



CASE STUDY

# Charter School Celebrates 20 Years of Direct Instruction Partnership

## ABOUT THE DISTRICT

Name

Verona Core Knowledge® Charter School (CKCS)

Location

Verona, Wisconsin

Grades

K-8



## Introduction

The Verona Area Core Knowledge® Charter School (CKCS) is a public school option in Verona, Wisconsin. Verona is located approximately 10 miles south of the state capital, Madison, home of the University of Wisconsin's flagship campus.

Verona CKCS is not the district's only charter school but, according to director Rick Kisting, it is the only K-8 program. The school currently has two classes per grade and a total of 420 students.

12%

HISPANIC

7%

AFRICAN  
AMERICAN

69%

CAUCASIAN

22%

ELIGIBLE FOR  
FREE AND  
REDUCED  
LUNCH

1%

NATIVE  
AMERICAN

4%

OTHER

2%

SPECIAL  
EDUCATION

8%

ASIAN

**TOTAL ENROLLMENT: 420**

“We want to grow and enroll more students,” says Annita Wozniak, a CKCS parent and president of the school’s Governing Counsel, “but right now the district does not have the space, so that caps our enrollment.”

CKCS will celebrate its 20th anniversary on January 16, 2016. And according to Chris Uelmen, the school’s grade K–8 curriculum coordinator and DI coach, “Of the 12 grade K–5 teachers currently working here, nine have been using DI for more than 10 years and five of those are 20-year veterans of both the school and DI.”

Kelli Kreienkamp, one of the school’s original founders and a CKCS second-grade teacher for the past 15 years remembers, “We [the founders] chose Direct Instruction because it was research-based.”

“We thought it was important to go with a learning system that had solid research behind it— something that was not just anecdotal,” says Kreienkamp. She had been a private tutor using DI before the founding of CKCS and had seen what she calls “amazing success” with students at all grade levels.

*“One of our main goals has always been to maintain the DI program’s integrity, because it works so well.”*

Annita Wozniak,  
CKCS parent and president of  
CKCS Governing Council

CKCS integrates effective traditional and contemporary teaching methods to create a dynamic learning environment for all students. The school uses the Core Knowledge® learning sequence for content, a detailed and systematic curriculum

content guide for each grade level that can be taught consistently year after year. CKCS also employs a number of McGraw-Hill Education Direct Instruction programs, including *Connecting Math Concepts*; *Reading Mastery Signature Edition*; and *Corrective Reading*. The school’s website notes, “Direct Instruction used in K–5 reading, spelling, written language, and math go hand-in-hand with the Core Knowledge® Sequence.”

There is a waiting list to get into CKCS because of its well-known excellence and proven results. During the 2013–2014 school year, the school had higher percentages of students in grades 3–8 scoring “Proficient plus Advanced” in reading than either the district or the state of Wisconsin.

## Teaching All Students to Mastery

According to Uelmen, all K–5 classes at Verona CKCS teach Direct Instruction for reading and math at the same time. “This allows us to assess the students and group them into flexible instructional groups across grade levels according to their individual skills and level of mastery,” she says. “The students are carefully monitored, by their teacher and by me. The built-in program assessments and day-to-day feedback provide valuable information about student learning and lets us know if students are at mastery or not. Based on what we see, children can move up or down in instructional groups, if that is what is necessary—depending on their week-to-week performance.”

Kisting knows the importance of having teachers who are well-versed and trained in Direct Instruction. “That’s Chris’ job as our curriculum coordinator and DI guru,” he says. “She does a great job of working with staff, working with new staff as they come in, to make sure they’re adequately trained and continually updated. Her position is invaluable to the program and its success.

“Our specific goals for this year include focusing on students who are really struggling, at the lower end in terms of our reading and math data, which we currently use as our metrics. Direct Instruction is just one part of that process, but it’s a huge part,” says Kisting.

*“DI is scripted, but when you put that script into the hands of a highly skilled teacher trained in DI, it comes alive. Just as an actor on stage with a script can make a play come alive.”*

Chris Uelmen,  
Grade K–8 curriculum coordinator  
and DI coach

## Continuous Improvement with DI

Although the CKCS teachers have been using DI for anywhere from five to 20 years, implementation is ongoing.

“One of our main goals has always been to maintain the DI program’s integrity, because it works so well,” says Wozniak. “Every year we are focused on ongoing implementation and protecting the fidelity of the program, the proper coaching of our teachers, the continuous review of the data we’re collecting on a daily basis, and the results we’re seeing that allow us to continue enrolling... We want to grow and offer more and more children the opportunity to do well in both elementary and middle school.”

