



From 15 years on the improvement list to a school known for teaching children to read.

How Edwin Loe Elementary built the instruction, systems, and shared responsibility to change its trajectory.

School: Edwin Loe Elementary

Location: New Town, North Dakota

School Type: Rural public elementary

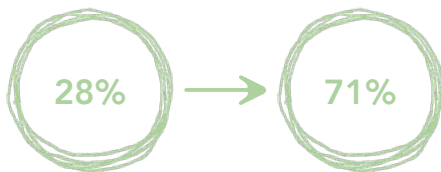
SFA Implementation Start: 2019

Recognition: Dr. Robert Slavin

Success for All Award, 2023

BY THE NUMBERS

A complete transformation



students reading on grade level, 2019–2023



on North Dakota's school improvement list before SFA



to move off the improvement list after implementing SFA

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

Reading proficiency in elementary school is a critical skill for success in later schooling and life. Research consistently shows that students who are not reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade are significantly more likely to struggle academically and are at much greater risk of dropping out of high school. **Helping more students reach proficiency by 3rd grade is one of the most reliable predictors of long-term academic success.**



THE CHALLENGE

Hard work wasn't translating into reading success.

For years, Edwin Loe Elementary had been working to change its trajectory. Teachers were working hard, but too many students were still struggling with reading, and the school remained on North Dakota's list of schools needing improvement.

Principal Jenell Bear saw a school community that wanted better for its students, and educators who were willing to work for it. But effort alone wasn't enough. The school needed a clearer, more coordinated way to strengthen instruction and respond when students needed more support.

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“You could feel it in the building. Our teachers were working so incredibly hard, but we still weren't seeing improvement. Families knew we were on the list. Kids knew, too.”

— Principal Jenell Bear

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THE SOLUTION

A schoolwide system—not another reading program.

Jenell already knew Success for All. Her mother, a first-grade teacher in Montana, had used the model for years. Its research base and the coherence of the approach stood out.

But Jenell also knew that successful implementation could not depend on one principal deciding what everyone else would do.

She began with her teacher leadership team, made up of representatives from each grade level, and asked them to engage seriously in the decision. Their support helped build ownership among colleagues before the work began. The district superintendent also protected Jenell's instructional leadership time by hiring an assistant principal to take on more non-instructional responsibilities.

THE FIRST YEAR

Learning a new way to work together.

The first year was demanding.

Teachers were learning Success for All's instructional routines and cooperative learning structures. The school was beginning new assessment and regrouping cycles. Teachers were becoming more familiar with shared expectations for instruction, data, and observation.

Edwin Loe also began without a formal SFA facilitator. A paraprofessional with reading-intervention experience stepped into the role temporarily and later returned to school, earned her master's degree, and became the school's full-time SFA facilitator.

There was a lot to learn. But one change became apparent quickly: students were doing more of the thinking.

They knew their roles. They talked through texts. They worked with one another. Teachers began shifting from doing the cognitive work for students to creating the structure for students to read, discuss, explain, and solve problems themselves.

"The brain that's working is the brain that's learning."

“

"Our coaches said that constantly and it really stuck with us. We had to stop doing all the work for kids and Success for All showed us exactly how to do that."

— Principal Jenell Bear

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Small assessment gains and visible changes in student engagement helped the staff keep going through a difficult first year.

YEAR TWO

Strong instruction was becoming a schoolwide responsibility.

As teachers gained confidence with instruction, Edwin Loe had more capacity to strengthen the systems surrounding it.

Schoolwide teams worked on priorities including family involvement, school culture, attendance, intervention, and writing. Teachers increasingly shared responsibility for identifying problems, reviewing data, and determining what the school should do next.

The change also began extending beyond the literacy block.

WHEN SFA BECAME THEIR OPERATING SYSTEM

Data became a routine. Improvement became everyone's work.

At Edwin Loe, regrouping became much more than moving students from one reading group to another.

