

Client: NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR DIRECT INSTRUCTION
Project: NIFDI VIDEO
Subject: CLOSING THE PERFORMANCE GAP: The Gering Story
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[EXTERIOR SHOTS; AUDITORIUM]

School Staff: Okay, go.

Students: [LAUGHING]

School Staff: - - the people who need the biggest hand is you guys. You met my challenge and we were in an 85th percentile school in the state of Nebraska. Awesome work, Northfield.

Students: [YELLING/APPLAUDING/SINGING]

Narrator: Children and teachers at Northfield Elementary in Gering, Nebraska celebrate their success in reading.

Students: [SINGING]

Narrator: But three years ago there were no end-of-year celebrations. Back then testing data showed that Gering School District was failing across the board with some children, especially the economically disadvantaged and minority kids, performing significantly below average.

Students: [SINGING]

Narrator: This the story of how the Gering School District turned itself around.



Students: [SINGING]

[EXTERIOR]

Radio Announcer: Good morning, everyone, across western Nebraska. Well, it's gonna be another cool day with 50's and lower 60's so do expect - -

Narrator: Gering, Nebraska, a town of less than 8,000 people has four elementary schools, one junior high and one high school. Until three years ago, for the most part, teachers and parents thought they were doing okay. But when new Superintendent Don Hague took a hard look at the testing data, he realized they had a problem.

Don Hague (Superintendent): It was after my first year here in Gering I had become very aware that our students weren't performing real well in reading. We weren't doing terrible. I mean we weren't in the bottom but we weren't doing as near as well as we would like to do. I think we had less than 30% of our kids performing at grade level in the 3rd Grade. Well, I said, *That's not good 'cause those are the kids who are losing in school.*

Narrator: Hague broke the bad news to school principals like Mary Kay Haun.

Mary Kay Haun (Principal): We did not realize as a district how low our scores were. We never looked at as a whole district or as a whole school. [MEETING ROOM] So that was the beginning of our revelation that we really needed to do something for kids and we needed to do something for teachers.



School Staff: - - probably a hundred of these. We just picked out a couple.

Andrea Boden (District Dir, Assessment): I think we had very hard working teachers. We/I think we have very good teachers. We just hadn't provided them with the right tools, [MEETING ROOM] professional development, high quality training. There was just really no consistency. The quality of curriculum we were providing wasn't very good.

Narrator: The data showed that some kids were doing especially badly.

Director Boden: We had huge gaps between our Hispanic students and our white students, between our students on free and reduced lunch, the students that weren't on free and reduced lunch. Then, we just really felt like the demographic group you represent shouldn't determine your achievement level. We felt that we wanted the achievement level of every student to be determined by the high quality of instruction that we should be providing.

[OFFICE]

Director Boden: We're below the state average at 8th and 11th and we're above in 4th Grade.

Superintendent Hague: And we wanta show that.

Director Boden: Okay.

Superintendent Hague: And I wanta show ACT - -



Narrator: So Gering School District applied for a federal grant under the Reading First Program. Administrators and principals researched curricula and selected Direct Instruction, a highly structured program totally different from anything the teachers had used before.

[CLASSROOM]

Student: [?]

Teacher: Yes. What's our— What was our story about today? Get ready.

Students: [UNISON]

Teacher: Why does Anne want a deer? Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] For a pet.

Teacher: Yes, for a pet. In this sense, who is Ann talking to?

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Teacher Flowers: Okay. Here we go. Which one was 3,000 years ago? Get ready.

Students: [UNISON]

Teacher Flowers: Oh, you're so smart. Which one was 200 years ago?

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Teacher: Read the whole item. Get ready.



Students: [UNISON] When the teacher says go clap.

Teacher: What are you going to do when the teacher says, Go. Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] Clap.

Teacher: When are you going to clap? Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] When the teacher says go.

Narrator: Direct Instruction is a carefully constructed research proven program. Teachers follow scripted lessons. Students answer in unison followed by individual turns and data is collected continually.

Superintendent Hague: We studied all the programs out there that were available and said: Direct Instruction has by far the most impact on students. And so [MEETING ROOM] we started communicating with staff. We were gonna make a change and we were gonna approach it differently than we ever had.

