill until they repeat it again and again and in different contexts, program providers say. Even with a script, Direct Instruction looks different in different classes. Some teachers, for example, moderate their delivery to accentuate key ideas. In other classes, the pace may be more staccato or more like a game.

Conducting the lessons properly, proponents say, can be tiring. The teachers must be "on" all day long and attend to individual students' progress. "It's like actors in a play," Ms. Berkeley says. "We don't ask the actor to write the play, but he interprets the play and presents the play."

Uneven Implementation Mr. Engelmann estimates that teachers need at least two years to teach the program well. "There are no dyslexic kids--only dysteachic teachers," he says with characteristic bluntness. Training

begins with a weeklong in-service session. In addition, Direct Instruction providers visit classrooms on a monthly basis to coach and observe.

But, unlike other kinds of professional developers, Direct Instruction coaches do not hang back in the classroom and take notes. They jump in when they see a potential problem--a tactic that rubs some teachers the wrong way. "It's like they undermine you in front of your students," says James Sarath, another 6th grade teacher at Arundel Elementary School. Mr. Carpenter says his students once offered to beat up a Direct Instruction trainer for "disrespecting" their teacher.

Because the lesson scripts are also sold commercially by Science Research Associates, a division of Macmillan/McGraw-Hill School Publishing Co., some educators also get the idea they need no training. And that attitude has led to uneven implementation of the program nationwide. Mr. Engelmann hopes that several studies and teacher surveys now in the works will help answer concerns about the program. But even with its newfound, higher profile, Direct Instruction still faces an uphill battle in cracking the education establishment.

When Arundel Elementary moved to adopt the program, several teachers transferred to other schools. The Denver-based Education Commission of the States, which also reviewed the program for its "Promising Practices" database, concludes that, despite an impressive research record, "Direct Instruction is not for all children under all circumstances or for all teachers or schools."

"Research or no research," adds Mr. Slavin, the developer of Success for All, "many schools would say that's just not a program that fits with their philosophy."

Who's In, Who's Out By Debra Viadero

In the world of education reform, the list has caused quite a fuss. Success for All made it, but Core Knowledge did not. The Coalition of Essential Schools is in. Foxfire is out. The roster isn't a social registry, but to some critics it has conferred membership in an exclusive club. It is a list of suggested reform models that schools can adopt to qualify for their share of nearly \$150 million in federal grants. The grant program seeks to raise performance at schools that serve large numbers of poor children through comprehensive--or "whole school"--reform.

Few federal education laws ever mention by name specific programs or curricular approaches. By law and tradition, such matters are left for local communities to decide. But the bipartisan legislation creating the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program, passed in 1997, lists 17 reform models. Reps. David R. Obey, D-Wis., and John Edward Porter, R-Ill., were trying to be helpful when they cited the models in their bill. Rather than set down vague criteria, they wanted to give concrete examples of what they meant by "successful, externally developed, comprehensive school-reform approaches" backed by rigorous research.

Since then, however, "the list," as it has come to be known, has taken on a life of its own. Researchers and program developers question why some as-yet-unproven programs are on the list while others with better track records are not. And states and districts are wondering whether they must use one of the "name brands" to qualify for the new grants.

"It's a little bit analogous to the federal government saying we want you to use good cars, such as Fords and Plymouths," said Herbert J. Walberg, a research professor of education and psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "In my view, it was a grave mistake to name them."

But supporters of the program point out that the list has stimulated some positive effects, too. Educators are having to ask tough questions--in some cases, for the first time--about the evidence justifying popular reform models. And program developers are scrambling for the proof they need to earn themselves a spot on future versions of "the list."

Who's In, Who's Out When it first surfaced, the roster of programs named in Obey-Porter, as the federal program is known, struck some researchers and program developers as a curious mix. Besides Success for All and the Coalition of Essential Schools, two of the most widely known reform models, the list also names: Accelerated Schools, ATLAS Communities, Audrey Cohen College, Community for Learning, Co-NECT, Direct Instruction, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, High Schools That Work, Modern Red Schoolhouse, the National Alliance for Restructuring Education (since renamed America's Choice), Paideia, Roots & Wings, the School Development Program, the Talent Development High School, and the Urban Learning Centers.

