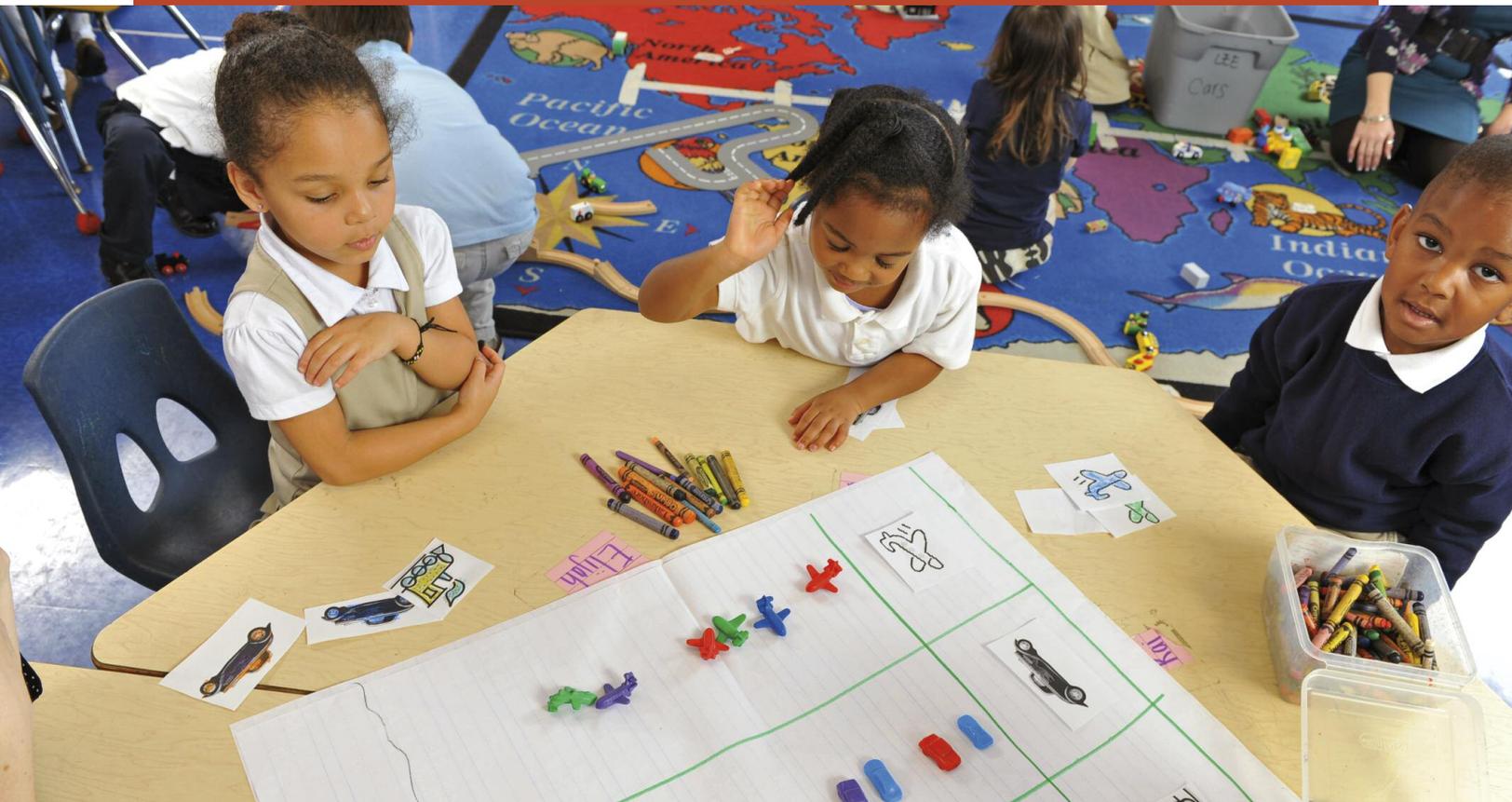


TWO DECADES OF HIGH PERFORMANCE



The Alhambra School District in Phoenix credits its continued academic progress to an 18-year relationship with Success for All.

THE CHALLENGE

The journey began in 1994, when Andalucia Primary School, along with two other Alhambra schools, turned to Success for All for a whole-school reform strategy. When student test scores began to improve, other schools in the Alhambra Elementary School District took note. Three more schools came on in 1996, and by 2000, all

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nine of the district's primary schools were using SFA. In 2006, Alhambra middle schools adopted SFA, bringing the district total to 13 of its 15 schools.

