

SUCCESS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM



An Ohio school district implements Success for All and realizes benefits that extend outside the classroom.

THE CHALLENGE

Success for All is known for how it increases reading comprehension, but the real selling point for many is its whole-school approach to reform. It's what drove Lincoln Heights Elementary in Cincinnati's Princeton City School District to implement SFA in 2011. The school sought a strategy that would address the many needs of the surrounding economically disadvantaged community.

"I really was drawn to the idea of making changes that would not only impact our students academically but [also] help with the climate and culture of our building – the attendance of our students, the overall discipline," says Brenda Miller, principal of Lincoln Heights, where 96% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

Lincoln Heights is one of eight elementary schools in the district that adopted SFA – something that would not have been feasible without the federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant awarded to four schools in the district.



THE SOLUTION

Miller worked hard to help her school take advantage of all the resources that SFA provides. "The entire reform includes not just the reading implementation but [also] the network. And all of the things fit within the SFA model," she says. "We were able to just build on them and strengthen them or align them with our goals and objectives."

SFA's Leading for Success Schoolwide Solutions teams is one invaluable resource that the school drew on, addressing nonacademic issues that may hinder student achievement. With the Community Connections team, for example, the school was able to marshal and focus the community and school resources at its disposal.

"We have had the benefit of a lot of volunteers from the community and of businesses around us, as well as support from various churches in the community," says Miller. "We've been able to do a lot of incentives and celebrations to really make [student achievement] the focus and the priority."

Knowing how vital home support is, Miller also utilized the Parent and Family Involvement team to drive home to parents how crucial their role is in their children's learning. "From day one, we were explaining to them that kids need to read every night," she says, as well as pointing out the importance of "celebrating and rewarding kids for doing their Read and Responds outside of school."

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THE RESULTS

One year into the partnership with SFA, Lincoln Heights saw significant improvement in reading scores and school climate. In fall 2011, the school's baseline was 25.5% of students reading on or above grade level. At the end of the school year, fourth-quarter assessments showed that the number had more than doubled to 52%. "For us, that was just a tremendous affirmation that we're headed in the right direction," Miller says.

Miller credits SFA with igniting both student and staff enthusiasm. "With first-year implementation, the entire focus and energy in the building was on reading," she says. "I think there was such a buzz and so much energy around reading that it caught fire."

The new enthusiasm for reading is hard to miss. As Miller notes, "Where we're seeing that most prevalent is with our younger students. They're hungry for success." In the first quarter, 34% of kindergartners were reading at or above grade level. At the end of the year, the number had jumped to 75%. "[We] had tears in our eyes when little kids who came in barely [able to] speak were actually reading."

Second-grade teacher Kevin Hardy has also seen students' new zeal for reading: "We do a lot of reading assessments, and a lot of kids keep on reading because they want to know how the passage ends. That's just not something we've seen in the past."

Not only have children demonstrated increased reading ability, but they have also shown improvements in vocabulary. "Working in an urban, high-poverty area, vocabulary is a big deal. They just don't have a lot of background knowledge about different vocabulary words," says SFA facilitator Alana Parsons. "And the increase in their oral language has been pretty amazing also."

As an added bonus, Miller has noticed that vandalism has decreased and students are taking more pride in their school. "The kids have planted gardens and flowers on the school grounds. I think it's just an increase of ownership of the school," she says. "I think the school has an opportunity to be a beacon, a safe haven within the community."

Moving into its second year, Lincoln Heights knows that with SFA it can set the bar even higher. Formerly a school on watch, it has turned into a learning institution that's poised for greater things. "I see our school becoming an excellent school," says Miller. "I feel that if we stay the course, that's where we will end up."

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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KEVIN HARDY, Teacher

Making the Transition Easy

Prior to implementing Success for All, some teachers at Lincoln Heights Elementary had concerns that the program might be overly rigid and not allow for creativity in their classrooms. However, they soon found this is not the case.

"The thing I love about SFA is it's not completely scripted," says the school's SFA facilitator Alana Parsons. "You can add our school's personality and our individual teacher's personality, and that's what helps make it successful."

Teacher Kevin Hardy points out that professional development is an invaluable part of SFA, enabling teachers to meet to discuss common challenges, ways to improve practices and to share ideas and resources to help students achieve. He adds: "It's also unique to have on-site coaching available to assist in implementation. That's just something we hadn't seen before."



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