



CASE STUDY

Arizona's Cartwright School District Prepares Students for Upper Grades Using Direct Instruction Programs

ABOUT THE DISTRICT

Name

Cartwright School District

Location

Maryvale, Arizona

Grades

K-8



Overview

Cartwright School District serves the Maryvale, Arizona community and has a long history of providing educational excellence for students in grades K-8. Its highly qualified team of educators serves more than 19,000 students in a total of 20 schools, including 12 K-5 elementary schools, four K-8 schools, and four grade 6-8 middle schools.

The Cartwright School District strives to advance college and career readiness for all its students by increasing student achievement, providing exceptional service, and creating opportunities for innovation. This is especially challenging given that 90 percent of the students are on free/reduced lunch and 40 percent are English Language Learners.

Implementation

A top district administrator at Cartwright, Shelby Jasmer, EdD, began evaluating literacy and math intervention programs in 2012. Jasmer, a 25-year education veteran, serves as Director of Response to Intervention (RTI) and Accountability. Her interest and expertise in educational assessment led her to investigate research-validated programs that had a strong RTI framework. She and the RTI steering committee looked at programs that deliver systematic Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

Our leadership group created the vision for where we were going and a solid plan for how we were going to get there. Our principals and district leaders support the teachers from the top down, so we can deliver success.

Shelby Jasmer

The initial goal was to get older students up to grade level by providing strong remediation in reading and mathematics. The district initially chose *Corrective Reading* and *Corrective Mathematics* for grades 3–12. “We chose programs based on not only their research validation, but also on the strong support we would receive directly from McGraw-Hill Education,” says Jasmer.

Before the district adopted Direct Instruction, it didn’t have a way to close wide gaps and teach remedial skills. “As many as one-third of our grade 8 students lacked knowledge of such topics as proportional reasoning; they simply didn’t have the basic skills required for math,” says Jasmer. Teachers lacked the time and knowledge to bring children who were two or three grades behind up to grade level.

Reaction

The Cartwright School District began implementing Direct Instruction on a small scale, starting at the resource-room level. Then, they extended the programs to grades 4 and 5. Over time, as students received diagnostic screening, they were matched to the intervention levels they needed.

“When you meet students where they are and provide effective delivery, then everybody learns and succeeds,” says Jasmer. The district has eased the initial apprehension some teachers felt about the new intervention programs.

“For teachers, it’s really great because of the student success, and it’s motivating. The teachers are more confident in sharing their kids, in regrouping kids, and we’re all committed to meeting kids where they’re at. Now, we don’t need to wait for underperforming students to fail. We can support them by saying, ‘We have already planned for you, and we can support you.’ The teachers find it very motivating, and it helps reduce student behavior problems,” says Jasmer.

“Simply asking teachers to work harder and provide intervention does not work. You need a system that is built specifically for intensive intervention and supported both at the school level and by the administration,” Jasmer says. “Our leadership group created the vision for where we were going and a solid plan for how we were going to get there. Our principals and district leaders support the teachers from the top down, so we can deliver success.”

According to Jasmer, initial and ongoing professional development are the key to success. After their initial training, most teachers attended intermediate

CARTWRIGHT SCHOOL DISTRICT:

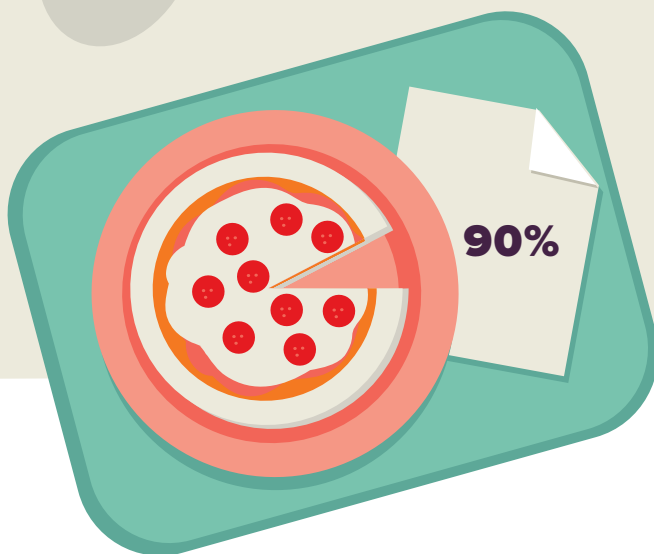


DISTRICT ENROLLMENT
19,000+ STUDENTS

40% ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS



FREE & REDUCED LUNCH



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classes to refine their delivery and then received advanced training from McGraw-Hill Education professionals and external consultants. Teachers also attended DI conferences organized by the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) and McGraw-Hill Education.

Results

The Cartwright School District sees many struggling learners; fortunately, it now has new structures in place to accommodate them. Middle school students who struggled before are now able to do division in their “Math Club” classes. Some even volunteer to assist when a substitute teacher is present.

“They just never thought they could do math, ever—but now they can. As we see kids getting better at reading and math, it’s very motivating for both the students and the teachers. Cartwright District is implementing another math program from McGraw-Hill Education, *Connecting Math Concepts*, and the teachers feel they can really focus on teaching and not spend precious time on curriculum development,” says Jasmer. Teachers can sequence the content so students get the repetition they need to build skills. According to Jasmer, teachers find this very liberating. They also feel much more confident that they are being effective.

The district has seen marked improvement in assessment scores. “Based on the AIMSweb Summary of Impact report, our Tier 3 student results are in the top quartile well over 50 percent of

the time. In Tier 1, they are nearly all in the bottom quartile, and in Tier 2, in the middle. But students progress, and the kids who are in the DI program are in the top quartile,” says Jasmer. From fall to winter, Cartwright saw many Tier 2 students move into Tier 1.

Parents have noticed, too, and according to Jasmer they trust sending their kids to the Direct Instruction teachers. At Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings and in letters to the principal, they express their excitement about their children’s reading and math progress.

The Future

College and career preparation is top of the list at Cartwright. That doesn’t just mean helping students meet state standards. It also means teaching them to be solid readers—creating the ability to read texts for lengthy periods of time.

“The Direct Instruction programs build that ability for all kids. When teachers just use reading programs from the Internet, it’s not sequential enough. Becoming a strong reader is critical because each student needs to be ready to pass their freshman classes,” says Jasmer. Cartwright is counting on Direct Instruction programs to help reduce the current dropout rate at the high school level, which is around 50 percent.

