

duct his formal observations, it is “show-off time.”

Many of our new teachers, although they had taught at other schools, were not accustomed to our coaching model that requires unannounced classroom observations by others. However, the model requires that administrators monitor the teachers’ performance in the same way the teachers monitor their students’ performance. All teachers are now accustomed to this model and our staff functions like one big DI classroom!

Train

No train, no gain! Victory Charter School has a highly trained staff, due largely to the coaching model and Mr. Curtis Jasper’s expertise and experience with schoolwide implementations of DI programs. Mr. Jasper is a former DI consultant and trainer. He came to Victory Charter School after he and his wife moved from Chicago to Atlanta in the winter of 2000. Prior to moving, Mr. Jasper had worked as a consultant with over 25 schools around the country. He is a former DI teacher and now a school administrator. He has been committed to DI since 1994.

Mr. Jasper is committed to training his teachers at every opportunity. Staff/faculty meetings are not social gatherings. Nor are they devoted to lectures. They are occasions for training one another in all of our DI programs, discussing challenges, and celebrating teacher success and student achievement.

The school’s budget is prioritized to accommodate professional development and the purchase of curriculum materials. We understand the benefits of supplementing our own training by sending teachers out of the building to be trained by other experts in other areas. All teachers are required to perform a professional development training in front of their peers and to go out of the building to be trained at least once. All new teacher candidates are asked to demonstrate a task from one of the DI programs during their final interview.

Celebrate

Student achievement is celebrated within Victory Charter School throughout the entire school year. Any classrooms or groups that pass a mastery test or checkout or any other assessment with at least 90% mastery are

recognized during the morning announcements. In addition, student achievement is recognized and celebrated within a number of reading incentive programs that support our DI mainframe.

Although Victory Charter School has achieved significant success in a short period of time, we have a long way to go. Currently, the school goes up to the seventh grade, but the plans are to add a grade each year until 12th grade. [ADI](#)

Curtis Jasper has worked as an independent consultant since 1998. He has extensive training experience with many DI programs as well as schoolwide DI implementations. His most profound area of expertise is working with school administrators and other instructional school leaders with curriculum and instruction. If you have any questions or are interested in working with Mr. Jasper please contact him at 770-856-6906 or email at cjasper@acninc.net

KURT ENGELMANN, National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI)

City Springs Sets the Standard...Again

Take a school in a high-poverty area of a large U.S. city—a school that has experienced years of utter failure—and implement the full-immersion model of Direct Instruction faithfully for more than 6 years, and what are the results? Possibly the most dramatic turn-around of a school from failure to success in the history of the United States.

From the Bottom to the Top

Until Baltimore’s City Springs Elementary started implementing the full-immersion model of Direct Instruction in 1996, the school was considered to be the epitome of failure. Ninety-five percent of the students were (and still are) eligible for free or reduced lunch. Academic per-

formance was at subbasement levels. City Springs was one of the very lowest performing schools in the city of Baltimore out of nearly 120 schools. At one point, no students in the school’s third or fifth grades passed the Maryland State test, the MSPAP, in either mathematics or writing. School climate was just as poor as academic performance. Students ran the halls, and teachers locked classroom doors in order to control their students...and keep others out.¹

¹ Principal Bernice Whelchel described the chaotic nature of the school before implementation of Direct Instruction in her keynote address at the 27th annual National Direct Instruction Conference in Eugene in 2001 (available on video from ADI), and the 2000 PBS documentary, “The Battle of City Springs,” captured the difficulty of transforming the school during the 2nd year of DI implementation, 1997–1998.

