

LEADING BY EXAMPLE



Liberty Elementary takes on a leadership
role for new 13 schools.



THE CHALLENGE

The Sunnyside School District in Arizona is a longtime Success for All partner with a long track record of success. Three schools have used the program for more than a decade, and three more have started SFA this year as part of the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation (i3) initiative.

Of these, Liberty Elementary has emerged as the leader of the pack for schools both old and new. It's no surprise, given their performance: they consistently outscore the state average on the reading AIMS test by a comfortable margin, despite having a 90% free and reduced-price lunch population.

This strong record of success, coupled with the school's 11 years of experience with SFA, has promoted Liberty into a mentorship position with the new Sunnyside schools that are delving into the program as part of the i3 scale-up grant.

To get to their current level of achievement, however, Liberty had to overcome a few speed bumps along the way. After initial success using the program, scores plateaued a few years ago, and the staff became "a little complacent," according to Guadalupe Rosales, the school SFA facilitator.

THE SOLUTION

In response to the situation, the Liberty staff decided to upgrade to SFA Reading Roots 4th Edition and participate in extra professional-development days, with the aim of reinvigorating their approach to SFA's whole-school reform program.

"We started using [SFA's] team scoresheet records again instead of having teachers use their own," says Rosales. "We went back to following the program with fidelity."

While using SFA scoresheets instead of their own might seem like a minor adjustment, it allowed Liberty to better track data across grade levels, diagnose problem areas and design solutions. Liberty implemented the SFA's online Member Center to more efficiently track and break down their classroom data. The Member Center program is designed to analyze data to give clear indicators of performance levels, for both individual students and classrooms.

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THE RESULTS

The positive effect of SFA's online data tools on Liberty's performance led the school to upgrade to Member Center 2.0, which increases the number of data metrics not only schoolwide, but across the entire network of SFA schools.

Liberty Elementary principal Edeida Orca is quick to credit the help desk of the SFA Member Center for its meticulous, step-by-step support in learning to use the abundant available resources effectively, and for SFA overall in helping the school to lift off its plateau.

With its experience, Liberty also hopes to help the new SFA schools to make their own breakthroughs. To this end, Liberty has given them access to its classrooms. Teachers and administrators from these new schools have spent "hours and hours" observing the program in action at Liberty, providing an invaluable supplement to the training they are receiving from SFA.

Orci has a few simple words of encouragement for the newcomers: "The biggest challenge is regrouping the students and getting the materials ready, figuring out what goes with what. Once that's done, it's a relief."

After the initial program adjustment period, the new schools should fall in love with SFA, according to Rosales and Orci. In fact, working with the new schools has reminded them both of their first experiences working with SFA after years of struggling to improve reading, despite hard work by dedicated teachers: "We were spinning our wheels with nothing to show for it. SFA was a Godsend," recalls Orci.

Adds Rosales: "After one year of experience, I thought 'finally, I'm learning how to teach reading.'"



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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