

SUCCESS STORY

Bancroft-Rosalie School Wins Awards for Its Commitment to Direct Instruction

Overview

Bancroft-Rosalie is a small, rural public school in Bancroft, Nebraska, that serves fewer than 300 students—43 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch. Despite its small size and limited resources, the school has made big news by winning two of the country's most respected awards in education.

In 2015, Bancroft-Rosalie School received Blue Ribbon School Recognition from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) for being an Exemplary High Performing School. Its top administrator also won an education award. Dr. Jon Cerny, now in his 34th year with the district and his 23rd year as superintendent, was named as the 2015 recipient of the Terrell Bell Award for Outstanding Leadership.

Bancroft-Rosalie Public School attributes its success to a solid base of Direct Instruction. For nearly nine years, the school has faithfully used *Reading Mastery*®, *Connecting Math Concepts*®, and *Spelling Mastery* for academic intervention as well as its core curricula. It is understandably proud of the results.

DISTRICT INFORMATION



Name:
Bancroft-Rosalie School

Location:
Bancroft, Nebraska

Grades:
K–12

Implementation

In 2006, many Bancroft-Rosalie students needed additional support in order to perform at grade level on state assessments. Cerny knew the school needed to do better, so he started looking at different intervention programs. He was particularly inspired by the results achieved by another Nebraska district, Gering Public Schools, which had closed its reading achievement gap after implementing Direct Instruction. Based on that success, Cerny decided to give the method a try.

Cerny knew Bancroft-Rosalie would be using the program it adopted for some time. To ensure the school got it right, he partnered with the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI).

Reading coach Karin Vogt, who has been with the Bancroft-Rosalie School for 22 years, remembered what it was like before the implementation. “We were always scrambling to find resources for our special education students,” Vogt said. “With Direct Instruction, there’s no searching. No planning. You just pick up where your arrow is the next day, so you can put all of your energy into engaging with students.”

Kindergarten teacher Patty Wegner has worked at Bancroft-Rosalie for 27 years. She remembered her first experiences with *Reading Mastery* because of the impact it had on one student who had autism and cerebral palsy. This student was struggling with sounds, and doctors told her parents she would never learn to read. Wegner tried every intervention and core program she had access to until she got her hands on *Reading Mastery*.

“Looking back, I know I did things wrong because I was new to the program. But she started to read, and now she’s a freshman,” she said. “*Reading Mastery* doesn’t give students an

excuse not to learn. Not even special education students. It teaches the same thing over and over, and they get it. It’s amazing.”

The school initially adopted *Reading Mastery* as a parallel to core instruction for special education students. However, when teachers saw how well it was working, they wanted to use it for their core students too.

“Our special education kids were suddenly out-reading the core program,” said Vogt. “The next year, the first-grade class wanted it; then kindergarten. Everyone wanted to try. It was a no-brainer.”

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Reading Coach
Bancroft-Rosalie School

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Student Engagement

After *Reading Mastery* was introduced at Bancroft-Rosalie, the administration and staff became true believers in Direct Instruction. Before long, they were adding *Connecting Math Concepts* and *Spelling Mastery* to the curriculum.

Cerny said the secret to the effectiveness of Direct Instruction is that it personalizes education, allowing students to move at their own pace. “At first, parents worried that Direct Instruction was too academic and not fun enough,” he said. “Now that they see the results—the students are doing well and moving up in the curriculum—parents don’t say that.”

Sometimes when students transfer in, they are already behind. But according to Cerny, Direct Instruction makes it easy to get every student caught up and on grade level.

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Wegner believes that Direct Instruction works because kids are never shown the wrong way. “I model it for them the right way from the beginning,” she said. “There’s no guessing, no wasting time on the wrong way. When kids are guessing and they hear wrong answers, they get confused. With Direct Instruction, you’re always reinforcing the right way.”

Vogt adds that the kids get used to Direct Instruction signals very quickly. The consistency they see across reading, math, and spelling delivers powerful results.

“Parents can’t believe what their kindergarteners are doing in math. It’s because everything is done in minute baby steps,” she said. “If they are doing an open equation, like $9 + _ = 12$, they first learn that the box means ‘how many.’ Then they start at nine and make lines until they reach 12. By the end of the year, they understand the concept of fractions. It’s amazing.”

Both teachers add that consistency does not make the lessons boring. “If you have between 25 and 30 kids in a second-grade class, some can read *Harry Potter*, and some can’t read at all,” said Wegner. “But if they are placed at the correct level of difficulty, they can excel. Within that context, everyone is reached and no one is bored.”

Regular assessments in the programs also ensure that students are appropriately challenged. Vogt said that if you teach with fidelity and do the program assessments regularly—every five lessons for *Reading Mastery* and every 10 for *Connecting Math Concepts*—you get a real feel for what your students can do.

“It makes parent-teacher conferences easy,” Vogt said. “I’m completely in tune with how the kids are doing, and I have hard data to show why a child is in a certain group.”

Results

In 2003, Bancroft-Rosalie students were scoring around 63 percent proficient on the state assessment. Over the last 10 years, those numbers have continued to climb thanks to the school’s commitment to Direct Instruction.

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In 2015, students reached 96 percent proficiency in reading and 94 percent proficiency in math—a truly impressive gain.

Cerny is proud of those numbers, but he said there is always room for improvement. “Our goal is to get our kids as far as they can go,” he said. “Ideally, we want to have kids ahead of the curriculum as much as possible. We want to see third graders doing fourth-grade work.”

Vogt said that to achieve great results, everyone has to be on board with Direct Instruction. “We have seven years of results and major awards to prove that Direct Instruction works,” she said. “But you also need the backing of the administration to succeed. We are lucky to have that.”

The Future

Bancroft-Rosalie School has come a long way with Direct Instruction, and almost everyone there agrees it's unlikely they will change their approach.

“Direct Instruction is about efficiency,” said Cerny. “You can increase student learning and maximize instructional time. If you teach it with fidelity, you're going to see results.”

Wegner said now that she's seen what *Reading Mastery*, *Connecting Math Concepts*, and *Spelling Mastery* can do, she can't go back. She'll have to stay at Bancroft-Rosalie until she retires.

“I can't see myself teaching anywhere that doesn't believe in Direct Instruction. I mean, why wouldn't you want a curriculum that is research-proven? If I'm going to buy a car, I want one with the best rating, not just the flashiest one,” she said.

Vogt agreed. “At first, it felt foreign, but there's meaning to this approach. You know you're going to get results,” she said.





About the Programs

Reading Mastery is a Direct Instruction program designed to provide explicit, systematic instruction in English-language reading. Program materials offer support for modeling new content, providing guided practice, offering individualized practice, and applying skills.

Connecting Math Concepts gives students who are at risk of falling behind, or have already fallen behind, the chance to catch up and learn significant mathematics through explicit, systematic, intensive instruction.

Spelling Mastery uses a phonemic approach to help beginning spellers learn the relationships between spoken sounds and written letters and apply them to the task of spelling.

DIRECT
INSTRUCTION



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