Kreienkamp agrees. “Again, the most important thing about DI is having highly qualified teachers. DI is only effective when teachers are really trained to use it to its fullest. At our school, that is priority number one.”

“Teachers are trained,” says Uelmen, “but it’s that onsite, ongoing coaching that makes sure things are going well and teachers have the support they need.”

This ongoing support pays off. “... When you put that script into the hands of a highly skilled teacher

trained in DI, it comes alive,” Uelmen says. “Just as an actor on stage with a script can make a play come alive.”

## Analytics Prove Effectiveness and Success

The teachers who have been using DI for years are very supportive of the program. So are the students. Bridget Baxter, CKCS elementary resource teacher, is also a former student who was taught with Direct Instruction. “My strongest memory of being a DI student is a sense of belonging. Having personalized groups based on students’ abilities really made me feel like each teacher genuinely cared about my learning. I knew that even though math wasn’t my strongest subject, I would be in a “just-right” group that was going to help me improve. I feel that the Direct Instruction program really sets students up for success.”

*“I feel that the Direct Instruction program really sets students up for success.”*

Bridget Baxter,  
elementary resource teacher  
and former DI student

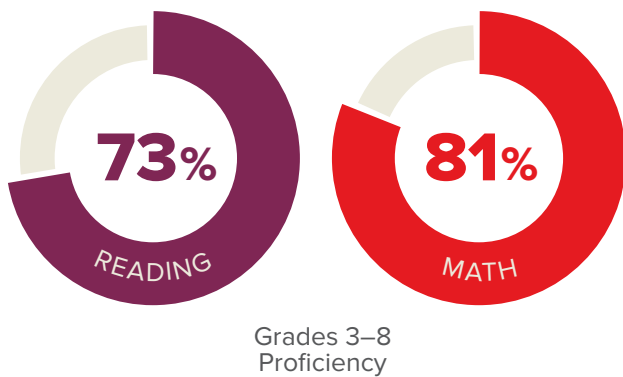
“They love Direct Instruction,” says Kreienkamp of her second-grade students. “It is fast-paced and keeps them really engaged. And when they find out the things they’re learning about, they say things like, ‘This is really easy.’ I tell them, ‘These are things middle school students do,’ so they get really excited. There is nothing about it that I do not like. I think that it has worked well with every child who has walked through this school because they are being taught at their instructional level rather than their grade level.”

Kreienkamp’s enthusiasm is supported by the 2012–2013 school year Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test results. For grades 3–8, the average percentage of student demonstrating proficiency in reading was 73 percent, while an average of 81 percent displayed proficiency in mathematics.

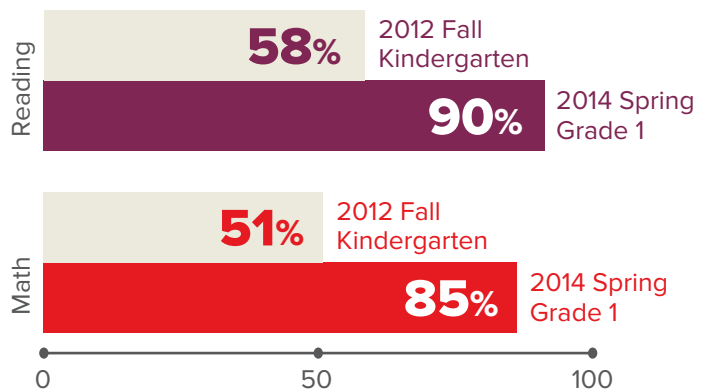
Stanford Achievement Test -10 (SAT-10) results have consistently shown significant growth for CKCS students at the end of first grade when compared to their kindergarten entry-level or baseline scores. The chart below represents SAT-10 results from a cohort of first grade students in spring of 2014 as compared to their entry level scores in fall of 2012.

“Our school was started by a contract with the district that identified DI as our core instructional program,” Kreienkamp remembers. “So we have had full-scale implementation of Direct Instruction for almost two full decades. We have seen excellent results since the very first year.”

### Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Test Results



### SAT-10 Test Results



## About McGraw-Hill Education Direct Instruction Programs:



This K–5 math program teaches computation, problem solving, and mathematical thinking while bringing at-risk or underperforming students up to grade level.



This research-proven K–5 literacy and language arts programs has a 35-year history of helping even significantly at-risk students become fluent, independent, and highly skilled readers.



This program focuses on decoding and comprehension and target readers in grades 3 and up who are one or more years below grade level. It also addresses many deficits common to older learners.



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