[EXTERIOR; CLASSROOM]

Students: [UNISON]

Teacher: Good reading. Time for - -

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Teacher: What might be something that they would sell on the street according to our story?



Student: [?]

Teacher: Ice.

Narrator: An educational revolution began at Gering's elementary schools.

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Teacher: It was— Let's read them together. Get ready.

Student: [UNISON] It was.

Teacher: Was it fun petting the deer?

Narrator: But how would the teachers react to the new reading program?

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Teacher Duncan: Spell 'known'. Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] K-n-o-w-n.

Sandy Duncan (1st Grade Teacher): I had never heard of it before and then I heard horror stories. You know I heard, *Oh, it's hard and it's so hard for teachers and your creativity is taken away and it's all documentation and teachers don't have a choice anymore. So I was a little nervous.*

Teacher: This is a quick sound, so look where you're headed.



Teacher Duncan: And I did see the funny print and I wondered, *What's all that about?* And it did look weird and it sounded weird.

Teacher: Oh, this sound is *eh* - -

Teacher Duncan: But once I figured out that all of those things had a purpose, I understood it. I appreciated it.

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Girl Student: [READS] Mike said, *You think you're an expert. I am the expert* - -

Teacher Duncan: Everybody wants to read. They put their hands up. They're excited. Whereas before the children that didn't feel like they could do it, they didn't have the confidence, they didn't wanta do it in front of the class, I feel like now they're willing to try. They have the confidence.

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Becki Thomlison (4th Grade Teacher): And, Jule.

Student Jule: They had to make clothes.

Teacher Thomlison: Okay, possibly had to make the clothing back then. Kaylin.

Student Kaylin: They had to make soap and candles.

Teacher Thomlison: Right. Now why - -

I started with the Direct Institution program two years ago. At first I thought, *Oh, there's this script to read* and I



wasn't sure if I saw the benefit of that. And once I had about a month of DI under my belt I realized, *This is a really neat program because all the children are actively involved.*

The error limit for this lesson is eight. I will be keeping track at the whiteboard. Alright. I would like Zach— Would you please read.

Student Zach: [READS] England in the 1500s, Chapter 3. During the 1500s, England had two main classes of people, rich and poor.

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Teacher: Get ready.

Narrator: The Direct Instruction program implemented at Gering in all four elementary schools provides a comprehensive system of professional development: curriculum, instruction and progress monitoring. Extensive training and onsite support were provided by NIFDI, the National Institute for Direct Instruction.

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Teacher: Look right at the book the whole time. Here we go, everybody.

Narrator: A successful implementation depends on a number of factors.

Students: [UNISON]



Teacher: When? - -

Narrator: First, students are grouped according to their skill level and started on material they can handle.

Teacher: What word?

Tami McGrattan (NIFDI Implementation Mgr): We like to make sure that students are placed in groups according to their ability level and the skills that they've already acquired. I mean, it doesn't make sense to put a 1st grader who knows how to read into a class that's teaching beginning reading. So we try to target or pinpoint as much as we can in a very short period of time that particular student's skill set and then place them in broad groups and then start teaching. And then once we start teaching we start gathering student performance data on a daily and weekly basis.

[CLASSROOM]

Teacher Flowers: Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] B.

Teacher Flowers: B 100 years. Which one does 100 years go to? Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] B.

Kay Flowers (Title One Teacher): For kids it's the best thing. I really do think that it is. Everybody fits into a group. Everyone is learning, everyone is progressing and the groups are flexible.



Get ready.

You know if a child is doing very well, we can move him. We can change the group. If the child is having difficulty, change the group.

Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] [?]

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Teacher Griess: They stopped walking *for* they were tired.

Student: What?

Teacher Griess: Okay? So sometimes you can use the word 'for' instead of the word 'because'.

Narrator: Instructional grouping helps both lower and higher performing students.

Teacher Griess: For they were tired.

David Griess (3rd Grade Teacher): Program benefits higher kids because it puts them into a higher group and really allows them to push ahead at their own level and they don't have to, they don't have to wait for— If there's lower kids, they don't have to wait for them and if there's a chance for them to move up even to a higher group then they're in. They have the chance to do that.

