



Education Consumers Foundation

Remarks from Shepard Barbash at ECF event

Author, *Clear Teaching*

Nashville, Tennessee

May 14, 2012

When John Stone asked me to speak to you today about my book on Siegfried Engelmann and Direct Instruction, I agreed under two conditions: first, that he put me in front of a good audience—an audience of interested and open-minded people who care about education. I trust he has succeeded in that. Second, I wanted it made clear that I am not a PR agent for Engelmann or his publisher, McGraw Hill; that I have accepted no fee from them or even from John for coming here; that I am an independent reporter; and that the views I express today are entirely my own. I tell you this not just to puff myself up, but to put you on notice that I am precisely what everyone fears: a loose cannon, accountable to nobody but myself. As my long-suffering wife says, Good Lord, you are self-righteous! Guilty as charged.

I have been a journalist for thirty years. In a popularity contest, that puts me slightly below politicians and lawyers, and maybe slightly above tyrants. So when people ask me what I do, I tell them I'm a *recovering* journalist. Don't get me wrong. Once upon a time I was an honest to goodness investigative reporter, with the scalps of my victims to prove it. In my first job at the *Hudson Dispatch*, a newspaper in New Jersey that no longer exists, I wrote a series of articles that led to the conviction of a police detective who had burned down his flea market go-go-bar and murdered his business partner. In my second job, at a newspaper in suburban Connecticut, I tracked down an engineer who diagnosed why the Challenger space shuttle exploded before my competitors did at *The New York Times*. My greatest feats of investigative reporting came when I became a foreign correspondent in Mexico—a paradise for muckraking journalists. Bad news was everywhere to report, and I gloried in reporting it. As bureau chief in Mexico City for the *Houston Chronicle*—bureau of one—I wrote about the monopolistic power of industry titans; the extortion of citizens by the state police; the rape of a pretty American woman in a Guadalajara jail; the systematic fraud in Mexico's presidential elections. When 38 people drowned after their bus veered into a lagoon, I was the first foreign correspondent on the scene.

But being a correspondent in a woebegone place is a young man's game, and by the time my son was born, back in 1989, I had had about enough. Becoming a parent teaches you things. One thing it taught me was to crave stories with happy endings: not fictional, make-believe stories, but *true* stories—stories of good things happening to people, or of good people making things happen. I wanted to tell the God's honest truth about these people, but I also wanted to honor and *help* them in some way, and when necessary, *defend* them against the attacks of others less righteous and less wise. I wanted to be an investigative reporter, but I wanted to devote myself to investigating the *good*, which we all should love, instead of the *bad*, which we should all shun.

Such an approach to truth-seeking and reporting is about as popular among journalists as Direct Instruction is among educators. Be that as it may, before my son had turned three, we had left Mexico for Atlanta, and I had left muckraking daily journalism to freelance books and articles about people who seemed, at least to me, to be making the world a better place.

I shouldn't say too many bad things about journalists because it was in fact a fellow journalist, the longtime editor of *American Educator*, Liz McPike, who first urged me to talk to Siegfried Engelmann and to write about him. Any journalist worth his salt knows a good story when he sees one, and in Engelmann I immediately saw one. One 45-minute phone conversation with him was all it took to shatter all my assumptions about education and how to accelerate learning in kids. Here was a genius who had invented a whole new science: the science of instructional design. Moreover, he had invented a science that could save lives and give joy and prosperity to millions—not just to the poor and the disabled, but to everyone. This was a story worth investigating, and indeed worth telling.

One of the things Engelmann understands better than anyone else in education is the importance of efficiency, of helping teachers make the most of their time in the classroom. Perhaps the most efficient thing for me to do now is to just read you the introduction to *Clear Teaching*. I'm not likely to be as efficient paraphrasing it.

What if Charles Darwin had written *The Origin of Species* and nobody noticed? Or Copernicus had shown that the earth went around the sun and nobody believed him? Or Jonas Salk had found a cure for polio and nobody cared? Such has been the fate of Siegfried Engelmann, pioneering inventor of a better way to teach that almost nobody uses.