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Researchers Rate Whole-School Reform Models By Lynn Olson

Only three of 24 popular school reform models have strong evidence that they improve student achievement, according to a report released last week that provides the most comprehensive rating of such programs by an independent research group.

Direct Instruction, High Schools That Work, and Success for All received the best marks from "An Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform," which was released at a press conference in Washington. The 141-page guide from the Washington-based American Institutes for Research was commissioned by five leading education groups.

The consumer-oriented guide rates 24 whole-school reform models according to whether they improve achievement in such measurable ways as higher test scores and attendance rates. It also evaluates the assistance provided by the developers to schools that adopt their strategies, and compares the first-year costs of such programs.

"We wanted to have a document that really, critically evaluated the evidence base underpinning these programs," said Marcella R. Dianda, a senior program associate at the National Education Association, which helped underwrite the \$90,000 study. "We felt that our members really wanted that. They wanted us to get to the bottom line."

The study comes as districts around the country seek proven, reliable solutions to the problem of low-performing schools. But as they spend greater amounts of tax dollars on the various reform models, questions remain about how well the programs work. Experts say that research such as the AIR report is needed to fill the gaps.

About 8,300 schools nationwide were using one of the 24 designs rated in the study as of Oct. 30, the report says. Congress gave a major impetus to such "whole school" reforms in 1997, when it authorized nearly \$150 million in federal grants for low-performing schools to adopt "research-based, schoolwide" efforts. ("Who's In, Who's Out," Jan. 20, 1999.) Yet, according to the report, "most of the prose describing these approaches remains uncomfortably silent about their effectiveness." That leaves schools in the tough position of deciding which model to choose with little evidence to go on.

"Before this guide came along, about the only way educators could judge the worth of some of these programs was by the quality of the developers' advertising and the firmness of their handshakes," said Paul D. Houston, the executive director of the American Association of School Administrators. "Now, superintendents, principals, and classroom teachers can sit down together and make reasonable decisions about which are best for their district's needs."

The study was sponsored by the NEA, the AASA, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Ratings Questioned While the report is a big step forward in helping schools sort out the value of such programs, it also underscores how hard it is to judge effectiveness in education. Last week, several of the

organizations behind reform models evaluated in the report contested its ratings. In particular, developers questioned how AIR decided which studies to include as evidence of a program's effectiveness. Several developers maintained that they have more evidence of positive results than AIR gave them credit for.

Henry M. Levin, a Stanford University economist and scholar whose Accelerated Schools program received only a "marginal" rating, described the study as "fairly amateurish." "Basically, they discounted anything, as far as I can tell, that comes in and changes test scores over time for a particular school," Mr. Levin said. "And anything that said it had a comparison group was given a gold standard."

The guide reviews all 17 whole-school models that were originally identified in the 1997 federal legislation that created the \$150 million Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. It also rates seven other prominent or widely used programs that schools could potentially adopt when seeking Obey-Porter grants, as the federal program is commonly known. The evaluators used a two-step process to rate whether the programs had evidence that they raised student achievement.

First, AIR gathered almost any document about a program that reported student outcomes, including articles in scholarly journals, unpublished case studies and reports, and changes in raw test scores reported by the developers. "We tried to cast a really wide net in collecting the research," said Rebecca Herman, the project director.

More than 130 studies were then reviewed and rated for their methodological rigor in 10 categories, based on such criteria as the quality and objectivity of the measurement instruments used, the period of time over which the data were collected, the use of comparison or control groups, and the number of students and schools included. Each study was assigned a final methodology rating by averaging across the 10 categories.

