

SUCCESS STORY

Beating the Odds at Cherry Street Elementary

Overview

Carol Rine, who had served as Cherry Street’s principal for less than two years, wanted to ensure that her students were receiving what they needed to raise their reading skills to grade level. She felt her students enjoyed learning to read and reading proficiently. Still, she admitted, “Our reading scores had been in decline for many years, in line with other elementary schools in the area.”

But the Cherry Street teachers refused to give up. If children needed help, they tutored them during planning periods or after school. “Our faculty exemplifies the ‘whatever it takes’ attitude,” said Rine. It was also seeking a long-term solution and analyzing data to pinpoint the learning approaches with the greatest impact on student achievement. Direct Instruction stood out, thanks to its history of success, data-driven design, and continual progress monitoring.

Another local school had used *Reading Mastery*® to make measurable reading gains. So when the Bay City School District offered Cherry Street the chance to implement the program, Rine accepted the offer.

Implementation

In fall 2013, as *Reading Mastery* implementation began, Cherry Street faced several major challenges. The school had never used a McGraw Hill program as a basal.

DISTRICT INFORMATION



Name:
Cherry Street
Elementary School

Location:
Panama City, Florida

Name of District:
Bay County

Then there was the issue of timing. Since the district authorized implementation after the school year began, full implementation was delayed until November. Pressed for time and in need of more professional development support, Cherry Street teachers called on their *Reading Mastery* consultant. After additional training in progress monitoring, data usage, and regrouping, the teachers began using *Reading Mastery* with their students.

Reaction

Principal Rine was impressed from the start by the rich language component in *Reading Mastery* and the progress monitoring approach that accelerated learning. She appreciated the program's consistency, which enabled her students to feel good about their reading abilities. She also liked the wealth of teacher resources.

Rine has encouraging words for other schools and districts that are implementing *Reading Mastery*. "Don't become overwhelmed with the uniqueness of the steps involved," she advised. "Your own rhythm and pace will develop over time, and Direct Instruction will become natural. The program's script is laid out for you. Even though it may initially seem too simple for your grade level, it builds slowly to advance students to the place where they need to be."

It didn't take long for Rine to start getting feedback about her school's new reading program. "Parents have been pleased that their students are receiving a reading curriculum on their level," she said. A new awareness of their children's reading problems has motivated some parents to help their children more with reading at home. One first grade teacher said parents have shared many positive comments with her, both on reading logs and during parent conferences.

Overall, teachers feel the strongest aspects of *Reading Mastery* are its structure, repetition, and monitoring of individual students. The program's technology component captivates students, and their level of confidence soars. One teacher explained, "I feel I am making a difference with those students who have struggled with reading in the past, and now they feel they are becoming good readers."

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—Carol Rine
Principal
Cherry Street Elementary School

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Results

Even before implementation was complete, *Reading Mastery* was making a measurable difference at Cherry Street. Scores were up on the mid-year district benchmark assessments. According to fluency mastery and assessment mastery data, teachers and students alike are showing growth. In the last school year, Cherry Street earned 72 more school grade points, a measure of success under Florida's State Accountability system. Reading gains for the bottom quartile increased a full 42 points.

Students with academic delays were beginning to succeed. As Rine explained, "The replacement of our core curriculum in November [2013] has broken a cycle of decreasing student achievement data during our second benchmark assessment on Discovery Education Assessments. One particular situation involved a student who was

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—**Carol Rine**

Principal

Cherry Street Elementary School

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in Tier 3 of the Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) and was very close to being diagnosed for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) eligibility. After the implementation of *Reading Mastery*, the student began responding to the program and has demonstrated an increasingly positive achievement trajectory in all reading and math data being collected. The student is reading!”

One second grade student—who, in October, was more than a year behind—was reading at grade level in January. The girl showed improvement in both fluency and vocabulary.

A third-grade teacher reported, “In my reading group, I have 11 students who have been with me since the implementation of the program, around October. These students all began at the second-grade level, Lesson 1. After my data was reviewed, I was given the go-ahead to have my students take the third-grade placement test. All but one of the students placed into third grade. These students showed a full year’s growth in five months.”

Increased reading proficiency is just the beginning. Students have also gained a wealth of subject-area knowledge from the context of their *Reading Mastery* materials. That’s critical because CCSS calls for the use of science and social studies expository text. And teachers are reporting fewer discipline problems, especially during student/teacher games, which engage children in competition and reward them for what they know.

Before *Reading Mastery*, one fifth-grade teacher was having trouble teaching one of her students. “When he begged to stay and keep reading at the guided table, I smiled a bit brighter. He is making progress with behavior as well,” she said.

The Future

With *Reading Mastery* in place as its new K–5 core curriculum, Cherry Street Elementary can now address fidelity of instruction and further refine their implementation. Upper-grade teachers are watching the school’s reading comprehension scores, optimistic that students are gaining the skills to make inferences and generalizations and draw conclusions from texts.

Reading Mastery is worth the investment, according to Rine. The program changes attitudes. By providing instruction at appropriate reading levels, it has increased students’ confidence. The mastery students achieve will stay with them and help them in all academic subjects throughout their school careers. The program gives them the confidence to become lifelong learners.

Cherry Street Elementary has been transformed by the experience of implementing *Reading Mastery*. “We have become an inclusive school,” Rine explained. “We believe that every student can learn. It’s our job to find the potential in every student and to develop that potential into a successful academic future.”



About *Reading Mastery*

Reading Mastery is an ideal K–5 core replacement program for Tier 2 and Tier 3/4 at-risk students. Its curriculum—delivered through systematic, explicit instruction—has been proven effective in preparing students for rigorous Common Core State Standards.

DIRECT
INSTRUCTION



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