



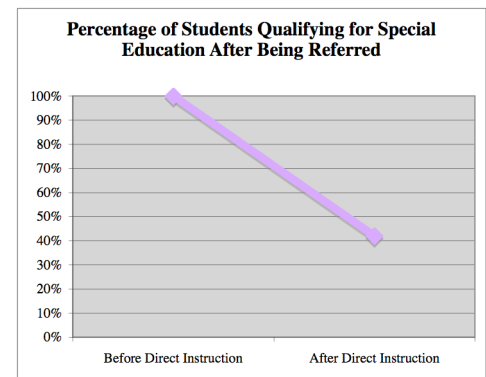
About the District:		About the Students:	
Grades:	PreK-12	African American:	44%
Number of Students:	23,980	Caucasian:	53%
Test(s):	LEAP	Hispanic:	1%
Reduced Price Lunch:	63%	Asian:	1%
		Other:	1%
		ELL	-



Direct Instruction Reduces Special Education Referrals In Louisiana School District by Half

Rapides Parish School District educators were certain the district needed early intervention services to address its disproportionately high number of students in special education. But the rapid, dramatic improvements after introducing two SRA/McGraw-Hill Direct Instruction programs came as a pleasant surprise.

At the start of the 2006–2007 school year, educators introduced *Reading Mastery* and *Corrective Reading* in three targeted elementary schools. Once early intervention began, students referred for special education evaluations at the end of the 2006–2007 school year compared to the end of the 2005–2006 school year decreased by 50%. Even more impressive: of the number of students who were referred for special education evaluations, the percentage that actually qualified for special education services decreased by 58% between the two years.



Debbie Morrison, director of special education, worked with Eddie Mae Washington, director of federal programs, to fund the Direct Instruction implementation for early intervention. Both said pooling resources was an efficient use of funds allocated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

“Direct Instruction has been one of the best things we have done to help at-risk students with reading problems advance beyond special education,” Morrison explained. “We targeted just a few schools at first. Students in these schools had low test scores and were at high risk for qualifying for special education services. Since implementing Direct Instruction, the percentage of students requiring special education services has dropped dramatically.

“Young children, especially in Kindergarten and Grade 1 who would have been referred to special education in the past, are less likely to be identified because of early intervention. The program has been so successful that we are expanding it to 15 additional schools at the start of the 2007–2008 school year,” said Morrison.

The district’s overall goal was to improve instruction and academic achievement in reading for all students, including special needs, economically disadvantaged, and minority, Washington said.



“We wanted to give them an extra push to improve their reading ability, as well as give them a lifelong love of reading. The process has been most successful. It’s easy to see the improvement students have made, and we credit this improvement to Direct Instruction,” continued Washington.

A few months after intervention began, Superintendent Gary L. Jones visited one of the classrooms, which included both regular education students and those targeted for special education, to witness their success in person.

“I had promised them a pizza party, so I brought in several pizza boxes,” he explained. “After each child read fluently, I wondered how someone would do with completely different material. I asked one little boy to read the pizza box, and he read every single word with ease, including a very long word, which he sounded out successfully.”

Then Jones asked that same group of children to read before the school board at their next meeting.

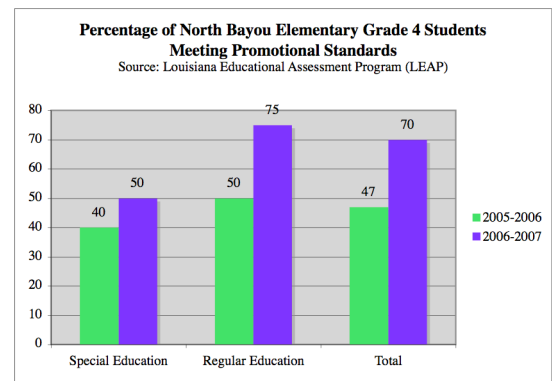
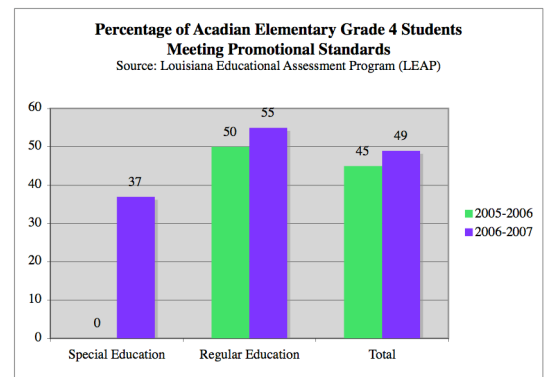
“Each student read in succession, and the board was really impressed. That started a trend for the next four months. Teachers called asking if they could bring their students to board meetings to read. We even had a Pre-K class read to us. Their teacher had used Direct Instruction’s *Language for Learning*, and 12 of the 20 students read proficiently.”