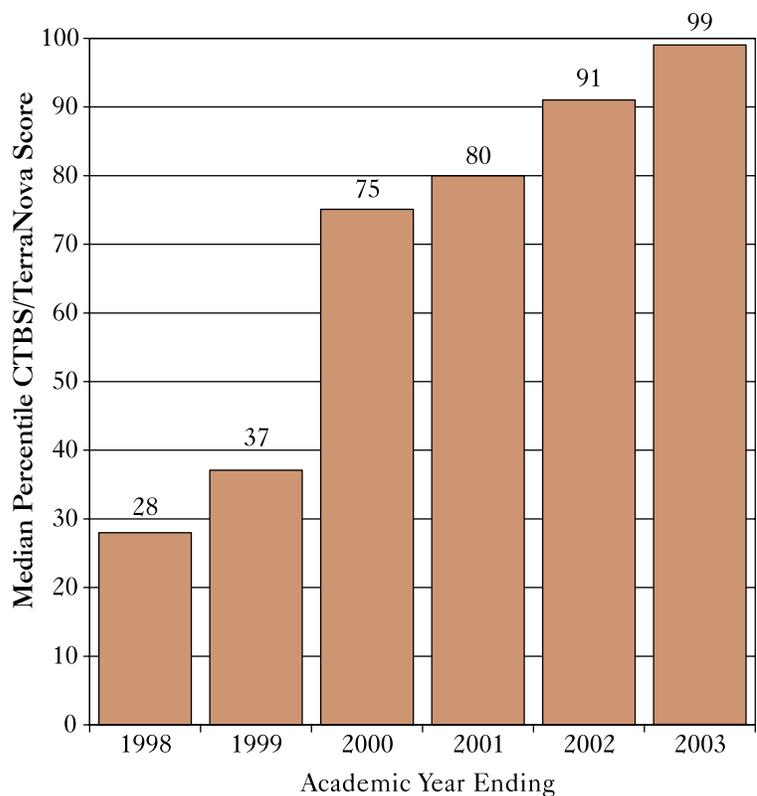
Fast forward to 2003 and the school is the epitome of excellence. The halls are clean and orderly. Students are well behaved. Most important, student performance has “shot through the roof!” The school scored highest in the city in first-grade reading, first-grade math, and fifth-grade reading on the 2003 TerraNova test. The median score for first-grade reading and first-grade math was at the 99th percentile—the highest possible score. Fifth-grade scores were also very impressive—the 87th percentile in reading and the 79th percentile in math—up from the 14th and 9th percentiles, respectively, in 1998.

Many of the dozen or so other high-poverty schools in Baltimore implementing Direct Instruction have also experienced strong achievement gains, though not as large as those of City Springs. Four of the top five first-grade reading scores in Baltimore in 2003 were from DI schools. These schools’ scores ranged from the 92nd percentile (Roland Park) to the 99th percentile (Langston Hughes). Three of the top first-grade math scores were also from DI schools (Roland Park—the 94th percentile, and Langston Hughes—the 93rd percentile, in addition to City Springs). But, with the exception of Roland Park, which is from a higher income area, City Springs outperformed the other DI schools in the upper grades by a considerable margin. For example, the median fifth-grade math score for Roland Park matched the score for City Springs (the 79th percentile), while the next highest score by a DI school was at the 62nd percentile (Langston Hughes), which is still very respectable.

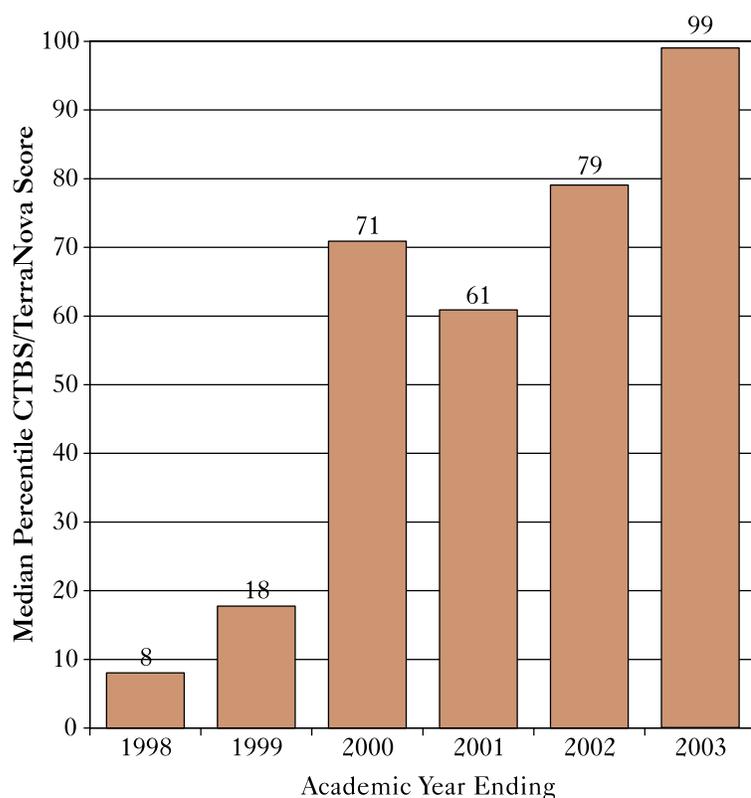
Why City Springs Is the Leader

What accounts for City Springs’ unparalleled upsurge in student performance? Simply put, City Springs is the first low-income urban school in the U.S. to fully implement the Direct Instruction full-immersion model long enough to realize its full effects in the upper

