

## HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION FOR MILITARY CHILDREN



Coping with a transient student population,  
Lackland Elementary School has developed a recipe  
for long-term academic success.

## THE CHALLENGE

Not surprisingly, the elementary school on the Lackland Air Force Base has a highly transient student population. As Air Force personnel and their families are shuttled between deployments, Lackland Elementary School will only retain about 40% of their student base in a given year.

Getting new students up to speed and giving outgoing students the tools they need to be successful in a new learning environment are ongoing challenges for the teaching staff. The school also must get new teachers quickly acclimated to its fast-track learning process.

## THE SOLUTION

For more than 23 years, Lackland Elementary School has relied on the cooperative learning strategies of Success for All to provide consistency amid constant change and to quickly get both students and new teachers on board with its proven teaching methods.

Incoming students' reading abilities are quickly and accurately assessed, strategies are put in place to help them progress, and teachers are given the tools and the information they need to fill in any educational gaps.

When principal Terry Leija came on board in January 2008, she was told by the outgoing principal in no uncertain terms that using SFA was "non-negotiable." No problem. Ms. Leija had experience with the research-based methods of SFA in her previous school, and so did not have to be convinced.

Since only 5% of the existing Lackland staff first introduced to SFA is still there, an effective method of bringing new teachers up to speed had to be put into place. To accomplish this, Ms. Leija and SFA facilitator Ms. Payne use a combination of encouraging new teachers to maintain fidelity to the teaching methods and principles of SFA while also using creativity in how they are applied.

## NO MATTER HOW SHORT A STUDENT'S TENURE AT THE SCHOOL, THEY LEARN QUICKLY TO "AIM HIGH ... FLY-FIGHT-WIN".

"When you first start cooking, you get the red-and-white Betty Crocker Cookbook and you follow every direction, reading and checking every measurement," Ms. Payne explains in her analogy for the process.

"As you become familiar with cooking, you begin to understand why things work the way they do and the relationship to outcomes. Eventually you learn how to make things even better and you become a better, more intuitive cook. And one day you are cooking out of the Emeril Lagasse cookbook."

The idea is, teachers must get to know the SFA program inside and out first, and then, with coaching, they can make modifications in how they use the program, to ensure the best instruction for their students. They must ensure that they have a strong rationale for their approaches, which will also help achieve desired outcomes.

The facilitator and principal also ensure that incoming staff are helped or mentored by veteran staff. Not only are the new educators quickly taught to work with SFA in the classroom, the veteran teachers reinforce and expand their own knowledge as they help others "to cook."

In this two-plus-decade process, the school has learned that success is built on trial and error. During supportive component team meetings, staff examines ideas that work and those that didn't – and then takes learning from the latter to build more successful outcomes.

## THE RESULTS

Nothing breeds success like success. Despite the challenges of a transitory school population and new staff coming and leaving, Lackland Elementary School has been able to achieve and maintain an 83% proficiency in the State reading assessment over the years. The principal and facilitator are equally pleased that they are helping prepare the students leaving school for new educational challenges ahead.

The outstanding results have also motivated the school to recommit to SFA's Getting Along Together, which helps students build social and emotional skills and apply them both in and out of the classroom. The program has a three-pronged focus: students learn thinking and cognitive skills, emotional management, as well as interpersonal and social skills.

Already incorporating the program's methods into class council meetings and elsewhere, the program is helping give incoming students the emotional coping mechanisms needed to acclimatize them to their new learning environment.

No matter how short a student's tenure at the school, they learn quickly to "Aim High ... Fly-Fight-Win" in the academic realm.



**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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