Alhambra continues to make impressive strides despite a high economically disadvantaged population (93% of students receive free or reduced-price lunch), high transiency rate and a population of English-language learners nearing 30%.



THE SOLUTION

Mara Wayland, Alhambra's superintendent of academic services, looked to SFA because of its research-proven results. "We were drawn to the success. It was replicable, and it guided teachers on how to teach reading," she says, but notes that SFA reaches far beyond reading: "It addresses the whole school. It is so much more than a reading program. You really get a systemic approach to instruction in your school."

She adds: "I absolutely don't believe there is any other program that has crossed my desk that meets the comprehensive needs that SFA does."

In a district with a high student-transiency rate, maintaining consistency is critical to giving students a stable learning environment. That's why the SFA model uses a systemic approach to ensure that all teachers use the same instructional method. "The consistency in management, in the instruction looking the same in all the classrooms – I think that's a huge part of why the program is successful," Wayland says. "That's very comforting to the

kids, to know even if their reading teacher changes, the program is the same."

SFA is also consistent for staff, emphasizing a collaborative environment. "Success for All brings a common language and a common discussion and a reliance that everybody is in this together," says Wayland. "It spills over into all parts of your other school areas. I think it has been a huge driving force in terms of consistency and expectations and creating a tone that has led to our academic success."

But Wayland also recognizes that SFA implementation can be only as good as the leadership at the school, which is why she appreciates all of SFA's built-in support for teachers. She says, "I've always said [SFA] was a staff development program disguised as a reading program."

THE RESULTS

In the 18 years that the Alhambra Elementary School District in Phoenix has worked with SFA, it has seen once-struggling schools transform into some of the state's top performers, especially for English language learners. Even after nearly two decades with the

program, Alhambra's upward momentum continues.

During the 2011-12 school year, 72% of Alhambra's students were reading on or above grade level. Two years before, that number was 70%. Wayland notes that this increase was typical of Alhambra's steady improvement; on average, the district's numbers increase by 2% each year.

The district's highest performing school, James W. Rice Primary, posted a one-year increase of 17% in students reading on or above grade level in the 2011-12 school year. The school began the year at a relatively high percentage – 77% – and throughout the year saw steady progress. By the fourth quarter, 94% of students were reading on or above grade level.

Wayland credits these impressive numbers to the extensive, ongoing support that SFA provides. Unlike some other programs, “you [don't] buy something and there it is, and you never got any support,” said Wayland. “I firmly believe SFA is our partner in this, and they have maintained a strong partnership that we value.”

SFA's longevity in Alhambra can be attributed to another very simple reason: People like it. Parents applaud the method because they can see their children make palpable progress. “Parents have said their children never learned to read until they came to our schools,” Wayland recalls. “That was very important and heartwarming for them.”

Students also love SFA because when they are taught according to their instructional needs, they progress at their own pace and often exceed even their own expectations. “When they're placed at their levels, they're successful, and they like it. They have a place where they can gain confidence,” Wayland says.

Knowing how rapidly education evolves, SFA strives to stay on the cutting edge and reflect new research in the curricula. Says Wayland, “I think it's the ongoing responsiveness to the research and updating and revisions to the program to meet [schools'] evolving needs, that keeps us coming back.”

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Continuous Improvement and Recognition

Throughout its partnership with Success for All, Alhambra's high scores and continual improvements have earned the district numerous awards and accolades. Recently, the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA) designated seven Alhambra schools – all of which use SFA – as NCEA Higher Performing Schools. This annual list recognizes Arizona public schools that are the most successful at preparing students for college and careers.

Also, since adopting SFA, six Alhambra schools have been classified as A+ Schools of Excellence, a rating from the Arizona Educational Foundation that is given to schools that demonstrate sustained high achievement or significant improvement and that identify and meet student needs inside and outside the classroom.

“Those are all things that SFA has helped put into place,” says Mara Wayland, superintendent of academic services in Alhambra, because “SFA was talking data years before data-driven instruction became the buzzword.”

FOUNDED IN 1987, the nonprofit Success for All Foundation is dedicated to ensuring that every child, from pre-kindergarten to grade 8, becomes proficient in reading and learning – opening up new doors for a lifetime of achievement. Not only has SFA been proven time and again to help with student reading ability and math performance, it also addresses non-academic concerns, improving behavior, attendance and parental involvement. Please contact us for more information.

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