Only studies that met AIR's criteria for rigor were used to rate whether a program was effective in raising student achievement. For example, a number of developers submitted changes in state or local test scores as evidence that their programs were working. But "we didn't really consider test scores alone, without some sort of context," Ms. Herman said, "because there are a lot of things that can explain changes in test scores."

Leaping to Conclusions? The study gave a "strong" rating to the programs with the most conclusive research backing, notably four or more studies that used rigorous methodology and found improved achievement. In at least three studies, the gains had to be statistically significant. A "promising" rating went to models with three or more rigorous studies that showed some evidence of success.

Reform models that earned a "marginal" rating had fewer rigorous studies with positive findings, or a higher proportion of studies showing negative or no effects. A "mixed or weak" label was assigned to programs with study findings that were ambiguous or negative. And AIR gave a "no research" rating to programs for which there were no methodologically rigorous studies. Eight of the programs received the "no research" rating. Ms. Herman said that was not surprising, given the newness of many of the models.

"It takes a good three years to implement a reform model across a school, and another two years to come up with a decent study," she said. "What we're looking at is the first wave of research, and we're hoping for an ocean to follow it." Janith Jordan, the vice president of Audrey Cohen College in New York City, whose design received a "no research" rating, said that "because of the fact that we are a younger design team, to leap to a conclusion about our potential or our effectiveness really is premature."

More Research Needed More than anything, experts said last week, the study underscores the need for strong, third-party evaluations of schoolwide reform models. Several other efforts are now completed or in the works. "The fact is that the capacity to do this kind of research is very limited in this country," said Marc S. Tucker, a founder of America's Choice, one of the 24 models reviewed. "I believe that it's very important for the federal government to put a fair amount of money on the table to make this kind of research possible."

Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, the president of the National Academy of Education, a group of education researchers and scholars, agreed. "It's amazing how little evaluation there is," she said. "Since the early 20th century, the people who have peddled the educational reform strategies that we all hear about tend to be successful because they're the best entrepreneurs. It doesn't necessarily have to do with any research credibility."

AIR rated the support that developers provide to schools based on the variety of help available; the frequency of on-site technical assistance; the number of years the support is given; and the tools schools receive to help monitor their own implementation.

To prepare the tables and a profile for each program, AIR interviewed the developers, gathered and reviewed all available studies, and collected additional information from schools that used the approach. © 1999 Editorial Projects in Education Vol. 18, number 23, page 1, 14-15 18:19:37

Last week I unknowingly walked into the most delightful K-3 schools (Algonquin School, Park Forest, Illinois) that I have seen in many years. When I asked the principal, Ms. Jones, if I could publicize this little gem she has nurtured, she nodded in the affirmative. And so I find myself wanting to tell as many folks as I can about a small school that appears to have taken a course to excellence in its service to a large percentage of minority students in a lower income area.

Initially, I was contacted by the special education director to provide assistance to a special education teacher at Algonquin School who was having difficulty with her class. My first indication that I was about to see something very special came as I sat in the principal's office waiting for her to finish the early morning announcements. Those of you who have been on the loop for awhile have probably read some of my more critical commentary about some of the phony, very lengthy self-esteem building announcements that I have had to endure over the years. In contrast, this principal in three or four short minutes managed to fit in the pledge and a glowing commendation about how the school now held the award for having the highest percentage of student attendance and on-time arrivals. I knew that when this principal vivaciously exhorted the students not to let another close-runner-up for the award win it back next month, that this school would probably keep the award for the rest of the school year. Before the classes formally started, all of the students and teachers repeated a wonderfully invigorating saying about working their hardest and learning a lot. The announcements ended with the principal telling the students an inspirational big vocabulary word for the day, which the principal later posted on the wall in the main corridor along with the definition. I made a mental note that these were the best announcements that I had ever heard in any school.