Engelmann has spent the last 50 years working out answers to basic questions every good teacher asks. What should I teach my students? How can I teach them so that they *all* learn what I'm trying to teach? How can I accelerate their learning as much as possible and help those who are behind? How do I know in what order to teach things and what not to teach at all? How will I know *right away* if a student is learning or is confused and needs help? *How* do I re-teach? How do I get my students to pay attention and work hard? How do I get them to trust me? How do I get them to trust themselves? In sum, how can I become the best teacher possible?

Unlike education theorists whose vague ideas rarely help anyone in the classroom, Engelmann stands alone for his ability to design clear instructional programs that can accelerate learning in even the hardest to teach children and that any willing teacher can learn to use. Known as Direct Instruction, his approach puts teachers firmly in charge of their students' learning and gives them a reliable, cost-effective way to verify how well they are actually teaching.

Engelmann has written more than a hundred curricula using Direct Instruction (DI) principles, covering all the major subjects from preschool to high school. He tests his programs in the classroom, and uses the results to improve them. He has taught every program he has designed and has trained others meticulously in his methods. More scientific evidence validates the effectiveness of his methods than any other approach to instruction. Yet so different are his techniques and curricula from anything else in education that even now, after so many years, few educators understand them, few colleges teach them, and barely 2% of K-12 teachers use them. Like Copernicus, whose proofs were rejected by the Church for 300 years, Engelmann remains a scorned revolutionary, anathema or simply unknown to most people in his field.

For forty years Engelmann has offered to bet anyone \$100,000 that he or anyone trained to use his programs could out-teach anyone else using any other approach. No one has ever taken the bet. Based on the evidence that has been amassed showing how well DI works, anyone who did would have to be considered the underdog. Indeed, the

largest scientific experiment ever to compare different approaches to instruction in the early grades, sponsored by the federal government in the 1970s and known as Project Follow Through, examined 22 methods of instruction and found that DI worked best *by far*. I mean, it lapped the field!

Follow Through tracked more than 75,000 at-risk students in 170 communities from kindergarten through the end of third grade. Students were tested on language skills, reading, spelling, and math. DI students did best in all four subjects. They also scored highest on tests designed to gauge their self-image and sense of responsibility. More than a hundred studies since Follow Through (including fifteen in the last three years and 75 in the last decade) have confirmed various aspects of its findings and found that DI accelerates learning in older students, children with above-average IQs, different racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities and in special education, and students in urban, rural and suburban schools. The research has also found that DI raises the rates at which students graduate from high school and go to college, and *lowers* rates of grade-retention, discipline problems and referrals to special ed. All of these benefits have been found to save money. No scientific study has ever found negative effects from DI. Such consistency of results across populations and settings is rare in the social sciences.

And yet—and yet—DI remains the ugly duckling of education, despised and defamed by education school professors, shunned by those whose ideas and products it threatens, and misunderstood by those who lack the time or desire to learn how it works. It requires training of a kind that few places offer and that few teachers are given the chance to go get.

Indeed the mere fact that all of you here were willing to come to a talk about DI sets you apart as curious, independent thinkers, determined to leave no stone unturned in your search for the very best tools to help Tennessee's teachers help their students, your children.

DI is unpopular for two simple reasons: it gives teachers less freedom to do what they want in the classroom, and it defies a vast system's vast stake in the conventional wisdom. Central to the prevailing view in education is the belief that children learn naturally, and that they learn most when they are allowed to direct the pace and content of their own learning. The ideal teacher in this view is not a teacher at all but "a guide on the side"—a coach who facilitates the child's God-given rate of growth and personal creation of knowledge. From these premises flow a host of others. Pre-K and

even kindergarten teachers are taught that it is not *developmentally appropriate* to seat children at desks, teach them the alphabet, letter sounds and math, or assess their academic skills. Teachers in all grades are warned that it is unjust and harmful to group students by skill level to instruct them in skills. Math teachers are taught that kids will like math better and be better at it if they are made to figure out their own strategies to solve problems, rather than learn standard procedures from the teacher.

