

NOTHING LESS THAN THE BEST!



Dillon Middle School took the walk from the “Corridor of Shame” to a transformed teaching model, improving student performance and behavior.



THE CHALLENGE

In 2006, J.V. Martin was featured in Bud Ferillo's documentary "Corridor of Shame," highlighting the decrepit condition of schools along South Carolina's Interstate 95. Its status was reconfirmed publicly when, in 2009, President Obama referred to J.V. Martin in the State of Union address. One of the school's students, who had written to Congress asking for help for the crumbling institution, was seen sitting with First Lady Michelle Obama.

The decaying facility was upgraded with a mixture of grants and low-interest loans from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and in September 2012, J.V. Martin was replaced by Dillon Middle School, serving grades 6 to 8.

But the school faced another challenge. For several years in a row it had received an unsatisfactory rating from the state, failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) as required under No Child Left Behind.

Located in a rural area, Dillon houses approximately 750 students, with a 75%-25% African American-Caucasian split. The number

of students on free and reduced lunch is 94%. Many of the students live in single-parent households or are raised by their grandparents. The school is viewed as a safe haven for youth in the community, so school faculty and staff wanted to do everything they could to provide opportunities for students, in keeping with the school motto of "Nothing Less Than the Best!"

The middle school started to investigate why its performance was so unsatisfactory, even with good teachers. "Our kids were not very good readers," says Principal Rodney Cook. "I knew that for us to be successful as a school and also for our student population to be successful that we had to begin something to help our kids become better readers."

THE SOLUTION

After speaking with other school principals who used Success for All's programs to achieve positive results, Cook decided that SFA was the right fit for his school. Using part of the funds from a \$2.1 million, three-year grant made under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (offered to the lowest-performing schools in each state), Dillon Middle School implemented SFA.

"SFA has become a given with all teachers," says SFA school facilitator Kathi Campbell. "Everybody knows they're going to teach this program the first hour of the day. One of the biggest effects of the first year implementing it was that teachers knew students' individual reading levels and what grade level they were reading on. They didn't have to wait until the end of the year to find out how they were doing. We became driven by that data."

Teachers started to group students in classrooms according to reading ability and use the data to differentiate their instruction. Every eight weeks the teachers meet to reassess the data and reassign students according to their current ability. Every child is discussed individually and recommendations are tailored to their special needs and abilities.

At the end of the 2012-13 school year, after using SFA for four years, Dillon received a B rating from the state, according to the ESEA accountability reports. The school is thrilled with its progress and now has an A rating as a goal.

"Five years ago, we started changing lives with SFA," says Campbell, "because now we've made readers out of students who were not readers."

WE HAVE SOME STUDENTS WHO HAVE BECOME LIFELONG LEARNERS. YOU CAN SEE THEM READING IN THE MORNING BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS, DURING THE SCHOOL DAY AND AFTER SCHOOL WAITING ON THE BUSES.

RODNEY COOK, Principal

THE RESULTS

In 2014, Dillon adopted the Reading Edge Middle Grades 2nd Edition, an updated version of SFA's middle school reading program that aligns with Common Core Standards. After a special effort to help teacher to adjust to the new program, the results paid off. At the end of the year the 7% of sixth graders considered advanced readers rose to 13%, and the 24% considered proficient rose to 45%. Students in grades 7 and 8 saw similar leaps in reading ability.

Campbell insists that SFA has "taught us how to change our way of thinking. In every classroom students are working in groups. It also taught teachers how to do more modeling for students to demonstrate what they want their students to learn. We utilize these strategies in our content classes as well, not just SFA."

Principal Cook adds: "We have some students who have become lifelong learners. You can see them reading in the morning before school starts, during the school day and after school waiting on the buses. They're becoming more successful in other areas as well, whether it's math, science, social studies or language arts. It all comes back to the success they feel with Success for All."

He also points out that with SFA, behavioral problems have decreased and many teachers use its cooperative-learning strategies to motivate kids throughout the day. But the single biggest improvement may be the increase in parental involvement. Five years ago the school was lucky to get 25 people to show up on a parent's night; now that number has grown to 200. Campbell attributes the increased involvement to a proactive effort, encouraged by SFA, to welcome parents into the school and get them to participate.

Embracing the Write Stuff

Dillon Middle School principal Rodney Cook knows that Success for All has improved both his students reading and writing. SFA is designed on a seven-day rotation, with one of those days devoted to writing. "We added an eighth day to the program," he says, taking advantage of SFA's flexibility, adapting itself to each school's special needs. "So that instead of one day of writing per cycle our students now have two. That has really improved our writing scores over the last three years."

Dillon now holds a parent night every nine weeks. And for the first one of the year, the school talks about SFA and gives a presentation about how it works. Parents are invited to sit with their children during a reading block and are given regular progress updates.

As the parents and students walk down the school corridors, the old feelings of shame are replaced by ones of pride in accomplishment.

SFA HAS BECOME A GIVEN WITH ALL TEACHERS. ONE OF THE BIGGEST EFFECTS IMPLEMENTING IT IS THAT TEACHERS KNOW STUDENTS' INDIVIDUAL READING LEVELS AND WHAT GRADE LEVEL THEY WERE READING ON. WE BECOME DRIVEN BY THAT DATA."

KATHI CAMPBELL, SFA Facilitator

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.

LEARN MORE! SUCCESSFORALL.ORG

Success for All
FOUNDATION®

