Success for All Foundation

# How ADLA Created Systemwide Literacy Growth with SFA

## Transformation across 32 schools – and counting.

**School:** The Archdiocese of Los Angeles School System

**Location:** Los Angeles, California

**School Type:** Urban, private

**SFA Implementation Start:** 2023 (18 schools); 2024 (14 schools)

BY THE NUMBERS

## In one trimester:

**32** schools implemented SFA

**243 more students** were reading at or above grade level by Trimester 1.

**54%** **of students reading at/above grade level,** a 9-percentage-point systemwide increase

### Why is reading growth in 2nd and 3rd grade so important?

**Second and third grade are pivotal years in reading development.** Students are building the fluency, automatic word recognition, vocabulary, and comprehension they need to read increasingly complex text independently. By the end of third grade, strong reading skills become increasingly important for learning across subjects—and students who are not reading proficiently face greater risk of later academic difficulty.

Sources: National Research Council, Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success (1999); Lesnick et al., Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (2010).

THE CHALLENGE

## From Fragmented Instruction to Systemwide Literacy

As one of the largest non-public school systems in the United States, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ADLA) needed to **find a high-quality literacy program to help their students across 32 elementary schools succeed in the classroom and life.**

After the pandemic, learning gaps widened and left **more than half of students in grades 1–5 behind in reading skills.**

Across ADLA's schools, students arrived with a wide range of reading levels. Without a shared instructional approach, teachers were left navigating that variation largely on their own. The instinct in many systems is to respond by layering in more: more programs, more interventions, and more supplemental materials to fill the gaps. But that approach creates its own problem.

A 2026 Fordham Institute survey found that **93% of K-3 teachers already use multiple reading curricula they're expected to piece together** to meet a wide range of needs, often without a change in outcomes.

ADLA leadership saw a different path. Rather than adding to an already fragmented instructional landscape, ADLA leadership wanted to build something coherent: a single model for excellent literacy instruction that could work consistently across an entire system of schools.

For Superintendent Escala, that model was already proven. He had seen Success for All (SFA) work firsthand in previous schools, and he believed it could do the same at scale in ADLA. The Solidarity Schools Initiative (SSI) became the organizational structure through which that vision was put into practice.

Through SSI, ADLA launched SFA—a schoolwide literacy model that combines a science of reading-aligned curriculum, evidence-based instruction, coaching, and implementation support. With SFA, teachers are given the tools, routines, and ongoing support to help every student succeed.

> "SFA is a science-based reading curriculum. But it goes beyond curriculum," said Escala. "Functionally, it serves **as a cultural transformation of schools where the joy of reading becomes a cornerstone of a school's culture."**

THE SOLUTION

## Building a Supportive Community Before Scaling SFA

Understanding the challenges faced by small schools with one class per grad ADLA dedicated its Academic Excellence team to organizing schools into two cohorts:

**Cohort 1:**
18 schools, started 2023-2024

**Cohort 2:**
14 schools, started 2024-2025 with the Gradual Start model and fully implemented in 2025-2026

For both cohorts, ADLA partnered closely with principals and SFA coaches, and leveraged SFA structures to support high-quality implementation across all 32 schools.

With SFA's *Gradual Start model*, Cohort 2 focused on establishing the leadership structures and classroom culture needed to sustain long-term success through two foundational SFA components: *Leading for Success* and *Getting Along Together.*

**Aligning Leadership and Instruction: Leading for Success**
Leading for Success is SFA's leadership and implementation approach. It helps leaders and educators put the structures, routines, and shared practices in place that strong schoolwide implementation requires.

Using these structures and the cohort model, ADLA distributed the work of improvement beyond a single leader or classroom. Through leadership routines and Schoolwide Solutions teams that are central to SFA's model, their schools began looking more closely at the barriers that keep students from making progress—attendance, behavior, intervention needs, family involvement, and community connections. Using intentional structures, educators had a clearer way to align support around student success, not just deliver reading instruction.