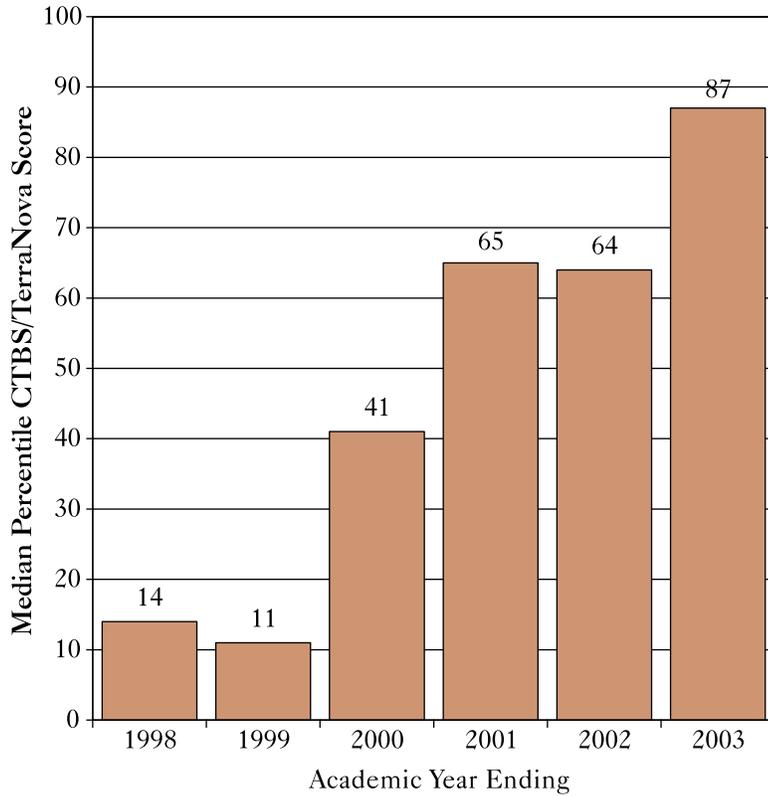
City Springs First-Grade Reading Scores 1998–2003



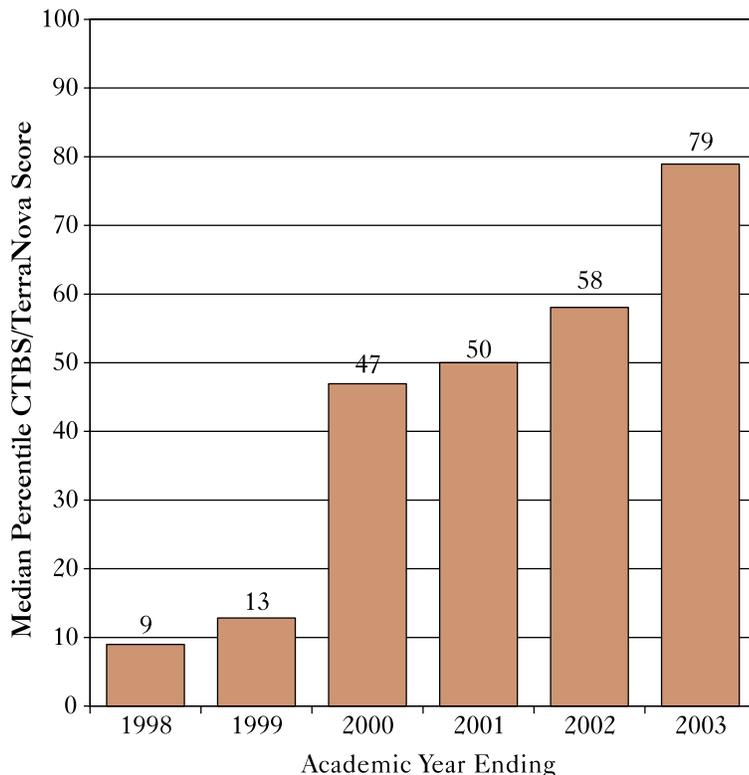
City Springs First-Grade Math Scores 1998–2003