The proven success of Direct Instruction explodes this entire constellation of myth: children do *not* construct their own reality about subject matters; teachers need *not* wait for children to reach a certain age or stage before teaching them certain concepts; children do *not* learn more when teachers teach them less.

Rather than abandon their beliefs (and their lucrative investments in textbooks and training that express them), rather than honestly examine Engelmann's methods *as an investigative reporter might*, DI's detractors have simply manufactured another stock of myths to justify their rejection of DI.

Now one of the cardinal rules when teaching with Direct Instruction is: if a child gives an incorrect answer, don't repeat the wrong answer—just say or help the child find the right answer. With that rule in mind, I am not going to spend too much time talking about the erroneous myths surrounding DI—many of you have probably heard them already. In fact, I only want to address one of these myths at length: the myth that DI works only to teach low-level skills to special needs children. Other than persuading you to look at the evidence *as an investigative reporter might* and not simply accept received wisdom, I'm not exactly sure how to dispel this myth except to dispense with all modesty and declare to you that, hey, *I'm* a pretty smart person—graduated Magna Cum Laude from Harvard, wrote five books, published stories in *The New York Times*, blah blah blah—and DI has worked very well for *me*. I have used DI techniques to teach myself Latin, to practice the piano more efficiently, even to improve my own writing—*writing*: it doesn't get more 'higher order thinking' than that. At the other end of the spectrum, although by no means a teacher, I have used DI to teach a poor, African American girl to read. The girl, LaDasia, had been left back and was repeating first grade. Using a DI computer program called *Funnix*, I was able to teach her an entire grade level in 60 days—less than half a school year. Moreover, I was able to accomplish this with no training. Her teachers were amazed and thrilled. What they failed to understand was that it wasn't *I* who deserved the credit; it was DI, or more specifically, it was Engelmann's genius in designing *Funnix*, the DI program. I never could have done it without the program.

The last chapter I wrote in *Clear Teaching* is in fact Chapter V, which refutes the myth that DI is only suitable for Special Ed kids and rote learning and such, and which I wrote and inserted at the urging of Liz McPike. She, too, had run up against this pernicious myth. I'll read that Chapter now.

Chapter V: Playing the Music

With DI, Smart Kids Learn Fast Too

Engelmann's programs are so carefully designed to reach the hard-to-teach that even his admirers often miss how well they teach everyone else. Likewise they are so good at teaching basic skills that few teachers appreciate how well they teach the more-advanced knowledge a literate society demands.

A recent major review of the research literature found that Direct Instruction is in fact similarly effective for students whether they are in regular education, special ed, elementary school or high school. The review also found DI to be similarly effective at teaching both early reading skills *and* high-level comprehension. No other method of instruction showed such consistently strong effects with students of different ability levels and ages, and with different subject matters. (The review is called *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*, by John Hattie, published by Routledge in 2009.)

The federal Follow Through study, which looked at young at risk children, found that the biggest differences separating DI (the only effective model) from the 21 other models was not on rote learning but on cognitive higher order skills. Forty years later and on the other end of the curve, in Gering, Nebraska, a rural district which uses DI, elementary students classified as gifted are out-performing their gifted peers in non-DI schools in the rest of the state. They have learned so much that Gering's junior high has had to rewrite its curriculum for them, raising standards to make it more like high school.

Any teacher flipping through Engelmann's lesson plans would see that they tackle sophisticated skills page after page and are content-rich.