**Building Classroom Culture: Getting Along Together**
Getting Along Together is SFA's social-emotional learning and school culture approach. It helps schools build the shared expectations, routines, and student skills that support cooperation, goal setting, problem solving, and strong classroom learning. "Teachers are more confident with the SFA routines, lesson structures, and data-driven grouping," said Anabel Rodriguez, Principal of St. Michael's School. "We see improved transitions, stronger participation during reading blocks, and more intentional use of assessment data to inform instruction."

With that foundation in place, Cohort 2 was ready to move into full implementation of SFA's literacy curriculum.

## Gaining Reading (and Confidence) Momentum

Within a few months of implementing Success for All's curriculum and implementation structures, classrooms began to shift. Attendance went up, family involvement increased, and the school saw a positive impact on overall student behavior. Teachers were no longer operating in silos, students started to share routines and expectations, and leaders united around common goals.

In just one trimester, systemwide reading proficiency increased from 45% to 54%, meaning **243 more students were reading at or above grade level.**

"The impact has been tremendous," said Lionel Garcia, Principal, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish School, Oxnard (Cohort 1). "We shifted into **a culture of huge momentum and confidence building… Success for All has really improved that level of camaraderie within the staff because they see the results."**

### Systemwide Proficiency Gains by Grade.

| Grade | **Before SFA:** *Students reading at or above grade level* | **After Trimester 1:** *Students reading at or above grade level* | Percentage Point Gain |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Grade 2** | 48% | 64% | +16% |
| **Grade 3** | 46% | 61% | +15% |
| **Grade 4** | 40% | 53% | +13% |
| **Grade 5** | 35% | 45% | +10% |

First-grade classes also saw impressive reading proficiency gains in the first trimester, especially in:

- Santa Isabel School's 1st grade class (+20 percentage points, Cohort 2)
- Santa Clara School's 1st grade class (+17 percentage points, Cohort 2)
- Our Lady of Loretto School's 1st grade class (+15 percentage points, Cohort 1)

Meanwhile, in the earliest grades, social, emotional, and cooperative foundations were helping create the conditions for stronger reading instruction to take hold.

PreK and Kindergarten teachers quickly saw that cooperative learning, Getting Along Together routines and practices, and strong classroom structures had a positive impacted in their classrooms.. Students were participating more, talking with partners, managing routines, and building confidence as learners.
In several schools, leaders reported that the reading block quickly became one of the most productive and focused parts of the school day.

"Whenever I conduct observations during SFA time, the students seem to be more engaged than they are in any other subject," said Lyanne Novales, Principal of Guardian Angel Catholic School.

Students noticed the impact, too.

> "When SFA wasn't there, I had a really hard time reading," said Ian Hernandez, a 5th-grade student at Saint Columbkille School (Cohort 1). "I used to need help from the teacher, but I feel good because now I can read on my own."

And as reading skills improved, confidence and excitement for the future followed.

"Reading will help me because if I want to be an engineer, I'll need to do a lot of reading…to build something," said Allison Vargas, a 3rd-grade student at Our Lady of Victory School (Cohort 1).

Allison's mom, Wendy Cardona, saw her quiet and timid daughter start to come out of her shell as her reading skills improved.

"We feel her confidence level went from zero to 100," said Cardona. "Now, she wants to speak in front of the public, and she'll help someone read something. Her confidence level has gone up a lot."

Escala's vision is to implement SFA in all schools. In 2026-2027, SFA will expand into 68 schools total, including middle and high school.

"We're looking forward to seeing much more success in the coming years," said Escala. "We believe every child should have access to this."

BRING SFA TO YOUR SCHOOL

## SFA works in schools of all kinds. See how it can work in yours.

ADLA is one example of what's possible when strong literacy instruction is supported by a coordinated schoolwide system.

To learn more about Success for All, visit www.successforall.org or email sfainfo@successforall.org.


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