

SUCCESS STORY

IDEA Schools Get Students Future Ready with *Reading Mastery*[®] and *Corrective Reading*[®]

Overview

The first IDEA Academy was founded in Donna, Texas in 2001. Today, there are 79 schools in the IDEA network of tuition-free, PreK–12 public schools. Together, these schools will serve 45,000 students across Texas, Louisiana, and Florida in 2021.

IDEA is the acronym for for “Individuals Dedicated to Excellence and Achievement,” which sums up the approach of the charter schools. All IDEA students are expected and encouraged to go to college, and in the 2017–18 school year, 100 percent of IDEA seniors were accepted to college.

In the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, IDEA schools serve 22 buildings and nearly 14,000 students, about 89 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged. The schools blend traditional instruction with personalized, cutting-edge technology to help all students perform at or above grade level. As part of this focus on student achievement and college readiness, IDEA schools use McGraw Hill Direct Instruction (DI) products—*Reading Mastery*[®] in grades K–2 and *Corrective Reading*[®] in grades 3–5.

DISTRICT INFORMATION



Name:

IDEA Public Schools

Location:

Cities across Texas including Austin, El Paso, the Rio Grande Valley, and San Antonio.

Grades:

PreK–12

Implementation

IDEA Schools have a unique expansion model. Each campus begins as a PreK–1 and expands one grade level in each year that follows. For six years, Erica Matamoros was a campus leader at IDEA Academy in Brownsville, which successfully grew to a PreK–5 campus. Today she is Vice President of Schools at IDEA.

Matamoros recalled when *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* were implemented in Brownsville back in 2011. Hilda Swanson, Principal of San Juan Academy, had used the programs in her work on an Indian reservation and saw impressive gains, so she related her experience to the CEO of IDEA. Today, all IDEA campuses use *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading*.

“We had success with *Reading Mastery* from the start,” said Matamoros. “At the end of my first year, all our kindergartners could read. Many were economically disadvantaged students who lacked language skills.

With *Reading Mastery*, we could give them a strong foundation to build on. And because we had so much data pouring in, we could identify every student who lacked skills as well as those who were ahead of the game. This allowed us to meet every students’ needs and our district goals.”

Hope Williams has been Principal of IDEA Judson Academy in San Antonio since 2015, and her school currently serves PreK–4. Williams said that she also saw gains very quickly after implementing *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading*.

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Reading Mastery and Corrective Reading allowed us to instruct kids to mastery level without skipping past anything. Seeing them read after just a few months shows just how phenomenal the curriculum is.

–Hope Williams
Principal
IDEA Judson Academy

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“When I first started as Principal of IDEA Judson Academy, many of the first-graders came in from other schools and were still at the kindergarten level. *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* allowed us to instruct kids to mastery level without skipping past anything. Seeing them read after just a few months shows just how phenomenal the curriculum is.”

Williams added that Direct Instruction is particularly helpful for weeding out the common errors of first-year teachers and ensuring they know exactly what to do—and what not to do—to keep children on track for mastery.

Matamoros agreed. “I can’t say enough about how *Reading Mastery* is structured,” she said. “It is a great way to get new teachers on board with less planning. They don’t have to ask themselves, ‘Will this lesson plan do? Does it meet my objectives?’ With *Reading Mastery*, I walk in to observe a lesson, and all the students are sitting up tall and answering together. There’s no way for the teacher to make a mistake.”

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Pamela Ray, Principal at IDEA Ewing Halsell Academy in San Antonio, was new to Direct Instruction when she started in her role. Soon she was learning DI while coaching and managing teachers in the use of *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading*. Ray came from a science background, so she had confidence in the credibility of the research-based programs.

She really started to believe in them when she saw students leaving kindergarten reading. Although some teachers were concerned about the lack of creativity in their instruction when they began, Ray said they soon understood the benefits of working within the instructional model. The program components provide a solid base, and teachers are encouraged to add value through their own personal touches.

“Many of the teachers on campus were in their first years of teaching, and they were hungry for something to start with,” said Ray. “*Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* give our teachers everything they need to differentiate, prioritize closing gaps, and build on achievement.”

Ray noted that she has received a high level of support from McGraw Hill during implementation. The instructional manager coaches right along with her to ensure teachers understand what the data is telling them and how to change their approaches to meet student needs.

“The Professional Development support we've received has been targeted and individualized to the needs of our teachers,” she said. “We started with a new campus, new administration, new teachers, and we were quickly off to a strong start with *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading*.”

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Student Confidence

Maria Carmen-Sepulveda has been the Principal at the IDEA Mays Academy in San Antonio for three years. She had no experience with Direct Instruction when she started.

“When I first saw Direct Instruction in action, I got goosebumps,” she recalled. “The lessons seemed so unnatural—like the students were robots. Then I saw the children flourishing. My students are all doing fantastically well with *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading*. No one is bored. No one is left behind.”

She recalled two students who immediately benefited from the shift to Direct Instruction. One was a kindergarten student and high achiever who quickly progressed to second-grade reading because he felt empowered to move ahead. The other was a student with autism who could make no eye contact. The repetitive structure of the lessons enabled him to join in and gain confidence. He also quickly showed progress.

Principal Carmen-Sepulveda also noted that 27 percent of her students were English language learners, and Direct Instruction allowed them to feel included and confident in their language skills.

“Reading Mastery is explicit about teaching language, so no one, including English language learners, feels left out. I’m so in love with it that I want to go back to the past and reteach some of the bilingual students I once had, so I could teach them the right way.”

