

RISING AFTER THE FALL



Despite an inauspicious beginning on 9/11, an Ohio school district has turned its partnership with Success for All into outstanding results and national recognition.

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CHRIS BRANSON, Director of Special Education for Blanchester Intermediate

THE CHALLENGE

The first day of Success for All district training for Blanchester City Schools in Ohio, held in September 2001, couldn't have gone worse: “We found ourselves crammed in an office, watching the twin towers fall on TV,” says Chris Branson, director of special education for Blanchester Intermediate and former principal at Putman Elementary.

Despite the looming shadow of 9/11, the district still had a mission: improve their low reading scores. Putman Elementary, a K-3 school, was struggling at the time, with just 33% of third-grade students reading at or above grade level.

Bridgid Carson, a teacher at Putman Elementary at the time and current principal of Blanchester Intermediate, remembers the scattershot, ineffective approach the school took to address reading performance: “Everybody did their own thing. Some were doing awareness, some whole language, some were doing cutesy stuff. Nobody was focusing on teaching reading strategies.”

THE SOLUTION

When the initial training was completed and SFA implemented in the Blanchester School District, the biggest change was the transition from a fragmented school culture to a whole-school approach. The teachers who were used to their own methods of instruction had to adopt a new strategy.

“With SFA, it went from ‘my kids’ to everybody’s kids; everyone had a stake in each child’s development,” says Branson.

One of the most important benefits of SFA, according to Carson and Cole, is the early intervention strategies for students with learning disabilities. Like many other school districts, Blanchester had seen an increase in its special-education population as a result of an overall rise in diagnosed ADHD and autistic children. Despite these challenges, Putman Elementary and Blanchester Intermediate have reduced their special-ed populations, a reduction Branson credits to SFA’s cognitive

strategies and its grade-level grouping arrangement.

“Our biggest reservation before adopting SFA was the reaction kids would have to being regrouped,” she said, “but the kids don’t mind their reading group at all.”



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BRIDGID CARSON, Principal



THE RESULTS

Since the Blanchester School District started using SFA a decade ago, its schools have made amazing progress across the board. Putman Elementary was recently honored as a National Blue Ribbon school, placing it within the top 1% of schools in the nation. Blanchester Intermediate, which serves grades four and five, isn't far behind – 90% of those students are reading at or above grade level.

Throughout the years of SFA implementation, reading scores rose steadily. In 2002, the number of third-grade students reading at or above grade level went from 33% to 56%. The next year, the scores went up to 74%. In the fourth year, the scores cracked 80%, beating the Ohio achievement baseline of 76%.

“We’ve never missed since,” says Carson.

While the awards and recognition have been welcome, both Carson and Branson take the most pride in Blanchester becoming a destination district for parents of children in open enrollment and for having a high level of parental involvement:

“The parents are very much in tune with what their child is doing in reading and beyond,” says Carson.

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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