

SCHOOL DISTRICT TURNS HEADS



Partnering with Success for All for many years, Carson City School District continues to improve in most areas that the state measures.

THE CHALLENGE

After learning that the Carson City School District was reappropriating its Title I funds to focus on schoolwide reading programs in 1998, Valerie Dockery, the district's grants director at the time, led the charge to find a research-proven reading strategy. She

wanted something that would not only address reading but also provide stability for Bordewich/Bray, Empire, and Mark Twain Elementary schools, which had highly transient populations.

After observing SFA's whole-school reform model in action, and its user-friendly methods, staff at the three schools were sold. More than 95% voted in favor of

implementing SFA. "We had overwhelming support," says Dockery, who is now principal of Bordewich/Bray Elementary.

John C. Fremont Elementary quickly followed the other three schools, implementing SFA the next year, while E.W. Fristch and Al Seeliger elementary schools followed in 2011 and 2012, bringing the entire school district on board.

THE SOLUTION

When Carson City first began looking for a new program, SFA stood out because of its 25 years of experience and research-based instruction. "We did not have, as a district, a strong, viable reading curriculum," says school district associate superintendent Susan Keema. "And SFA brought that to us."

SFA is composed of many parts, each of which has a specific purpose – something Dockery says influenced teachers to choose SFA. Whereas other programs use "drill and kill" methods of rote memorization, SFA incorporates a multitude of learning techniques designed to help students not only learn basic skills but also grasp integral reading concepts.

Those strategies and research-based practices are seamlessly woven into each SFA lesson, which provides organized instruction each day. Keema is pleased that SFA's routine "really helps us with making sure that all the components of teaching reading are done. I know that all the required parts like phonics, phonic awareness – all those pieces are being implemented every day."

Carson City School District needed SFA's consistent approach to support its many transient students, providing the same strategies and techniques in each building. "With SFA we had common vocabulary, we had common training," says Keema, noting that students who moved among SFA schools adapted to their new schools quickly, while students who transferred into the district from a non-SFA school took more time to acclimate.

SFA also offers teachers built-in systems that encourage constant collaboration. Carson City teachers find that component team meetings – designated times for teachers to discuss instructional issues with each other – are especially valuable. "We can all sit down with our grade summary and look at our kids and strategize. That's really powerful for us," says Dockery.

**ALL YOU HAVE TO DO
IS LOOK AT OUR DATA.
IT HAS CONTINUED
TO GROW AND
OUR KIDS ARE
CONTINUING
TO DO BETTER**

VALERIE DOCKERY, Principal



ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT [SFA] IS THAT EVERYBODY'S ON THE SAME PAGE. EVERYONE IS TEACHING WITH THE SAME PHILOSOPHIES AND THE SAME STRATEGIES.

SUSAN KEEMA, Associate Superintendent of the School District

THE RESULTS

After implementing SFA, Carson City schools' scores began a gradual climb, and academic achievements are still being made. Since 2002, the district's average Annual Measurable Objective (AMO), a state-mandated achievement target, has increased every year except one, in some cases by as many as eight percentage points. In 2002, the AMO was 37%, and it grew steadily every year. In 2012, the district average had increased to 71%, besting the AMO state minimum by 5.2 points.

Empire Elementary – which, at nearly 80%, has the district's highest free and reduced-price lunch population – was one of the first three schools to adopt SFA. After scores plateaued a few years into the school's work with SFA, administrators realized that they needed to reassess fidelity to the method. Empire renewed its focus on SFA's core concepts and recommitted to the program. It worked. In 2003, 40% of Empire students were reading on or above grade level. By the 2011–12 school year, that number had increased to 71%.

Although SFA has been in the Carson City district since 1998, it's still a cornerstone of the district's approach to education. Keema appreciates that the model is constantly evolving to address changes in education and is in step with new and emerging needs. "Just as we would think that something needed to change, SFA saw the need for that change as well and would come up with a modification," she says.

Teachers in Carson City continue take pride in their work and they, like their students, strive for success. "What they expect of themselves is really high," Dockery. "They really want to do everything well, and I think that's so important."

School District Turns Heads

Success for All's many types of student assessments supply teachers and administrators with tangible measures of student progress, ranging from individual pupils to classrooms to the whole-school level. The data allows Carson City School District teachers and administrators to see where students need more practice and alter instruction accordingly.

Says district associate superintendent Susan Keema, "It is a strong, viable tool to support student learning – a common measure of what students should know and be able to demonstrate."

Carson City teachers have also found that SFA gives them instructional techniques in a solid teaching framework that extends throughout the school day. Keema notes that math, social studies and science all utilize SFA concepts, particularly the program's cornerstone: collaborative learning, "which is so important for today's world, and most of our test scores show it."

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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