During each cycle, Jenell and the school's SFA facilitator set aside time to look closely at student performance, comprehension, fluency, classroom trends, engagement, growth, and the instructional environment each student needed next.

Students became part of that process too.

They began asking about their growth, celebrating success, and understanding what they needed to improve to reach the next goal.

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“If you want to move up, here's your current level of mastery and here's where we need to get you. We know what to do. Let's do this together.”

— Principal Jenell Bear

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The practices spread beyond reading.

By the third year, Jenell noticed something that told her the work was becoming part of the school rather than remaining a separate literacy initiative.

“By year three, I'd walk into math or social studies and think I was watching an SFA lesson.”

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“Teachers were transferring SFA's routines and strategies in every subject area, not just reading block.”

— Principal Jenell Bear

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Students were talking, explaining their thinking, working together, and using familiar learning routines throughout the day.

Teachers also increasingly chose their SFA reading block when Jenell came to conduct annual observations—something she saw as a sign that instruction they once found overwhelming had become an area of confidence.

COACHING WHEN THE LANDSCAPE CHANGED

The work did not happen in a vacuum.

When North Dakota shifted its expectations around the science of reading, questions emerged about whether SFA met the state's requirements. Edwin Loe's SFA coach asked Jenell for the state criteria and crosswalked SFA to those requirements, helping the school document the alignment and continue moving forward.

That kind of support mattered because Edwin Loe was not simply adopting materials. Teachers and leaders were learning how to implement a complete model well—and how to keep strengthening it as expectations and needs changed.

THE RESULTS

From “I can’t read” to “We teach every child to read.”

By 2023, four years after Edwin Loe began Success for All, the percentage of students reading on grade level had increased from **28% to 71%**. The school had already been removed from North Dakota’s improvement list within two years of implementation, after spending 15 years on it.

But the change at Edwin Loe went beyond one measure.

TEACHERS

A common way to teach—and improve.

Teachers built shared instructional routines, became more comfortable using student data, and worked together on schoolwide priorities. Practices that began in the SFA reading block increasingly appeared throughout the school day.

One veteran teacher summed up the instructional shift this way:

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“All those years I taught reading, I didn’t really understand it until we started SFA.”

— Edwin Loe teacher with 40 years of experience

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STUDENTS

Readers who know where they are—and where they’re going.

Students became more active participants in their learning. They talked about their reading levels and goals, asked what they needed to do to become more proficient readers, and learned to see progress as something they could understand and influence.

FAMILIES + COMMUNITY

The school’s reputation changed.

As reading outcomes improved, families noticed.

A phrase began circulating in the community:

“If you want your child to learn to read, go to Edwin Loe.”

In 2023, Success for All recognized Edwin Loe with the Dr. Robert Slavin Success for All Award for its student success, strong implementation, and schoolwide commitment to improvement.

WHAT EDWIN LOE LEARNED

Build ownership before expecting change.

Jenell brought respected teacher leaders into the process early. Implementation was not something being done to teachers; educators had a role in building it.

Expect the work to take work.

The first year was demanding. Teachers had new routines to learn, new structures to build, and new expectations to make their own. Coaching and strong leadership helped the school work through that difficulty rather than abandon the effort.

Build a system that is bigger than one person.

Instructional routines, regrouping, data practices, teacher leadership, coaching, and schoolwide teams helped improvement become part of how Edwin Loe operates—not something dependent on one teacher, leader, or initiative.

Jenell's advice to another school starting the same journey is simple:

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“I wish I had known on day one how good it would be later. This journey has been worth every bit of work.”

— Principal Jenell Bear

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BRING SFA TO YOUR SCHOOL

Want to Start Building Systemwide Literacy Success?

Success for All brings evidence-based literacy instruction together with the coaching, data, student support, and schoolwide structures that help strong teaching become consistent practice.

Ready to transform your school?

Visit www.successforall.org or email us at sfainfo@successforall.org