Let's find column five. Here we go.



Narrator: Second, teachers use scripted lessons to bring students to mastery on a given set of skills before moving on to more complex material.

Teacher Griess: Word two. What word?

Students: [UNISON] [?]

Teacher Griess: I think I benefited from having a script because, you know, I could go on with a lot more confidence that what I'm covering is what I'm supposed to be covering.

Put those together. Hama.

Student: Homonyms.

Teacher Griess: Homonyms. I'm gonna give you a point; that was close.

My strength, I feel, I feel like is just relating to kids and getting across to kids what I need to get across to 'em. I think that's my strength. So I think that DI plays into my strengths because it sets you up with everything you need to get across to the kids and it just let me, as a teacher, do that.

Dorothy ran because the storm was coming. Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] Dorothy ran for the storm was coming.

Teacher Griess: Wow, that sounds really good. Dor/Dorothy ran because the storm is coming. Or, you could say: Dorothy ran for the storm was coming. Tanner.



[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Coordinator Hague: Look at that, over 92. Give me a five on that one. Okay.

Narrator: Third, progress monitoring is built into the system so that students who are falling behind or teachers who are having problems can be quickly identified and helped.

Boy Student: Okay.

Coordinator Hague: And I want you to practice every night.

Bev Hague (Reading Coordinator): Looking over data is very important also. We do that on a weekly basis. So, you know you only have to watch a child for a couple of weeks to see how they're doing on their mastery tests, and if they're not passing their mastery test, then that tells us that, you know, we need to go back and maybe reteach some of these things. Or, if there's several children in a group that are not passing their mastery tests it tells us right away that they're not at mastery. We need to go back. We need to do this again until they are at mastery. And we don't send 'em on and we don't move on until they have mastered it.

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Teacher Foster: Get ready.

Student: [UNISON] After.

Teacher Foster: Yes, after. Next word?



Claire Foster (1st Grade Teacher): Ninety percent of each lesson is review and only 10% is new so every child in my class was able to succeed and the main thing that kept me aware of that is all of the data that we receive all the time on their checkouts and so forth that really prove that they are learning the material and they are mastering it.

Narrator: Fourth, there is continual professional development: teacher training, in-class coaching and problem solving are provided by local support staff and NIFDI, the National Institute for Direct Instruction.

Director Boden: The support they have provided to us has just been critical on their onsite coaching, consulting they do, helping our teachers by modeling lessons, giving them feedback, using the data all— NIFDI, you know, helps us focus on the student data all the time. All the decisions are data-driven decisions. So they've just played a critical role in how well we've been able to implement the program.

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Manager McGrattan: They started doing punctuating sentences where there's more than one person speaking.

Teacher: No - -

Manager McGrattan: Our job is to come in and teach teachers and train kids and build that support within the principals and the coordinators and their peer coaches and the community. Our mission is to work ourselves out of a job in the, in the way that the school district then becomes the manager of the implementation.



[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Narrator: And, finally, high quality instruction and hard work by teachers and students alike.

Teacher Flowers: Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] [?]

Teacher Flowers: Good. All - -

Narrator: Within months Gering's elementary school teachers became convinced.

Teacher Flowers: This has been to me the most powerful program that I have ever seen in my 15 years of teaching reading.

What do we call men and women in the Army? Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] Soldiers.

Teacher Flowers: What were - -

I like how there's a lot of accountability, not only for teachers but also for children.

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Teacher Janecek: Spell [?] 'that'. Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] T-h-a-t.



Mickie Janecek (2nd Grade Teacher): It is a big step for teachers, especially those that have been teaching for a while. It was a totally new way of teaching and thinking for me, as a teacher, and so it was difficult. And that first year I was constantly practicing and I had to think about what I was doing each day and each lesson. But then from then on, it's just gotten easier and you can put your personality into it and can make it fun and the kids do love it. They just made phenomenal amount of growth this year and I had never seen that kind of growth from a large group of students.

The sentence should say: 'She should put it away'. Listen again.

