

WITHOUT EDUCATION THERE IS NO LIGHT



With its growing population of Somali students, Dugsi Academy Charter School needed special help to get its newcomers' reading up to speed.

THE CHALLENGE

In the spring of 2014, Dugsi Academy Charter School, in St. Paul, MN, found itself facing a tough challenge: getting its growing population of Somali students up to reading speed. All Minnesota public schools, including its public charter ones, are required to show positive reading gains from year to year.

Since Minnesota is home to the nation's largest community of Somali refugees,

Dugsi's 300 kindergarten through grade 8 students came from predominantly non-English speaking refugee homes. Not only was there a language challenge, many of the Somali families were having trouble making ends meet in entry-level jobs and were without

reliable transportation, so just getting their kids to school on time could be problematic.

There were also issues of cultural sensitivity to address, such as overcoming the initial reluctance to have boys and girls in the same classroom.

With reading scores low and substantial hurdles to overcome to get families, and community, actively involved in the kids' education, Dugsi needed more than a change in curriculum – it required a whole-school reform solution.

**AQOON LA'AANI
WAA IFTIIN LA'AAN.
WITHOUT EDUCATION
THERE IS NO LIGHT.**

A well-known Somali saying

THE SOLUTION

With funding from the Caterpillar Foundation and the approval of the Minnesota Department of Education, Dugsi turned to the Success for All Foundation (SFAF) to put an improvement plan in place. Known for its whole-school reform approach, the nonprofit SFAF employs proven research-based solutions and positive supports to help students improve reading scores and quickly meet state proficiency standards. A rich phonics foundation enables the program to meet the specific needs of each student at all grade levels.

In an effort to reach all students from day one, Dugsi invested a significant amount of resources in professional development of both staff and administration. Baseline data was collected for each student, so that progress monitoring could be put in place at the beginning of each quarter to track student development.

First thing each morning, the entire school devotes itself to a 90-minute reading block. The school takes this time very seriously. Families are encouraged to get their kids to class on time. Breakfast is served on site to ensure kids are fed and ready to learn. And interruptions are minimized as each class gets down to work quickly.



KIDS NEED STRUCTURE TO SUCCEED. OUR STUDENTS ARE MOTIVATED TO BECOME BETTER READERS, SO THEY CAN GROW INTO THE NEXT READING LEVEL.

STACY UTGARD, teacher and full-time SFA Reading Facilitator

Positive behavioral supports are used during this time and throughout the day. Dugsi employs the Success for All (SFA) “Getting Along Together” framework, teaching students how to work cooperatively, and “Peace Path” a conflict resolution tool.

“Kids need this structure to succeed,” says Stacy Utgard, a licensed teacher and Dugsi’s full-time SFA Reading Facilitator. “Our students are motivated to become better readers, so they can grow into the next reading level.

Each morning, during the highly focused reading block, Utgard goes to different classrooms to observe the instruction and student encouragement, offering feedback and support as required.

THE RESULTS

With the unique cultural sensitivities of the school’s students and their families, the flexible SFA program has been tweaked for successful implementation, and the school has listened to the concerns of parents and negotiated acceptance – including mixed classrooms – and workable compromises.

Even so, Utgard insists that Dugsi is 100% committed to making the necessary changes to get all students reading at grade level. And the results so far indicate that the school is making notable gains in reading levels across all grades.

The local Somali community has a well-known phrase: “Aqoon la’aani waa iftiin la’aan.” (“Without education there is no light.”) With the help of SFA and the Caterpillar Foundation, Dugsi’s staff and administration have worked hard to bring new light to the immigrant students, so they can achieve sustainable progress that leads to a better life.

The Caterpillar Foundation Makes Sustainable Progress Possible

Since 1952, the Caterpillar Foundation has been dedicated to transforming the lives in the communities where Caterpillar employees live and work around the world. It champions programs that support education, environment and basic human needs.

The Caterpillar Foundation first partnered with the Success for All Foundation in late 2013, with a generous grant of \$200,000. St. Paul’s Dugsi Academy was one of four high-poverty schools in “priority communities” to receive \$50,000 for implementation of SFA’s research-proven program for the 2014-15 school year.



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.

LEARN MORE! SUCCESSFORALL.ORG


Success for All
FOUNDATION®