Standardized Tests Show Marked Improvement

Progress is evident throughout the district, including Grade 4. The percentage of students meeting promotional standards on the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) continues to improve. During the 2005–2006 school year, just 45% of Grade 4 students at Acadian Elementary School 47% at North Bayou Elementary School. After one year with Direct Instruction, those percentages increased to 49% and a whopping 70% respectively.

Direct Instruction Reduces Discipline Referrals

Direct Instruction improves discipline as well, Jones said. Before the programs began, North Bayou Rapides Elementary School averaged 70 disciplinary referrals each year. After implementation, that number dropped to zero.





“Direct Instruction brings structure to the teaching environment, which is critical in getting young students to stay on task. The programs are great academically, and they obviously work well on other levels too.”

Teresa Arratia, principal at North Bayou Rapides Elementary School, has seen firsthand the disappearance of discipline referrals.

“Students struggled to master the skills needed to be successful readers before we adopted Direct Instruction,” she explained. “They displayed inappropriate behaviors in the classroom and acted out so others would not see they were struggling to read or master the skills.”

Arratia said now students are actually excited about their accomplishments and strive to achieve success not only in reading, but in all subject years.

“Direct Instruction has increased the overall teaching and learning at our school. The programs address different learning styles, allowing each student to excel academically. Direct Instruction offers meaningful, engaged learning that is not left to chance. Students are actively involved in a tailor-made program that is not boring, holds their attention, has high expectations, and has reduced disruptive behavior,” she said.

Dr. James M. Patton, Professor of Special Education and Leadership at The College of William and Mary, has worked with Rapides Parish School District since October 2006 to reduce disproportionality. Specifically, he is helping the district decrease the number of students misdiagnosed for special education. Dr. Patton uses a metaphor about a Roman god named Janus to explain disproportionality. Janus was the god of gates, doors, doorways, beginnings, and endings.

“Janus had the ability to look in two different directions simultaneously,” Patton said. “If he were involved with American education today, he would see something very ironic. If he looked to his left, he would see overrepresentation of certain ethnic groups (like African Americans) in special education. If he looked to his right, he would see the same individuals underrepresented in gifted education.”

Dr. Patton said Rapides is no different from other districts across the United States.

“We can reduce disproportionality if we drill down deeply into the problem,” Patton stressed. “One cause is reading difficulty, and Direct Instruction, as well as committed teachers, address this problem. If pre-referral programs, pupil appraisal programs, and a solid reading curriculum are in place, there is a great likelihood the number of students who are ‘false positive’ will be reduced, especially in the category of mild mental disabilities. I’ve observed educators teaching Direct Instruction passionately, and I’ve seen students use their reading ability to enhance their life skills and problem-solving abilities. Many actually read for enjoyment, not just for understanding.”



About the Rapides Parish School District

Serving approximately 23,980 students in Grades Pre-K–12, this district’s student population is 53% Caucasian, 44% African American, 1% Asian, 1% Hispanic, and 1% multicultural. Sixty-three percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 14% are classified as disabled. For more information about this district, please visit www.rapides.k12.la.us.

For More Information

If you would like to learn more about success with Direct Instruction programs in your school or district, please contact us today at **1-888-SRA-4543**.