It was a definite change. I was a little apprehensive at first and now I wouldn't have it any other way.

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Teacher: Read the whole item. Get ready.

Students: [UNISON] When the teacher says go clap.

Principal Haun: People who visit the schools are just amazed at how focused, how intense the children are, as well as the teachers. There is not a minute lost in transition time or teaching time or learning time. As a principal, I can almost count on zero discipline problems when it's reading time.

Teacher: - - words.

Students: [UNISON] Two.



Teacher: Good. Starting over for me, Skylar.

Student Skylar: [READS] Soon he came to - -

[EXTERIOR]

Narrator: Rather than wait three to four years for Gering's elementary school kids to enter junior high, Direct Instruction was also implemented for Grades 7, 8 and 9 to get students who were behind in reading skills caught up and ready for high school.

Maurie Deines (Principal, Junior High): It was really a big change to/for our teachers since they had not had any reading instruction in their prior college instruction. So this is was foreign to them. After we got some of the results back and they felt more comfortable with it and could see where it was going, they embraced it and were glad that we did it. I think our results show that.

Student: [READS] With everything his heart could wish for.

Teacher: Thank you.

[ANOTHER CLASSROOM]

Carolyn Ewing (JH Math Teacher): When this whole process started, I had real mixed feelings. Part of me selfishly thought, *Why should I, being a Math teacher, spend a class period every day teaching out of my field, teaching reading.* I felt very inadequate. But I found that the kids responded and I began to see kids' creativity. I began to see them read better. My 'aha' moment came in the middle of one of the



stories when I had to discipline kids for trying to read ahead because they wanted to know what was going on.

Principal Deines: Students feel more able to attack a content area. They will leave Gering Junior High with self-confidence, the ability to know that they have confidence in themselves and can move on.

Teacher: Last word is 'threshold'. What word?

Student: [UNISON] Threshold.

Teacher: Nice job. Let's - -

Narrator: In only one year the number of 7th Grade Gering students scoring above the 50th percentile on the Terra Nova Assessment rose from 41 to 59%.

Teacher: - - We're gonna practice these words. Word one - -

[EXTERIOR]

Narrator: Back in the elementary schools, the data has shown a steady increase in student performance. The averages of all demographic groups exceed the 2007 state averages. For the 4th Grade statewide writing assessment, an important benchmark, the Gering 4th graders of 2007 achieved 92% proficiency. That's 8% higher than the state average which ranks Gering fifth among the state's 25 largest school districts. For Gering's Hispanic and free and reduced lunch students, the improvement has been even more remarkable.



Director Boden: And there was about a 23 percentage point gap between our Hispanic and white students and now this year currently 2007 that gap has been reduced to two percentage points and our Hispanic students are actually outperforming our white students. What we're seeing with our data is we're more at 70 to 80% of our students being on grade level as compared to, you know, 35-36% five years ago.

Narrator: After three years of hard work by teachers, administrators, principals, consultants, aides and the students themselves, Gering is seeing success for all of its kids.

Teacher Griess: My kids work way harder now and they show way more progress now than what we used to teach.

Teacher Janecek: I had my kids write: What was your favorite thing about 2nd Grade? And almost every single one of them put 'DI'. And then I had them write why? And they said, *Because I can do it and I'm good at it.* Our job's to make kids feel like they can do it and they're the best and we're doing that with DI and I'm not sure we were before.

Jennifer Bohnsack (Kinder Teacher): All kids leaving my classroom will be ready to read and read well the rest of their lives. I don't know that I could have said that four years ago.

Director Boden: It's hard work day in and day out keeping it going but it's the right thing to do for kids when you see every Kindergartener reading by Thanksgiving. I think the work is well worth it.



Superintendent Hague: If we really do care about all students getting an education, then we implement programs for all and this is a perfect program for all of our students.

[EXTERIOR]

Narrator: For more information on Direct Instruction and how to implement it in your school or district, contact the National Institute for Direct Instruction at 1-877-485-1973 or email info@nifdi.org. You can also visit the NIFDI website at www.nifdi.org.

[CREDITS]

Students: [UNISON]

[EXTERIOR]

[END]