The upper levels of *Reading Mastery* focus on great literature, such as Mark Twain, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Jack London. Earlier levels focus on non-fiction, and contain many things DI teachers confess they themselves never learned. Third graders read about Nancy who becomes less than 1 centimeter tall. Before reading the story, they are taught the science concepts that enable them to predict what will happen when she falls from a counter (she won't get hurt), what problems she will have drinking water (because of the surface tension of a drop of water), and why her voice changed so that her mother could not hear her when she called. In the context of other selections, children learn how rivers change their course and why tire tracks are visible on the road after it rains. They learn the principles of convection and propulsion. They learn Archimedes' law of buoyancy. They learn the difference between induction and deduction, similes and metaphors, and (often mistaught!) facts and opinions.

Reasoning and Writing teaches how to identify misleading claims in advertising and to draw appropriate conclusions from evidence. *Essentials for Writing* (for middle and high school) teaches the principles of argument and debate. *Corrective Reading* (a remedial program for students who are behind) teaches economic principles and how to apply them. *Morphographic Spelling* teaches rules and techniques for analyzing word parts that most adults do not know. For instance, when trying to spell and understand words like *inspect* and *spectacle*, students learn that *spect* is a morphograph—a word part—that means “to look.” (Teachers trained in the program learn that the *rrh* in hemorrhage, rhinorrhea, diarrhea and gonorrhea, means “to flow.”)

Many DI teachers and program authors use the programs to teach their own children, often against the advice of their peers, who warn that they will ruin their kids by pushing them too hard.

Jean Osborn, co-author of several programs, including *Language for Learning*, taught her daughter to read with DI when she was four. “By

kindergarten she was a good reader,” Osborn says. “I always like to say to people who say that DI ruins children: Emily learned to read with DI, she got a PhD at Stanford in history, and she’s a professor at University of Chicago. Did DI ruin her life? Of course not.”

Emily recalls liking the lessons so much she would try to teach them to the dog. “My life is reading now,” she says. “I read and write. That’s how I make my living. My mom’s regret is she didn’t do DI math with me. I’m terrible at math. I have a seven-month-old. I will absolutely teach him with DI. And I will do math with him too.”

Bernadette Kelly, a teacher and co-author of DI math programs, moved to Eugene, Oregon from England just to study with Engelmann. She says her children skipped kindergarten because she had taught them with DI. “I couldn’t have done it with any other program,” she says. “With smart kids you go fast, you respond to their performance, you skip some of the examples—but they still need careful instruction.”

Lindsay Boorman, whose mom used DI with her through sixth grade, graduated from high school at 16, went to college and law school, served as an assistant district attorney in Manhattan, then went to work with her mom, who runs a DI training company. She says she used DI techniques to prepare for the bar exam (which she passed on the first try), just as she used them to master helping verbs in eighth grade. “That’s just how I learn now—it’s the quickest way to master something,” she says. “If you’ve done DI enough, you know when you know and you know when you don’t know. I know when I’ve mastered something and when I haven’t. It makes me more efficient.”

But it’s more than about efficiency. Boorman’s husband, a policeman, wants their baby girl to share her love of learning. “I got that from DI,” she says. “It made me successful. I started reading when I was three. Everyone thought that was marvelous. I’m still an avid reader.”

She recalls meeting Engelmann: “It was at a party in Vermont. We were sitting on the back stairs by ourselves. I was four. He asked me if I would read to him. So I read to him—*for an hour*. He was just

enthralled. It was like I was playing him music, like I was doing something no one else had ever done. I'll never forget it. He made me feel like the most special person in the world."

One good way for you to inoculate yourselves against the myths about DI is to visit one of Linda Vinson's schools in the Elgin Foundation project and see for yourself what the kids there are learning. (Linda, would you raise your hand, please?)

