

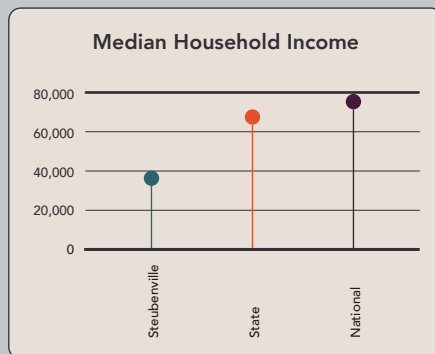
# Steubenville City Schools Defy the Odds with SFAs Proven Model



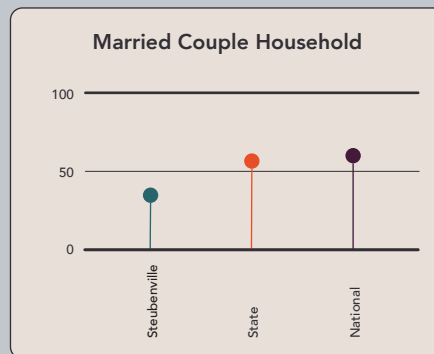
## District overview

Steubenville City Schools have gained national attention for their reading scores, which outpace some of the wealthiest districts in the country. This achievement has caused some researchers to claim Steubenville could be the “best school district in America.”

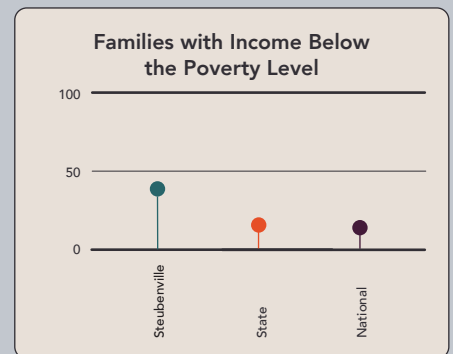
Located in the rust belt of Ohio, Steubenville serves approximately 2,850 students across its six schools. Eighty percent of students in Steubenville qualify for free or reduced meals, and median income in Steubenville is half the national average.



The median household income in Steubenville is more than half the national average (\$36,943 versus \$75,149).



Thirty-six percent (36%) of children in Steubenville live in a married couple household compared to the national average of 63%.



Over 40% of families live below the poverty level compared to the 14% national average.

Source: The NCES [Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates \(EDGE\)](#) uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey to create custom indicators of social, economic, and housing conditions for school-age children and their parents.

## The challenge

In 1999, Ohio's fourth-grade reading retention law raised the stakes for Steubenville, where poverty and transiency had widened literacy gaps. The district faced a decision: fail entire grades of children who struggled to read, or find out exactly how to help them learn to read. “We had to act decisively,” reflects the assistant superintendent at the time, Richard Ranallo, in *APMreports' Sold a Story* (2025). After researching evidenced-based programs, the district chose Success for All due to its systems-building approach and its proven results in closing literacy gaps. They never looked back.

## The solution

Success for All partnered with school leaders and teachers in Steubenville, helping them build a cohesive system across its five schools that serve PreK-8th grade students. This system aligns critical elements of education: leadership, instruction, learning, family involvement, and social-emotional development. Teachers in each school were also trained to implement SFAs science of reading based curriculum, and active instructional practices aligned with learning science research.

SFA partners with educators in these Steubenville schools for lasting impact:

- East Elementary
- West Elementary
- McKinley STEM Academy
- Wells Academy
- Harding Middle School

“

When anyone asks, 'Why do you have such success?' we start with SFA.

~ Superintendent Melinda Young

”

As a whole-school improvement model, SFA helps build instructional capacity, improve school culture, and boost student achievement. Among the components of SFA:

- A dedicated coach who partners with educators and supports the effective implementation of SFA.
- Establishment of critical structures to support and sustain improved learning outcomes, attendance, and meaningful family engagement.
- Extensive training on research-based instructional practices to ensure continuity of exceptional instruction across classrooms.
- Science of reading-based curriculum and materials combined with ongoing implementation support.
- Targeted, built-in interventions rooted in science of reading and aligned with classroom instruction.

## Results

Despite high rates of poverty, Steubenville students have outperformed districts consistently since adopting SFA more than 20 years ago.

