

Carson City, Nevada:

Across The Board



All photos courtesy Carson City School District

Across Nevada, the Carson City School District is turning heads. That's because year after year, its elementary schools continue to improve in just about every area that the state measures. The schools attribute their academic achievement in large part to Success for All (SFA), which is being implemented in six Carson City elementary schools. And they are continuing to grow. >>>

Overwhelming Support!

After learning that the district was reappropriating its Title I funds to focus on schoolwide reading programs in 1998,

Bordewich/Bray Elementary Principal Valerie Dockery, who was the district's grants director at that time, led the charge to find a research-proven reading strategy. She was looking for something that would not only address reading but also provide stability for Bordewich/Bray, Empire, and Mark Twain Elementaries, whose populations were highly transient.

After observing SFA's whole-school reform model in action, staff were sold. They "saw that [SFA] was so user friendly," according to Associate Superintendent Susan Keema. Dockery also saw that SFA could serve all students, regardless of their reading levels. Enthused, more than 95 percent of staff voted in favor of implementing SFA. "We had overwhelming support," Dockery said.

John C. Fremont Elementary quickly followed the other three schools, implementing SFA the next year, while E.W. Fristch and Al Seeliger Elementaries came on board in 2011 and 2012, respectively. Six of the district's elementary schools are now SFA sites, and administrators are pleased to see results year after year.

Adding Up

Upon implementing SFA, Carson City schools' scores began a gradual climb, and academic achievements are still being made. "All you have to do is look at our data," Dockery said. "It has continued to grow, and our kids are continuing to do better." Since 2002, the district's average Annual Measurable Objective (AMO), a state-mandated achievement target, has increased every year except one, in some cases by as many as eight percentage points. In 2002, the AMO was 37 percent, and it grew steadily every year. In 2012, the district average had increased to 71 percent—besting the AMO state minimum by 5.2 points.

Empire Elementary—which, at nearly 80 percent, has the district's highest free and reduced-price lunch population—was one of the first three schools to adopt SFA. After scores plateaued a few years into the school's work with SFA, administrators realized that they needed to reassess fidelity to the method. Empire renewed its focus on SFA's core concepts and recommitted to the program. It worked. In 2003, 40 percent of Empire students were reading on or above grade level. By the 2011–2012 school year, that number had increased to 71 percent.

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Rigorous Readers

When Carson City first began looking for a new program, SFA stood out because of its twenty-five years of experience and research-based instruction. “We did not have, as a district, a strong, viable reading curriculum,” Keema said. “And SFA brought that to us.”

SFA is composed of many parts and pieces, each of which has a specific purpose—something Dockery said influenced teachers to choose SFA. Whereas other programs use what she calls “drill and kill” methods of rote memorization, SFA incorporates myriad learning techniques designed to help students not only learn basic skills but also grasp integral reading concepts. “All the pieces that are in [SFA] are there for a reason,” she said. “They’re all part of strategies and research based on how kids learn to read.”

Those strategies and research-based practices are seamlessly woven into each SFA lesson, which provides organized instruction each day. Keema is pleased that SFA’s routine “really helps us with making



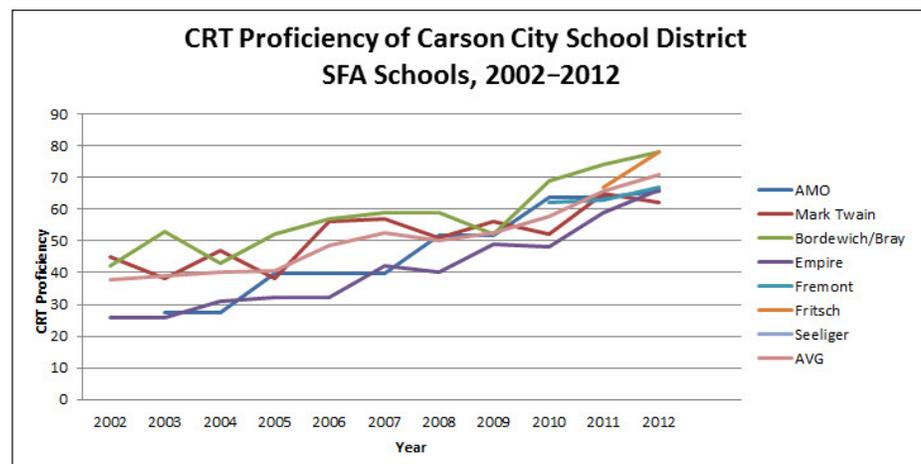
sure that all the components of teaching reading are done. I know that all the required parts like phonics, phonic awareness—all those pieces are being implemented every day.”

Each School the Same

Carson City School District needed a consistent approach to support its many transient students, and SFA brought that by providing the same strategies and techniques in each building. “One of the best things about [SFA] is that everybody’s on the same page,” Dockery said. “Everyone is teaching with the same philosophies and

the same strategies, and that’s just a huge thing.” Keema agreed. “With SFA we had common vocabulary, we had common training,” she said, noting that students who moved among SFA schools adapted to their new schools quickly, while students who transferred into the district from a non-SFA school took more time to acclimate.

SFA’s consistency isn’t just for students. It offers teachers built-in systems that encourage constant collaboration. Carson City teachers find that component team meetings—designated times for teachers to discuss instructional issues with each other—are an especially valuable resource. During these meetings,



Dockery said, “we can all sit down with our grade summary forms [a tangible measure of student progress] and look at our kids and strategize. That’s really powerful for us.” Keema reports that teachers are “helping and supporting each other by checking in with each other daily about where their students are, where their data is, and what they need to do to support their students.”



The Tools to Teach

SFA’s many types of student assessments supply teachers and administrators with tangible measures of student progress. The data they provide for the individual student, classroom, and school level allows teachers and administrators to see where students need more practice and alter instruction accordingly. “[SFA] gives you an opportunity to measure group information, but it allows you to do that for each student,” Keema said. “It is a strong, viable tool to support student learning—a common measure of what students should know and be able to demonstrate.”

Carson City teachers have also found that SFA gives them instructional techniques in a solid teaching framework that extends throughout the school day. Keema noted that math, social studies, and science all utilize SFA concepts, particularly the program’s cornerstone: collaborative learning, “which is so important for today’s world, and most of our test scores show it.”

“All you have to do is look at our data. It has continued to grow, and our kids are continuing to do better.”

—Valerie Dockery, Principal, Bordewich/Bray Elementary School

Teachers in Carson City take pride in their work and they, like their students, strive for success. “What they expect of themselves is really high,” Dockery said. “They really want to do everything well, and I think that’s so important.”

Though SFA has been in the Carson City district since 1998, it’s still a cornerstone of the district’s approach to education. Keema appreciates that the model is constantly evolving to address changes

in education and is in step with new and emerging needs. “Just as we would think that something needed to change, SFA saw the need for that change as well and would come up with a modification,” she said.

Success in Carson City’s elementary schools is abundant, and Success for All has provided every tool necessary to sustain those achievements for years to come. Said Dockery, “I’m a big supporter.” ★

The Success for All Foundation, founded in 1987, was awarded a \$50 million federal Investing in Innovation (i3) scale-up grant in 2010. It enables eligible Title I elementary schools to receive grants of \$50,000 or more toward first-year implementation costs. To learn more about available i3 grants, contact us at (800) 548-4998, ext. 2372, or visit www.successforall.org.