The charts on display reflect the performance of nearly 7000 students in 34 schools across six districts in the coal regions of Kentucky and Virginia. What those sloping lines tell us is that these students, most of them from poor homes, are learning to read at a rate faster than the average combined learning rate for all students nationwide, rich and poor. Indeed, students in most of these schools made more reading growth last year than their predecessors in those schools did at any time prior in their history! Last year all but 16.2% of students made at least a year of reading growth. The number of students reading at or above grade level (the 50th percentile nationally) increased by 25% in first grade, 20% in second grade and 15% in third grade. According to one independent assessment, this growth rate exceeded that of at least 90% of all elementary schools in the US! At the same time, the number of students who are two to three years *below* grade level declined 60% in first grade, 53% in second grade, and 42% in third grade. Linda Vinson, congratulations! Keep it up!

DI's success in these schools discredits another popular myth: that teachers always know best how to teach their kids and should be given wide latitude in the classroom. Critics say that DI's scripted presentations limit teacher creativity and can become boring to teach. But in fact Engelmann's programs are designed to free teachers from having to reinvent the wheel for every class and subject, and to let them focus on the give-and-take with students—which, as any teacher knows, is rarely boring or predictable. Many teachers are in fact relieved that they don't have to be responsible for course design and lesson plans, on top of all their other duties in the classroom.

Let's listen to some of these teachers who have got past the myths. Here are eight, from eight different states.

"DI frees you up to do the fun stuff," Dotty Glevve in Baltimore, Maryland says.

Sunya Lewis in Spring, Texas says: “If you’re a creative person, you can be creative with DI. I was creative for 17 years, but I wasn’t reaching all my students until I had this structure. I was always playing catch up.”

Charlotte Andrist in Columbus, Ohio says: “Teachers worry that kids will be bored with DI. It’s the *opposite*—kids love getting the skills. Teachers worry that kids won’t work independently, *but it’s the opposite*. DI gives them the skills to be independent. Teachers worry that DI is tracking, that kids in the low track will get a watered down curriculum and move slower. *But it’s the opposite*. DI teaches more efficiently, more intensively, so that you don’t *have* to track. Tracking assumes ability is inborn and you can’t do anything about it. DI assumes *all* kids can learn.”

“DI is the great equalizer,” Wayne Callender in Boise, Idaho agrees.

Don Steely in Oregon says: “There is a misperception that DI is hard to teach. Initially it is, but then it’s fun because you don’t have to worry about kids with holes in their knowledge anymore.”

Robin Morris, Associate Dean of Research at Georgia State Univ. in Atlanta says: “DI works and you’ll know it works by the outcomes along the way. Most teachers really believe what they’re doing works and that they have their own evidence to point to. But *self perception of effectiveness* is not the same as an *independent evaluation of effectiveness*. DI programs give you an independent way to evaluate your effectiveness.”

Mary Bruce in Mathews, Alabama says: “Most teachers spend the whole day throwing out information without really knowing where it landed. With DI you know where it landed.”

Finally, Maria Collins in Lisle, Illinois says: “If you’re bored teaching an effective program, that’s a red flag. It means you’re not in the kid’s head. You’re focused on presenting the curriculum. If you have walked the bridge from presenting to teaching, then teaching *never* gets boring because a kid can make a mistake in a million different ways. *That’s* what’s exciting about teaching and what DI helps you deal with.”

And of course DI teachers get to experience that ultimate reward, the thing that makes it all worthwhile, the reason they became teachers in the first place: the success, trust, and indeed love of their students.

You would think that with thousands of success stories and 40 years of research showing that DI works better than any other program—you would think that the people who study these things would be crying out for more schools to use DI. You would be wrong. Most researchers refuse to publicly endorse DI, because DI is so unpopular that to endorse it would hurt their professional careers. The editors who buy their research would stop buying it. The people who supposedly *read* their research would stop reading it. And so they remain silent, they look the other way, they ignore or attack the evidence, they complain DI doesn't have *enough* evidence—even though it has more evidence than any other approach. They care more about their careers than they care about you or your kids. Please don't think I'm being paranoid, or that I'm one of those typical journalists hunting for conspiracies where there are none. Not long ago I spent two weeks defending DI against the attacks of one of these researchers. The guy had written me a very flattering email praising my book. Innocent that I am, I asked him to post a version of his praise on Amazon. After much hemming and hawing, here's the email he sent:

Dear Shep,

I enjoy discussing these issues – it's what I do. But there is no chance that I will end up writing a note to Amazon that endorses your book *or* Direct Instruction.

