

Direct Instruction & Special Education Fact Sheet

The Baltimore Curriculum Project has helped implement Direct Instruction in Baltimore City public schools since 1996 with remarkable success. Direct Instruction is effective with a variety of populations including special education students.

Direct Instruction groups students by skill level instead of age. As a result, many students who might have been placed in special education classes can remain and excel in mainstream classes. ⁱ

Special education students benefit from Direct Instruction's focus on learning to mastery, active student engagement, choral response, continuous assessment, and individual attention.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 encourages the use of instructional methods that are grounded in scientifically based research. ⁱⁱ Direct Instruction meets the criteria for a scientifically-based program. With over 30 years of supportive research, Direct Instruction has been consistently rated as one of the most highly-effective research-based instructional methods.

“The kids are happy. The parents are excited. There’s been so much success.”

- Barbara Tomlinson, Director of special education, speaks about the use of DI in the Deer Lakes, PA School District. ¹

RESEARCH

- **A 2001 study by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute concluded that** “the research base for Direct Instruction is unusually solid,” and that in the schools visited, “teachers and principals report that Direct Instruction has produced excellent results — for regular-education students as well as special-education students.” ⁱⁱⁱ

The report also concludes that widespread implementation of Direct Instruction in Wisconsin would reduce the need for remedial reading programs and could save the State as much as \$107 million annually. ^{iv}

“We think Direct Instruction is phenomenal for all kids. About 25% of our children are classified as special education students, and we know the program has made a tremendous difference for them.” ²

- Principal Maureen Berg speaks about the use of DI at Louisa May Alcott Elementary School in Cleveland, OH.

- **A 2005 study of Direct Instruction reading programs for urban middle schools students** confirms “the effectiveness of highly structured, explicit, teacher-directed instruction for struggling readers.” ^v
- **A 2003 BCPSS report on Baltimore City’s Direct Instruction program** states that the “principals and Direct Instruction coordinator spoke very highly of the program’s impact on reading, especially for very young children. They also pointed out that, ‘repetition is especially good for special education students.’” ^{vi}

- **A 2001 report by Westat on the Baltimore City-State partnership** found that “principals of alternative, Direct Instruction, and Achievement First schools were far more positive about the supports for including students with special needs in their classes than were principals of regular schools.”
- **“DI has a long history of effective results** for at-risk students and students with disabilities, especially as an intervention for older struggling readers (Carnine et al., 2004).”^{vii}
- **A 1997 analysis of intervention programs for special education students identified Direct Instruction** as one of only seven programs showing strong evidence of effectiveness.^{viii}
- **A 1996 review of 34 research studies comparing Direct Instruction interventions** with other instructional programs showed large gains for both special education and regular education students.^{ix}
- **A 1988 meta-analysis of 25 studies that examined the effectiveness of instructional programs for special education students** found that 53 percent of the outcomes significantly favored Direct Instruction.^x
- **“Kame’enui and Carnine (1998) pointed out that students at risk for reading failure ... benefit from intensive, well-sequenced, and teacher-directed instruction.”**^{xi}
- **Positive effects of Direct Instruction** “with at-risk populations have been noted by the American Federation of Teachers (1999), American Institutes of Research (Herman et al., 1999), and the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2002).”^{xii}
- **“DI offers sufficient validation** as noted by Fuchs (1996) to warrant its use with special education populations.”^{xiii}
- **“Meyer (1984) contends** that students who spend two years in Direct Instruction classrooms are less likely to drop out or be assigned to special education classrooms.”^{xiv}
- **A 2005 study by the American Institutes for Research’s Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center found strong evidence to support Direct Instruction’s effectiveness.** Of the 22 elementary school comprehensive school reform models reviewed, Direct Instruction was one of only two models that received *Moderately Strong* ratings for *Evidence of Positive Overall Effects* and *Evidence of Positive Effects for Reading*. (No models received *Strong* ratings.)^{xv}

“I’ve been teaching since 1974, and ... I watched these kids experience success in reading for the very first time.”³

- Best-practice classroom teacher Margie Black comments on special education students using the DI Corrective Reading program in the Wake County Public School System, North Carolina

CASE STUDIES

- **Cumberland Middle School in Virginia implemented Direct Instruction’s Corrective Reading Program in 2001.** After one year of implementation the number of special students who passed the State’s Standard of Learning assessment increased from 20 percent to 50 percent. ^{xvi}
- **Pioneer Valley High School in Santa Maria, CA** implemented Direct Instruction in August 2001. After only six months, special education students in Grades 9 and 10 achieved one year and four months of reading growth. ^{xvii}
- **In 2001 the Wake County Public School System of Raleigh, North Carolina** implemented the Corrective Reading Program for elementary and middle school special education students in self-contained classrooms. Success was immediate and led to the expansion of the program to all self contained and resource classrooms, serving about 3,725 students, and six middle schools. ^{xviii}
- **The Fort Worth Independent School District in Texas** implemented Reading Mastery in 1997. Since its introduction “administrators have noted fewer disciplinary problems and fewer referrals to special education programs.” ^{xix}
- **Portland Elementary School in Arkansas** implemented Direct Instruction’s Reading Mastery program in 1995. “Before Reading Mastery, 18 percent of students were assigned to special education classes. After the implementation of Reading Mastery, that number was trimmed to 5 percent.” ^{xx}

Quote References

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3. McGraw-Hill Education. (2003). Results with Corrective Reading, 15. <http://www.mheducation.com/programs/files/Corrective_Reading.pdf>

This fact sheet was prepared by The Baltimore Curriculum Project, 711 W. 40th Street, Suite 301, Baltimore, MD 21211
410-235-0015 | www.baltimorecp.org | bcpinfo@baltimorecp.org

The Baltimore Curriculum Project exists to improve educational opportunities for all Baltimore City Public School students through direct operation of charter schools and advocacy of policies that provide equitable opportunities for all city schools and students.

We believe that all students can learn when their teachers have effective tools and the training to use these tools; that all students deserve access to teachers with these tools and training; and that effective teaching tools are developed and improved through scientific research.

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