City Springs Fifth-Grade Reading Scores 1998–2003



City Springs Fifth-Grade Math Scores 1998–2003



grades. City Springs has consistently followed the Developer’s Guidelines, a comprehensive set of implementation parameters outlined by DI creator and founder of the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI), Siegfried “Zig” Engelmann.²

Dr. Muriel Berkeley, President of the Baltimore Curriculum Project, noted in her 2002 article in *The Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)* that City Springs implemented the full model with more fidelity than other Baltimore schools.³

The full-immersion model includes the following components

- Adequate time to accelerate children’s performance. Morning and afternoon reading periods are scheduled and implemented for all students in kindergarten, first, and second grades, and extra reading instruction is provided to students who are behind in Grades 3 and above.
- The full DI curriculum—the reading, language, writing, spelling, and math programs. No competing programs are allowed that teach a different strategy that might confuse children.
- Teaching to mastery. Staff members strive to bring all students to mastery on all tasks in every lesson.
- Appropriate placement. Students are placed appropriately in the instructional sequence at the start of the year. Groups are re-grouped and re-placed formally at least three times a year and informally throughout the year based on student performance.

² The Developer’s Guidelines are available via the *Data and Issues* section of the NIFDI web page, www.nifdi.org.

³ Her article also appeared in the Fall 2002 issue of the *DI News*.

- Classroom support. In addition to in-class coaching from the external support provider (NIFDI), teachers receive support from school-based peer coaches who go through a three-level advanced training series.
- Frequent assessment. Teachers record lesson progress and mastery test data, which the external support provider and the school’s management team (the principal, assistant principal, building coordinator, and peer coaches) analyze weekly.
- Problem solving. The school management team participates in weekly problem-solving sessions with the external support provider to review progress and problems and determine the tasks for the coming week.

A crucial component of the model is to have a principal who is an effective instructional leader, and Principal Bernice Whelchel of City Springs fulfills this role to a T. Principal Whelchel consistently attends teacher and coaches trainings. She knows the DI programs very well, and she frequently takes over instructional groups in order to assess student mastery and enable teachers to visit other classrooms. She is in classrooms much of the day observing students and teachers. She sets down clear expectations for students and teachers, and she follows up to make sure that her expectations are met. When students work hard and achieve Principal Whelchel let’s them know they’ve done a good job. She is the leader in celebrating student success.

The full-immersion model places great emphasis on accelerating students through the primary levels of reading and math in kindergarten and first grade. At City Springs, nearly all children who enter the school in kindergarten complete *Reading Mastery II* during first grade, and a significant proportion of first graders move well

into *Reading Mastery III* by the end of the year. Kindergarten and first-grade students also complete the first levels of the language track (*Language for Learning and Reasoning & Writing*). This acceleration continues through the middle grades so that about half of the children who entered in kindergarten complete level VI of *Reading Mastery* by the end of fourth grade.

The strong DI implementation in the primary grades at City Springs has made it possible for the school to implement the upper levels of the DI programs in fourth and fifth grades.

DI is highly effective at the upper elementary grade levels, which dispels the myth that DI is only effective with lower-grade learners.

These upper-level programs teach sophisticated reasoning, writing, comprehension, and vocabulary. Most children in City Springs are placed in a Direct Instruction U.S. History textbook in fifth grade.⁴

In this program, students learn a great deal of sophisticated vocabulary (e.g., words such as “accommodate,” “capacity,” “resources,” “dominate,” “economic”), learn a great deal of important general knowledge on social studies and geography, and do a wide variety of writing tasks (e.g., comparing the War of 1812 and the Revolutionary War).