I worry that anything I write in praise of your book could be seen as an endorsement of DI, and that implication—however indirect—might diminish the impact of my research.

And this from a researcher who *likes* DI!

What is the price for this conspiracy of silence? How devastating is it that many of our schools refuse to adopt effective methods to teach children to read? Our prisons hold the answer: the most common feature of the US prison population is not poverty, not race—it's illiteracy. If as a child your teachers fail to teach you to read, you won't necessarily grow up to become a criminal, but if you *do* become a criminal and go to prison, chances are your teachers failed to teach you to read.

What teachers do is a matter of life and death. Don't let anyone tell you it isn't. I'll illustrate the point with a gruesome story that I intend to publish somewhere. Then I promise I'll end with a happy one.

Of the millions of illiterates who have spent time in prison, none is more notorious than Mafia hit man Salvatore “Sammy the Bull” Gravano. Sammy the Bull was the son of law-abiding, church-going immigrants in Brooklyn. His dad ran a small dress factory and earned a decent living.

Sammy attended P.S 186 in Bensonhurst and was left back twice because he couldn’t read. His teachers called him ‘a slow learner.’ His classmates taunted him for being stupid—until he started beating them up. At 13 he joined a street gang. At 16 he was so violent his parents were forced to remove him from school. He earned his nickname fighting. He became involved with the Mob at 23 and committed his first murder at 25. He went on to commit at least 18 more murders. Those were just the ones he confessed to.

Gravano stayed in the Mafia for 23 years, rising to the rank of underboss in the Gambino crime family. In 1991, he became the highest ranking member of the Five Families to break his blood oath and turn informer. His testimony helped bring down family boss John Gotti. He pled guilty to a reduced charge of racketeering, received a five-year sentence, served time, entered and left the US federal Witness Protection Program, and went back into crime. At 52 he published *Underboss*, and was sued by the families of his murder victims for \$25 million. At 57 he was convicted in Arizona of possession and distribution of a drug with a very long name I can’t pronounce, but it’s known as Ecstasy. He is currently serving a 19-year sentence at a maximum security prison in Colorado. He suffers from Graves disease, a thyroid disorder which causes fatigue, weight loss and hair loss. He is bald and has lost his eyebrows.

Gravano told his biographers that his contempt for authority began back in elementary school, when teachers called him slow and classmates made fun of him for not knowing how to read. He is still a poor reader. He shows no remorse for his actions, and the system that failed him shows no remorse either. His victims are still dead, their families still grieve, and too many schools still refuse to use reading programs that work.

I don’t mean to be harsh. Teaching is not easy. Direct Instruction demands the precision of aircraft design and the responsiveness of a jazz musician. Just being willing to *try* DI is not easy, as Linda Vinson can tell you. After all, it *is* the ugly duckling of education, and any leader who adopts it must be prepared to push past the front-end resistance and invest *heavily* in training, as Elgin has, so that your teachers can succeed. In the places where DI has been successful, teacher buy-in has been not a *precursor* or *precondition* for the program, but an *outcome* of the program. Over and over again, we see teachers

who are skeptical about starting a DI program ultimately fall in love with it once they see how well it works for their kids.

So you've taken the first step. I am grateful you're all here. Being a writer can be a lonely business, especially when you're writing about something that's not in fashion. But it's not as lonely as being that one kid, or those two or three kids, or those five or six kids in class who don't know how to read. My best friend says he admires people who can get so passionate about things they can't do anything about. Whether he had me in mind I can't say, but if he did, I hope at least one of you will take my message to heart and prove my friend wrong. I hope at least one of you will go out and make a bunch more teachers a *lot* more successful, and a bunch more kids a *lot* smarter and a *lot* less lonely by teaching them with Direct Instruction.

