

“What Did You Learn in School Today?”

Information for Parents about Direct Instruction Programs

If you ask your child, “What did you learn in school today?” and get the answer, “Nothing,” here’s a way to find out more. With these guides to our school’s Direct Instruction programs, you can figure out what your child learns every day, as well as what he or she learned earlier.

You will need to find out two things about your child’s progress:

What program level he or she is in (for example, Reading Mastery III)
What lesson his or her group is on (for example, Lesson 120). Most students complete about one lesson per day in each subject.

You can find this information by asking your child’s teacher. Once you know your child’s program level and lesson number, you can select an information sheet and use it to find out what he or she has been learning recently.

We recognize that parents make a huge difference in our school’s success. As a parent, you have a right and a responsibility to be concerned that your child is learning material appropriate for his or her age and ability. Knowing that most parents are not familiar with Direct Instruction (DI), we wrote this guide to show you what your child is learning. By asking your child about the new words or facts the class is studying, you can make sure he or she is achieving as much as possible. If you have more questions, you can arrange to meet with your child’s teacher.

What did you learn last fall? About Direct Instruction (DI)

For every skill, we *teach to mastery*. This means that no matter what is being taught, the teacher will not move on until every student in the group knows the material. No child is left behind. No one is allowed to learn a skill halfway. If your child is working in Reading Mastery II, Lesson 100, you can quiz him or her about anything up to that lesson.

This is true for any of our students, regardless of ability. Our teachers chose DI partly because it is designed to teach all students, including those who are learning disabled, gifted or average. All skills are taught according to an exact plan, so nothing is left to chance. Students are not expected to just “catch on” to new material — everything is broken down for complete understanding. Also, parents do not have to re-teach at home. All of the material is covered during school.

Four Steps for Teaching New Skills

DI uses the same basic steps for teaching every skill. They could be used for teaching children a new letter sound, how to write a deduction or how to count by 10s, for example.

For every skill, the teacher uses these four steps:

1. She shows the children what she wants them to do.
2. She does it with them.
3. She has the children do it by themselves.
4. If they have problems, she goes back to step 1 or 2.

In almost every exercise, the teacher follows those four steps, until the students know the skill well enough to skip one or two steps.

You may have noticed that those four steps are a good way to teach anything to anyone. For example, you could use the format to show a child how to make chocolate milk. First, you would show him exactly how much chocolate syrup to add, what spoon to use, and how long to mix it. Next you would help him do it the right way, giving him hints if necessary. Finally, you would give him a glass of plain milk and tell him to add the syrup, just the way you showed him. If he didn't get the idea, you would show him again.

You can see that this format makes it easier for the teacher to make sure students are learning exactly what she wants them to learn.

How can I help my child be an excellent student?

Direct Instruction is complex, but please don't let that scare you away from using your own judgment about helping your child learn at home. As with any other program, when your child brings you work from school, you can ask her to read from it and explain her work. You can go to the library to find books on whatever the class is studying. You can make sure your child has a quiet, well-lit, comfortable place for reading and doing homework. Also, reading, word puzzles, listening to music, going to parks and museums, watching carefully chosen TV programs, cooking, or other structured activities will increase your child's knowledge about the world and potential for school success.