

# Madison Schools Performance Series

## Paper # 1

### Reading Instruction

#### ***Why did Madison Schools Superintendent Rainwater reject 2 million federal dollars for reading instruction despite the District's tremendous budget constraints?***

*Reading Recovery*, the Superintendent's preferred reading instruction program, is not among the 22 recommended programs<sup>1</sup>, because its success rate is low.

- ✓ Does *Reading Recovery* work for Madison students?

Not very well. The District's own analysis concludes that nearly half of students fail to reach the reading success threshold. The gains for the entire *Reading Recovery* were statistically insignificant, even after controlling for poverty and other intervening measures.<sup>2</sup>

- ✓ Does *Reading Recovery* cost less so we don't need federal dollars?

No, it's very expensive. Its method of one teacher to one student costs \$8,000 per student, excluding materials and teacher training, based on 2001 teacher salaries.

- ✓ Are there any proven programs that work with Madison students?

Yes, *Reading Mastery/Direct Instruction*, improved reading scores at Lapham Elementary. Between 2002 and 2004, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading scores improved nearly 20%. By 2004 almost 100% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders were reading at the proficient or advanced levels. At-risk students especially made gains with this instruction method. However, due to pressure from the Superintendent, *Reading Mastery/Direct Instruction* is now discouraged at Lapham. In total, three of Madison's 30 elementary schools use *Reading Mastery/Direct Instruction* with some students.

- ✓ Does *Reading Mastery/Direct Instruction* cost more?

No, because students learn in groups just like they do in regular classrooms. Except for teacher training and materials, there are few extra costs associated with *Reading Mastery*.

- ✓ Does *Reading Mastery/Direct Instruction* qualify for federal funds?

Yes, *Reading Mastery/Direct Instruction*, is a proven program used in many schools throughout the country with students of all abilities. When students master one reading level, they move to new material which keeps both at-risk and talented students engaged in learning.

- ✓ Are Madison's reading scores competitive?

Madison students score better than those in many districts. However, in 2003, Milwaukee school students outperformed Madison students on the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading test, despite the fact that Milwaukee public schools having double the number of low-income and minority students<sup>3</sup>.

***Madison schools could have \$2 million more for reading instruction and improved reading scores with *Reading Mastery/Direct Instruction* or other reading programs that work.***

## Resources

Reading Mastery/Direct Instruction Success in Milwaukee schools, view video of a presentation by former principals Delores and Norman Michelow and their success with Reading Mastery in central city Milwaukee public schools, <http://www.schoolinfosystem.org/archives/001003.php>.

Reading Recovery Evaluation, by Tim Potter, Planning Research & Evaluation, Madison Metropolitan School District, August, 2004.

Myths About Direct Instruction and Research that Refutes those Myths, by Sara Tarver, see: <http://www.schoolinfosystem.org/pdf/112004/ditarver.html>

Research on Direct Instruction: 25 years beyond DISTAR, by G.L. Adams, G. L & S. Engelmann (1996). Seattle, WA: Educational Achievement Systems. ISBN: 0-675-21014-3 (related reference: [http://www.nifdi.org/pdfs/Rsearch\\_Bse.pdf](http://www.nifdi.org/pdfs/Rsearch_Bse.pdf))

Direct Instruction and the teaching of early reading: Wisconsin's teacher-led insurgency. M.C. Schug, S.G. Tarver & R. D. Western, R. D. (2001). Thiensville, WI: Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc., <http://www.wpri.org/Reports/Volume14/Vol14no2.pdf>.

Direct Instruction's effectiveness (very effective) and costs analysis on the American Association of School Administrators web site, see: <http://www.aasa.org/reform/Approach/direct.htm>.

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<sup>1</sup> Each state's education department develops a list of recommended programs. Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction's list has 22 programs, including *Reading Mastery* also known as Direct Instruction, see: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlsea/title1/doc/listresources.doc>.

<sup>2</sup>*Reading Program Deemed a Failure*, Isthmus, see: <http://www.thedailypage.com/features/docfeed/docs/document.php?intdocid=101> and *Reading Plan's Value Questioned*, Wisconsin State Journal, November 5, 2004, see: <http://www.madison.com/archives/read.php?ref=wsj:2004:11:05:392442:LOCAL/WISCONSIN>.

<sup>3</sup>*Comparative Performance Results, Academic Year 02-03*, Active Citizens for Education ([http://www.schoolinfosystem.org/pdf/092004/comp\\_performance\\_ace.pdf](http://www.schoolinfosystem.org/pdf/092004/comp_performance_ace.pdf)). Source data: School Facts 03, Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance.

The School Performance Series is published by concerned citizens working together to improve Madison schools, see [www.schoolinfosystem.org](http://www.schoolinfosystem.org) for more information or on this paper contact: Linda Hall at [lhall@merr.com](mailto:lhall@merr.com).  
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