For the next hour, I observed in the designated classroom, analyzing what this special education teacher needed to do differently. Few schools ever use my skills in this direct manner and I was impressed at the school district's course of action with a teacher who was having difficulty. Later that morning when I walked into the teachers' lounge to use the washroom, my eyes bugged out as I heard teachers animatedly talking about how most of the kindergartners were reading since it was only December. This probably sounds hokey, but the enthusiasm and joy in that lounge reminded me of my grandfather's farm in the Spring when the lambs were born. I had to rush back to the classroom, but I was aching to know what the staff were using to teach reading. A Whole Language school just could never get these results.

Soon the class I was observing walked to music class and as I accompanied them, I saw two small groups of readers at opposite ends of the hallway working with adults on the Direct Instruction Reading Mastery curriculum. After the music class, when the principal stopped me to find out how the morning was going, I asked her how the school had come to use the DI program with their at-risk readers rather than Reading Recovery. She looked at me and said, "But the whole school started to use the DI phonics program last year and now the kindergartners are reading before the Christmas break." When I asked her how the staff learned to teach such a difficult curriculum, she told me the superintendent had started all six schools using it and that the teachers had undergone a great deal of training in order to teach phonics effectively. The training was still ongoing and once a month a team of people observed all of the teachers and gave them "grow and glows," detailing what they should improve and what they were doing that was effective. In addition to the DI reading, the schools also used DI language and Saxon math.

Incredulous at the direction this school had taken, I timidly asked, "So you teach these subjects to the whole classroom group?" "Oh no," she replied. "We form as many groups as we can, depending upon where the child is with the material." Since it was just last year in a neighboring suburb that I came across a principal who said that school board policy did not allow for any type of grouping, even to let the children read different books," I blinked my eyes in wonderment. Ms. Jones continued by proudly telling me about how all the teachers taught the same subject at the same time so that they could group for children who needed to go to a different grade. Another teacher joined the conversation and proudly talked about a first grader who was now reading in Reading Mastery 3. The staff had made all sorts of changes so that this child could go to reading class with the older students. I revelled in their pride and assistance to this high achiever. The principal later explained that she helps the teachers give the timed assessments to their students in order to make sure that every student is progressing. "It sure can get boring, taking those timings, but the teachers need the help. What else can I do?" The principal's halo started glowing at that moment, and I knew that she would meet all of Elaine McEwan's criteria for an effective principal.

By now it was clear to me that a child would receive a better K-3 education in this relatively poor school district than in my flashy west suburb. The staff in this school were implementing the Joplin grouping, a solid skills approach, and the challenges that we all want to see in education at this early level. By the time I went to lunch with the students, I wasn't surprised to see the most tranquil, civilized student lunchroom that I have seen these past ten years (with the exception of one middle-school west suburban lunch room where the assistant principal worked for two years to establish a harmonious environment). Typically, I dread spending 20 minutes in any student lunch room because of the excessively loud volume as students shout in an echoing gym. In one of the worst situations eight years ago, I had been in another nearby south suburb and found myself in the middle of a food fight, with plates and food flying fast and hard. In contrast, a gym teacher ran the lunch room in this school and quiet, conversational voices were expected. More amazingly no students who were waiting in line for food pushed or shoved. The staff expected excellence from these students and they were getting it in return.

City schools reformer to lead Bush initiative Doherty: Director of curriculum project will leave to oversee national push to teach reading by third grade. By Howard Libit Sun Staff Originally published January 6, 2002 The head of a Baltimore nonprofit group that brought phonics-based reading instruction to some city schools in the 1990s has been tapped to head President Bush's \$975 million reading initiative.

Christopher J. Doherty, executive director of the Baltimore Curriculum Project, is set to begin tomorrow as director of the president's Reading First initiative, overseeing the distribution of grants to states and school districts that use approved reading-instruction programs.

"The bill stresses that the federal government must focus in early reading on those programs that have been scientifically proven to be effective," Doherty said yesterday. "My job will be to help identify those districts and states that show they are going to implement K-3 reading programs based on that scientific research."

Bush's No Child Left Behind Act - to be signed into law Tuesday - represents the most sweeping federal education legislation since 1965 and includes a tripling of federal spending on reading programs.