Implications of the City Springs Experience

The extraordinarily high student performance at City Springs has several implications for transforming failed

schools. The school’s experience implies that

1. DI is highly effective at the upper elementary grade levels, which dispels the myth that DI is only effective with lower-grade learners. Much of the research on DI from Project Follow Through, a K–3rd-grade project, and other sources focuses on the effects of DI on primary-grade children or remedial learners. The preponderance of research in these areas has led many to conclude that DI is *only* effective with younger populations “developmentally,” or older students “remedially,” but not with older students “developmentally.” The high performance of City Springs’ upper-grade students dispels these myths.
2. The “fourth-grade slump,” which asserts that at-risk students inevitably fall behind their more privileged peers in the upper elementary grades, is also a myth. Highly at-risk students can continue to excel and outperform their more privileged peers in the upper elementary grades if the full-immersion DI model is applied rigorously for 5 years or more. The performance of at-risk students does not need to “slump” dramatically in the upper grades.
3. All of the components of the full-immersion model are necessary for maximizing student achievement. City Springs has implemented the full-immersion model with the most fidelity and has achieved the greatest gains. The degree to which other schools in Baltimore have been able to accelerate student performance reflects the degree to which they have followed the Developer’s Guidelines. This relationship between fidelity of implementation and performance holds true for the other schools NIFDI has worked

⁴ *Understanding U.S. History* by Douglas Carnine, et al., is available via the University of Oregon Bookstore, 800.352.1733.

with across the United States. So to maximize student performance, schools need to receive **comprehensive support**—including substantial on-site coaching, off-site data analysis, and frequent problem-solving sessions—and the school staff needs to fulfill **specific roles**—including a principal who is the instructional leader of the school.⁵

Will Policy-Makers Use City Springs as a Model?

If policy-makers at the district and state levels are serious about improving student performance, they should examine the experience of City Springs and determine how to replicate the school's experience at other schools. Ironically, City Springs serves more as a national model than as a local model. Principal Whelchel and City Springs have received accolades at the federal level, including recognition by the U.S. House of Representa-

tives Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, and President and Mrs. Bush at the anniversary of the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act.⁶

Baltimore officials, on the other hand, have largely ignored the success of City Springs and other Baltimore DI schools. Mike Bowler describes this lack of attention in his column in *The Baltimore Sun* ("An Urban Oasis Of Flowing Hope," June 15, 2003):

It's getting to be a broken record, but City Springs Elementary, one of Baltimore's poorest, led the city again in this year's TerraNova testing, results of which were announced last week. The east-side school's scores have been surging for 5 straight years in both math and reading, surely proving that Direct Instruction, the scripted

curriculum used at the school, is a success. Four of the top five city schools in first-grade scoring use Direct Instruction. Yet the curriculum is seldom credited by the school system's leaders. One wonders why.

City Springs should indeed serve as a local AND national model of how to achieve academic success with at-risk students, and the school could serve as a training center for other schools implementing Direct Instruction. To ignore the experience of City Springs, to dismiss its success as an anomaly, or to attribute its success to a single factor (e.g., the relatively small size of the school) is to obscure information needed by others who are trying earnestly to learn how to improve the academic performance of at-risk students and thereby improve the lives of children greatly. **ADI**

5 A session that is part of the annual National Direct Instruction conference in Eugene, *A Full-Immersion Model for Implementing DI*, describes the components needed to maximize student performance.

6 The school also received the Excellent School Award from the Association for Direct Instruction in 2001.

MARTIN A. KOZLOFF, University of North Carolina, Wilmington

MARTIN'S MUSINGS

Technical Proficiency, Direct Instruction, and Educational Excellence

How many excellent teachers, courses, or lessons have you had in your life? Or—beside yourself—how many excellent teachers have your students had in their lives? I mean, how often could you describe instruction as follows?

1. Students were carried along by the teacher's brisk presentations and by

class discussions. Students wanted to grasp (get) everything the teacher was trying to teach. They were so engaged they had little urge to pester their neighbors or look out the window.

2. The subject matter (things to learn) was presented in a **logical sequence**. The teacher taught the

tools needed (e.g., vocabulary words, basic strategies) **on time**, before students needed them. What students learned every lesson was built on and used in the next lessons.

3. The teacher's demonstrations (**models**), explanations, and examples were clear and on target (focused on the objective at hand) so that students grasped new material (e.g., a definition, or how to conjugate a new verb) quickly and without a lot of struggle, confusion, and errors. Even when material was hard, students made steady progress.

4. Not only did students get new material, they were able to apply it skillfully (accurately and quickly)