I promise if you do, you won't be alone. You will be joining a vanguard of some of the best people, delivering some of the best results anywhere in education. Leaders like Linda Vinson in the Elgin Project; or like Muriel Berkeley at the Baltimore Curriculum Project, one of the longest-running and most successful DI implementations in the world; or like the folks I read to you about in rural Gering, Nebraska.

Or maybe you'll be like the guy I plan to investigate and write about next: Tom Torkelson, director of the IDEA Public Schools in the Rio Grande Valley, in south Texas. IDEA is a K-12 public charter system with 20 schools enrolling 10,000 students, 82 percent of them low-income. The system has earned a rating of 'exemplary' from the Texas Education Agency. (That's TEA's highest rating.) No other K-12 public school system with such a high percentage of low income students has earned an exemplary rating, and there are over 1,000 districts in Texas. And you know what? Every single IDEA elementary school uses Direct Instruction as its core curriculum for reading and math. Surprise! Surprise!

IDEA is growing fast. It will open eight new schools next fall, including schools in San Antonio and Austin, and it expects to be running 62 schools by 2017, ultimately enrolling 50,000 students. It currently has a waiting list of 14,000 students, and despite its rapid expansion, that waitlist is growing.

Meanwhile, enrollment in the public school districts where IDEA operates is *dropping*, and my colleagues in the media are noticing: Here's a report from the *Brownsville Herald*:

“As early as 2004 Brownsville Independent School District was predicting that it would soon exceed 50,000 students. Instead, the district’s enrollment as of Sept. 9 was 49,331 compared to 49,490 at the end of last year. Meanwhile, high school enrollment *decreased* from 12,687 in 2007 to 12,653. Officials said overall enrollment increased by just 218 students since 2007. Officials said the figures indicate that students who would have gone to BISD are going to IDEA and other schools instead.”

NBA star David Robinson has just joined IDEA’s board.

Here’s IDEA founder Tom Torkelson’s biography:

Upon graduating from Georgetown University in 1997 with a degree in economics, Tom joined Teach For America and taught fourth grade in Donna, Texas for three years, after which he successfully launched the IDEA Academy in 2000, serving as the first board president and founding principal. At 24, Tom was then Texas’ youngest-ever charter school founder. Since 2000, Tom has led the replication efforts of the original school.

‘The mission of IDEA Public Schools is to ensure that students in underserved communities are prepared to succeed in college and citizenship. Currently, over 93% of graduates are on college campuses across the nation, where they continue to receive support and guidance from IDEA.

‘For the last three years, *U.S. News and World Report* has ranked IDEA College Preparatory Donna as one of the top high schools in the nation.

‘In 2009, Tom was featured in *Time* magazine as one of the 100 most influential global citizens. He has won the prestigious Peter Jennings Award for Civic Leadership and the *Freddy Fender Humanitarian Award*, and he has been named the University of Michigan Ross Business School’s Social Entrepreneur of the Year.’

Ladies and gentlemen, people like Tom Torkelson and Linda Vinson represent the future of education in America. I hope you will join them, defy the fashions of our day, and do what *the evidence* shows works best for our children. Posterity will reward you if you do.

Tennessee is the perfect place to try DI. You were one of the first states to win the coveted Race to the Top grant. You have an accountability system that is the envy of the nation: beginning this year, educators who out-perform their peers will be identified and formally rewarded for their students’ superior achievements. Best of all, you have that unique treasure, the wonderful Education Consumer’s Foundation, who will make

sure your top-performing teachers and their schools get the public recognition they deserve. As they will this afternoon.

Rest assured, Direct Instruction will make more of your teachers top-performing. DI may not be the only thing that works. But as an investigative reporter, I have found nothing else that works as well, and certainly nothing that works better. With accountability pressures rising, and education budgets falling, and competition from the school choice movement growing, maybe it's time at last to give DI a try. I hope you will. Thank you.