The president pledges to provide almost \$5 billion over five years, modeling the program on reading reforms he oversaw in his home state of Texas. The measure targets beginning reading, with the goal that all children read proficiently by third grade. The bill sets aside \$900 million for early elementary programs and another \$75 million for pre-kindergarten literacy programs annually.

"This is a huge investment in reading, and it's very much representative of the administration's approach to reform and accountability by requiring schools to use reading programs that have been proven to work," said Lindsey Kozberg, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of Education.

Kozberg confirmed yesterday that Doherty will become special assistant to Susan B. Neuman, assistant secretary of elementary and secondary education, and will focus on reading issues.

In Baltimore, educators and others who worked with Doherty mourned his departure from the city but said the federal government is getting someone knowledgeable and experienced in helping schools succeed.

"He's got a good mind for education and brings a different perspective to it," said David Clapp, principal of Barclay Elementary/Middle School. "It's a loss for Barclay and the Baltimore Curriculum Project and the city schools, but it's good to know that someone so talented is going to be at the highest levels of the federal government."

Clapp praised Doherty's "hands-on" efforts at the school, which included running an after-school program for a small group of pupils. "He didn't just want to sit on the outside and give advice. He always had to be involved," Clapp said.

Doherty, 35, has been with the Baltimore Curriculum Project since 1999, immersing himself in the group's activities in city elementary schools and in its development of lesson plans for schools nationwide.

In Baltimore, the group is best known for helping bring the Direct Instruction and Core Knowledge programs to a handful of city elementary schools.

Direct Instruction is a scripted, basic skills program that is focused on phonics - drilling on the relationship between letters and sounds, which is crucial to reading.

The reading program has expanded to become a separate "area" in the city school system, run by its own executive officer, and the project serves as an adviser to those schools. Doherty's wife, Laura, works part-time as a Direct Instruction trainer at two city elementaries.

On last spring's national standardized exams, the 17 Baltimore elementary schools using Direct Instruction generally outperformed their city counterparts.

Core Knowledge is the fact-filled sequence of learning for children from kindergarten through eighth grade, developed by University of Virginia professor E.D. Hirsch. The curriculum project writes lesson plans based on Hirsch's curriculum, selling them to about 700 schools nationwide.

"Chris has done a very good job working with our program," Hirsch said yesterday. "He's bright, he's been a good administrator ... and he seems to me to be a very good choice."

The curriculum project also runs two city schools, Barclay and City Springs Elementary, through Baltimore's New Schools Initiative - a quasi-charter school program that gives private groups the flexibility to choose staff, curriculum and philosophy.

The project has focused on finding successful programs and helping teachers put them into Baltimore schools - the charge given by its founder and principal source of funding, the Abell Foundation.

"They've been doing what we intended, which is trying to identify research-based education programs and implement them," said Robert C. Embry Jr., the foundation's president. "The president's program, at least in reading, is very results-oriented, and Chris' training and background make him well-suited for the position."

Doherty, who grew up in the Boston suburb of Belmont, graduated from Stanford University with an international relations degree and entered the U.S. State Department's Foreign Service.

After serving tours in Warsaw, Vienna and Washington, Doherty briefly worked in management consulting before beginning work with the Abell Foundation in 1996. Doherty and his wife oversaw the first year of the foundation's Baraka School - an alternative school in Kenya for Baltimore middle school boys.

Doherty then earned an M.B.A. degree from Northwestern University - winning distinction as an Austin Scholar, among the top 4 percent of his class - before joining the curriculum project.

Although his new position is in Washington, Doherty said he expects to continue living in Baltimore's Ten Hills neighborhood with his wife and their two children, Riley, 2, and William, 1.

Maryland educators said yesterday that Doherty's selection represents confirmation that the state and many local school systems have been on the right track in their efforts to reform reading instruction. Maryland has relied heavily on the work of G. Reid Lyon, director of reading research at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and Bush's top reading adviser.

