

A PARTNERSHIP MADE IN HEAVEN



Even in chaotic times, two Detroit public schools achieve solid successes with their new reading program.

THE SUCCESS FOR ALL PROGRAM JUST PUT IT ALL TOGETHER. IT WAS A PARTNERSHIP MADE IN HEAVEN.

BEVERLY GREEN, Principal of Edison Elementary

THE CHALLENGE

The Detroit Public School district has had its share of issues, including a revolving door of district leadership with 10 superintendents in nine years, many school closures and high student turnover rates. But even amid these challenges, Oakman and Thomas Edison Elementary Schools are thriving.

Looking for stability, schools in Detroit embraced the Success for All Foundation's whole-school reform strategy. Ten Detroit elementary schools, including Oakman and Edison, adopted Success for All (SFA) in fall 2011 and 2012 with help from a federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant. The schools have found that, despite the disorder, every child can succeed when his or her teachers have the right tools.

Before SFA, Oakman was on what principal Cheryl Price called a "roller coaster ride" with its test scores. Though the school made adequate yearly progress (AYP), scores fluctuated. "I was looking for a program that would help take us over that hump," Price says. She investigated SFA and was "sold" by its research-proven core.

Edison Elementary was in a similar situation. While it met AYP, the school had issues with student performance and attendance. Principal Beverly Green believed that SFA's whole-school reform strategy would address her school's needs.

THE SOLUTION

For 22 years, principal Price had been a constant in Oakman's sometimes unstable environment. She used techniques that mirrored SFA tenets but found some teachers struggled with this style. The SFA implementation not only organized the instructional techniques already in place, it provided the continuity and support that was missing for teachers.

"The Success for All program just put it all together," Price says. "It was a partnership made in heaven."

Her worries about staff reluctance to using SFA dissipated as she found that "everyone was on board." Staff, students, and parents were all excited to see SFA implemented, and they eagerly awaited positive results.

Although Oakman had intervention teams in place prior to SFA, Price struggled with staff accountability. Reorganizing her staff using SFA's Leading for Success Schoolwide Solutions teams format boosted staff participation. All members – including custodial and food service employees – chose which team to join, investing them in creating positive outcomes. "These teams were now connected to 'What are the barriers to our students not performing?'" Price says. "The difference in involvement was palpable."

Not only did both schools see "100% buy-ins" to the SFA method, they valued its highly collaborative structure. "For the first time, it felt like we had a common language," Harper says. "Never have I experienced a schoolwide laser focus on a specific area, where we're all looking at the same data, we're using the same tools, the same resources, just to drive one particular focus."

THE RESULTS

The two elementary schools did not have to wait long to see results. With its first reading assessment, in fall 2011, 20% of Oakman students were reading on or above grade level. In spring 2012, that number had jumped to 46%. "We were flabbergasted," says Price. "It was just an awesome response."

Price credits SFA's phonemic and cooperative-learning methods in helping to close the school's achievement gaps. "By placing them in the SFA groups, they picked up what they were missing," Price recalls. "They definitely became more confident."

Edison also saw noteworthy results after just one year of SFA implementation. In fall 2011, 20% of students were reading on or above grade level. In spring 2012, that number jumped to 43%. "I've never seen such a substantial amount of growth within one year's time," says Harper. "That speaks

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volumes to how well the program is working for our students.”

Parents have also noticed improvements. Harper notes that students come home excited about doing their reading homework, and parents are more aware of their children's assignments.

SFA's focus on problem solving and critical thinking also gives students tools that will be imperative for upcoming Common Core State Standards (CCSS). “We are feeling pretty comfortable that the standards will be achieved with the continued use of SFA,” says Price.

Harper aspires to be an example for other schools in Detroit and looks forward to opportunities to share Edison's achievements. She hopes that administrators “will want to extend the same opportunity to other students in our district to allow them to experience the same success.”

In a school district with its share of challenges, Oakman and Edison demonstrate what can be accomplished with a vision and solid structure to carry it out. As Harper points out, with SFA, students are “no longer looking at where they are; they're looking at where they're going

Better Attendance and Behavior

When it comes to student attendance, Oakman Elementary has seen great improvements with its SFA Schoolwide Solutions Attendance team. Before implementation, records show that only 52% of students were present on half days. After putting into place incentives such as dress-down days, students were eager to come to school, increasing attendance on half days to 94%.

Teachers also found that students seemed more enthusiastic about learning and that chronically tardy children were coming to school on time so they would not miss the daily 90-minute SFA reading block.

Edison Elementary used its Schoolwide Solutions Attendance team to address similar issues, sending postcards to parents and offering schoolwide incentives such as dress-down days. SFA facilitator LaShauna Harper credits the attendance committee's “laser-focused efforts” for raising attendance from 86% in the first quarter to 90% in the third.

Edison principal Beverly Green also notes that the Getting Along Together component – an aspect of the SFA Schoolwide Solutions Cooperative Culture team that focuses on behavior – decreased conflict among students.



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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