As the Vice President of Schools at IDEA, Erica Matamoros knows that enthusiasm like that can have a huge impact on how students respond to Direct Instruction. She believes that even though *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* lessons are delivered explicitly, what teachers

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can bring to the table is joy and the affirmation that students can achieve higher results.

“Direct Instruction is repetitive: teachers say something, and students answer back. But teachers who use a positive tone can help students get excited, help them gain confidence,” said Matamoros. “Teachers must also be proactive about identifying kids who are simply droning and hold them accountable.”

At IDEA Judson Academy, Principal Williams oversaw data checks every Friday for this very reason. She and her teachers were looking for red flags that showed a lack of mastery.

“We talk about which skills are weak and which are strong, and we continue to use decoding in the upper grades to close gaps that we identify,” said Williams. “*Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* are pivotal for uncovering deficiencies and avoiding new ones. We can catch it if someone is coming in low, and we can push high performers further.

Last year we had four kindergartners test two years above normal, and they were able to skip a whole grade and still keep up with their peers.”

Results

Across the board, lower valley IDEA schools report amazing results using *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading*.

“At IDEA Schools, our mission is college for all,” said Principal Ray. “We want every student to get into and matriculate through college, so we backload to identify what we need to do to

Student Growth at IDEA Campuses During the 2017–18 School Year			
Campus	Grade Level	On-Level Students at the Beginning of Year	On-Level Students at the End of Year
IDEA Mays Academy, San Antonio	First and Third	43%	73%
IDEA Judson Academy, San Antonio	PreK–3	22%	87%

put them on that college-bound path. *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* provide the data we require to be able to monitor and pivot to meet our students’ needs.”

Having instruction informed by data resulted in impressive gains on the Ewing Halsell Academy campus. During the 2017–18 school year, 90 percent of PreK and kindergarten students at the school finished at grade level or above, and 70 percent of first-graders entered second grade on track with their grade level.

Principal Carmen-Sepulveda saw equally strong growth at IDEA Mays Academy. During the 2017–18 school year, Mays expanded its campus to include third-graders, many of whom were still reading on a kindergarten level. In fact, at the beginning of the year, only 43 percent of third-graders were reading on grade level. By the end of the year, 73 percent were on grade level.

Third grade is an important year for Texas students, as it is the first year they will be required to do state testing. At the IDEA Judson Academy, this was a challenge. When it expanded to include third-graders, only 20 percent of them tested on or above grade level during the 2017–18 school year.

By the end of the year, 84 percent met their goals. And their reading skills helped them succeed in math as well: 78 percent scored above grade level on their state math exams.

That same year, first-grade students at Judson came in with just 22 percent at mastery level. By the end of the year, they were scoring at 87 percent on or above grade level.

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“We saw a huge jump, and we attribute it to adding 90 minutes of decoding instruction to the regular reading classes,” said Principal Williams. “Fidelity to *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* has also been key. We teach the script with fidelity and then work hard to understand what the data is saying about our students’ progress. Our teachers are not afraid of reading the data to uncover which discrete skills students have or lack.”

Matamoros noted that their goal for all lower valley IDEA campuses is for 90 percent of students to be on level or higher in reading, math, and language arts. The 2017–18 school year was the first time all the schools in her region met those goals. Matamoros also expressed pride in the achievements of students at IDEA Academy Brownsville, where she was the principal just two years prior.

“IDEA Academy Brownsville was the only IDEA school in Rio Grande Valley to meet its goals for state academic requirements in 2017–18,” she said, “I attribute that to a strong commitment to Direct Instruction and a strategic base that uses data to evaluate students to mastery.”

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The Future

Carmen-Sepulveda said that San Antonio IDEA campuses will continue to use *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading*, and she plans to complement them with collaboration and writing skills.

“Collaboration helps students apply what they have learned and allows them to expand on a thought,” she said. “So, this will be an area of focus for us going forward.”

As their campuses grow, both Ray and Carmen-Sepulveda are focused on conducting parenting academies to show parents how and why IDEA academies teach using Direct Instruction. Their hope is that family classes will result in more support at home.

“Parents need to understand why we do what we do, so they can reinforce what students are learning,” said Carmen-Sepulveda. “For instance, when we teach students using *Reading Mastery*, we say, ‘get ready,’ and then we snap. Parents understand why we do this once they sit through a session. It really helps to have them on board.”

Williams is equally committed to continuing with *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* at her school.

“Now that our teachers understand what mastery looks and feels like, and they have students moving on to new levels of understanding, most will say that they would never go back,” said Williams.

“You have to trust that the curriculum and its processes will add value to the classroom,” said Ray. “Nothing else teaches fluency with such great success for every student. I have students with disabilities finishing at grade level, and I often wonder if that would have been their end-of-year story without *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading*.”



About Reading Mastery

Reading Mastery is an evidence-based, comprehensive English language arts program proven to raise reading performance for a wide range of students, including significantly at-risk populations, for over 35 years. More than 10,000 schools across the country use *Reading Mastery* to explicitly and systematically teach key foundational literacy skills and how to read, comprehend, and write narrative and informational text of increasing complexity while building oral language fluency skills.

About Corrective Reading

Corrective Reading provides intensive Direct Instruction-based reading intervention for students in grades 3–12 who are reading below grade level. This Direct Instruction reading intervention program delivers tightly sequenced, carefully planned lessons that give students who may benefit from additional support the structure and practice necessary to become skilled, fluent readers, and active, engaged learners.

DIRECT
INSTRUCTION



To learn more about McGraw Hill Direct Instruction programs, please visit:
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