"It's terrific we have a Marylander who is very familiar with Maryland's reform efforts," said state schools Superintendent Nancy S. Grasmick. "The new legislation focuses on programs that have sound research ... and the curriculum project has been very good at doing that for a long time. That's been a priority for us as a state, too."

Doherty said he believes schools in Baltimore and some parts of Maryland will be well-positioned to qualify for the millions of dollars in new federal reading grants that he will help oversee.

"When you take a look at what's been happening in Baltimore City and see the programs the school are using - Direct Instruction, Success For All, Open Court - they have verifiable results," Doherty said. "And Maryland, with its serious focus on pre-kindergarten programs, those things bode very well for a match with the Reading First goals." *Copyright © 2002, [The Baltimore Sun](#)*

New reading program improves test scores in Fort Worth

Texas Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 5, 2000 By Michelle Melendez Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — Nearly every school day, Fort Worth middle school students drop what they're doing for a newly mandated reading class.

School officials are trying to teach some of them what they failed to teach them in elementary school: how to sound out words they don't know and to read fluently. Students who already have the basic reading skills are given advanced material.

The new approach, called Corrective Reading, was first tried in 1998-99 in Fort Worth at J.P. Elder Middle School. Elder's reading TAAS test scores improved from 65 percent passing in 1998 to 78 percent passing in 1999.

Now, every middle school and some high schools and elementary schools are using the program for older students who are below average. The program is part of the district's overall reading initiative that begins in pre-kindergarten.

"It's a first-aid station, if you will, to mend the missing section," said Judith Scott, the district's Title I reading and language arts coordinator.

Schools test students for placement in one of four levels. The levels are phonics, speed and fluency, comprehension and reasoning and writing. Students are divided by ability and assigned to a classroom.

The classes meet during the same period, four days a week.

Every middle school teacher has been trained to use the program. For students who need remedial help, the lessons are tightly scripted. A teacher tells students to repeat after her as she sounds out a word. In other lessons, children take turns reading passages aloud. Science teachers, coaches, even librarians lead the instruction.

"It's not the most creative kind of thing," Elder Principal Mary Jara Wright said. "But it seems to work. It has improved reading ability, TAAS scores and, unexpectedly, also improved math scores."

At Elder, a group of mentally challenged children is working at the kindergarten and first- grade level. Other students are reading at the fourth- and fifth- grade levels.

In the comprehension class, students read passages with science and social studies information. Students in Elder's special high-academic program are reading literature and diagramming sentences.

Barbara Black, a math specialist at Elder, said some parents with children in high- academic programs complained at first. They didn't like the idea of their children using "Corrective Reading" because it carried the stigma of a remedial program.

Elder officials explained the purpose of the program for high-achieving students and changed its name to STAR, meaning Students and Teachers Achieving Recognition.

As they progress, students earn points that can be redeemed for prizes, such as pencils and ice cream.

"It's fun and neat how they give you stuff when you get to a certain level," sixth-grader Noah Rustin said. "It's one of my better classes. I feel like my reading has gotten better."

Seventh-grader Mark Luna said the program is "OK."

"Now I'm starting to get higher grades," he said.

Rubidel Johnson, president of the Fort Worth Education Association, said teachers love the phonics instruction. But they resent the notion that Corrective Reading is the most important part of the day.

Michelle Melendez, (817) 390-7541

Note the mention about City Springs. Also, three of the five schools mentioned with the biggest gains were DI schools.

City MSPAP scores up for fifth straight year Gain of 2 points - 2nd-biggest among state school systems By Erika Niedowski Sun Staff Originally published January 29, 2002

The Baltimore school system continued its slow but steady progress on state tests last year, posting its fifth straight increase and outgaining every other jurisdiction except one in Maryland.

The percentage of city pupils meeting the standard on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program exams rose 2 points, to 22.5.

In every other school system in the metropolitan area, scores dropped, and the statewide average fell 1.6. Only Worcester County's gain was larger than Baltimore's.

At two city elementaries, Pimlico and Dr. Rayner Browne, a significant percentage of tests were thrown out because teachers improperly coached students.

Five teachers at Pimlico, the city's top scorer last year, have been given 20-day suspensions without pay, and the principal and two administrators have received letters of reprimand, said Carmen V. Russo, the schools' chief executive officer. Russo said one class at Dr. Rayner Browne was involved in the cheating, but she offered no details.

The city system, which began a comprehensive reform effort in conjunction with the state in 1997, still ranks last in pupil achievement in Maryland. But Russo said Baltimore pupils are showing consistent improvement, proof that extra state funding has been wisely spent.

"The good news is that the gap is closing," she said. "Are we where we want to be? Not yet."

Two of the three low-performing elementaries taken over in 2000 by the state and run by for-profit Edison Schools lost ground in their first round of MSPAP scores since the takeover. At one, Furman L. Templeton, no third-grader scored satisfactory in reading or math for the second straight year.

The city's trend upward has been systemwide. Third- and fifth-graders at 109 of the city's 120 elementary schools have improved on the state tests since the 1996-1997 school year. Eighth-graders at 37 of 44 middle schools improved over the same period.

On the latest exams, third-grade reading scores declined by 1.1 points and third-grade math scores were up 6.1 points. Fifth-grade reading and math scores were up 1.9 points and 2.5 points, respectively. Eighth-grade reading scores were up 1.1 points and math scores were down 0.5.

Roguel Heights Elementary-Middle School had the top-scoring eighth-graders in math. Almost 63 percent passed, compared with 5.5 percent four years before.

Principal Ivy M. Hill said the intensive teacher training provided by Achievement First, a reform model widely used in the city, has helped raise scores across the board.

Tony D. Barnes, principal of Hamilton Elementary-Middle School, said another factor is smaller class size. His school, with some of the city's top-scoring third- and eighth-graders, surpassed the state average for the first time.

"We are very happy in the city," he said. "We are dealing with the most difficult students. We believe all children can learn, but children need certain needs taken care of before they can learn. It is good to see Baltimore City shine."

Elementaries with the largest gains were Cecil, City Springs, Montebello, Charles Carroll Barrister and Federal Hill.

The composite score at City Springs, run by the Baltimore Curriculum Project using the scripted teaching program Direct Instruction, rose 23.5 points, to 42.4, which got it removed from the state's list of failing schools. Only one other city school, Pimlico Elementary, has ever been taken off that list.

At Pimlico, dozens of third- and fifth-grade tests were invalidated because of "teacher interference" that was discovered when some test answers were found to be similar, the state reported. The overall score at Pimlico, which had a new principal, fell from 69.3 to 25.3.

The sharp drop resulted in part from 57 tests with scores of zero. Russo said that even without the invalid tests, there would have been "slippage" at the school.

A little more than a third of fifth-grade results from Dr. Rayner Browne were invalidated, also because of improper teacher assistance, the state said. The overall score there rose 11 points, to 26.1.

Pimlico's former principal, Sarah Horsey, left the city system in 2000 to head Montebello Elementary, the only Edison school to improve on the most recent exams. Montebello's gain was 22.5 points. At the other two Edison schools, the percentage of children meeting the state standard fell, from 4.4 to 2.3 - at Furman L. Templeton and from 12.9 to 9.2 at Gilmore.

Russo said the system's overall gains would not have been possible without extra funding from the state.

Sun staff writer Liz Bowie contributed to this article.

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Giant leap in learning School: Teachers at City Springs Elementary attribute pupils' success to hard work, smaller classes and a new instruction method. -----

----- By Erika Niedowski Sun Staff Originally published January 31, 2002

The sounds of "Pomp and Circumstance" and the rap song "#1" filled the auditorium at Baltimore's City Springs Elementary School yesterday as pupils and teachers celebrated the end of an ugly notoriety. After posting remarkable gains on Maryland's latest student achievement tests, the East Baltimore school has been removed from the state's list of failures, and is no longer in danger of being taken over.

Few city schools have accomplished a greater turnaround. In the 1996-97 school year, only 6.5 percent of children at City Springs performed satisfactorily on the Maryland Student Performance Assessment Program exams.

Now, after a 23.5-point gain announced Monday, the percentage of children meeting the standard is 42.4 - just below the state average. The city average, while up for the fifth straight year, is 22.5.

Pride was on display yesterday, the first day pupils were back in class since statewide MSPAP results were released.

"You, boys and girls, proved to everyone that you know how to read, that you know how to write and that you know how to do math," Principal Bernice E. Whelchel said during the morning assembly.

City Springs got here the way education reformers like best: slowly but surely. Those who work there attribute its success to a combination of hard work, a highly scripted and sometimes controversial teaching method known as Direct Instruction, and a small school.

City Springs' latest increase was driven in large part by its fifth-grade scores, which rose sharply in all six content areas. In reading, the percentage of children meeting the standard jumped from 10.9 to 50. In math, it leaped from 16.4 to 75.9.

Third-graders improved, too, increasing their reading score from 9.3 to 17.9 and their math score from 5.7 to 38.5.

Success at City Springs hasn't been limited to the MSPAP. On last year's national Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, first-graders had one of the highest reading scores in Baltimore, with 82 percent performing at or above the national average.

Muriel Berkeley, president of the nonprofit Baltimore Curriculum Project, which runs City Springs as part of the city system's New Schools Initiative, said that the school probably benefited from its smaller size.

The school's population fell to between 270 and 300 children last year in part because a nearby housing project was torn down. Only 38 third-graders and 29 fifth-graders took the May exams. (The year before, 47 third-graders and 50 fifth-graders took the exams.)

But she said size alone doesn't explain the success.

"There are plenty of small schools - smaller than us - that didn't score as well," Berkeley said. "I think the scores went up because of hard work and good instruction and kids learning."

City Springs was more aggressive last year in moving children in the upper grades through lessons, even skipping some, meaning that they reached higher levels.

"We felt that our kids were strong because of the proper implementation of Direct Instruction, and because of that, we became more aggressive - I'm going to say 'greedy,'" said Whelchel, 54.

A former special education teacher, reading specialist and assistant principal who has worked in Baltimore schools for 31 years, Whelchel doesn't believe City Springs would have progressed so much without Direct Instruction, which she called the most "effective" and "efficient" method of learning.

DI is quick-paced and regimented, with teachers working from a script and prompting dozens of responses from children in a single hour. Some say DI takes the creativity out of the classroom.

"It bothers me that the critics say, 'Oh, Direct Instruction, so robotic,' " said Whelchel. "It's what you make it."

Whether a curriculum is engaging to pupils and helps them learn depends on how teachers teach it, she said.

"Any curriculum can be boring to a kid," she said. "If you give the kid motivation - that they are achieving - you've got them."

Sixteen other Baltimore schools use DI, though none for as long as City Springs. Of those, 11 exceeded the citywide gain of 2 points on last year's MSPAP. Charles Carroll Barrister increased its composite score by 22.2 points, while Federal Hill went up 17.4.

Scores at two DI schools dropped slightly, including at Dickey Hill Elementary-Middle, which was added to the state's list of failing schools this week.

At City Springs yesterday, fourth- and fifth-graders in Phyllis King's U.S. history class read aloud from a seventh-grade textbook.

Whelchel took over for a few minutes and asked how the children felt about their class.

"I feel good about being in U.S. history because you learn a lot of important things," Brittany McCready, 10, said.

"I'm very proud," said Renee Maultsby, whose son Kenneth Flomo, 11 today, is also in King's class. "Miss Whelchel is Mom No. 2. The majority of the students know what she stands for and what she will accept and what she will not accept, and I really thank her for hanging in there with us."

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Jimmy Kilpatrick, Editor

