

# THRIVING IN THE AFTERMATH OF KATRINA



Devastated by Hurricane Katrina, Edward Hynes Charter School fought back with SFA to rebuild itself and reach new levels of academic success.

## THE CHALLENGE

Before adopting Success for All in 2003, Edwards Hynes was performing reasonably well all on its own, but scores climbed even more with the new partnership. Unfortunately, the school –like so many other institutions in New Orleans – was devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

Faced with total shutdown in the aftermath of the disaster, the staff and community rallied to preserve their school as a charter school using SFA as the reading program.

## THE SOLUTION

Back in 2003, Michelle Douglas was pulled out of her sixth-grade reading position to serve as cofacilitator for the new SFA program at Hynes. The adoption of SFA across the Orleans Parish district was the result of what Douglas called a do-or-die situation: schools had to select either SFA or Direct Instruction or face takeover by the state accountability system.

The district eventually selected SFA, but Hynes was considered one of the few successful schools in the district at that time. Students were at a 69% baseline level, and Douglas wondered why the reading performance at their school needed improvement.



# IT'S A WHOLE SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO IMPROVEMENT. — A LOT OF BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS

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However, after one year of SFA implementation, the baseline for the school jumped to 87%. “It turns out we had a bigger problem than we thought we had,” Douglas jokes.

When Hurricane Katrina drowned the school in six feet of flood waters, all the initial progress made at Hynes threatened to come undone. Hynes lost a whole year in the aftermath. Finally, school leaders determined that the only apparent solution was to convert to a charter school.

Through the efforts of a core group of community and staff members, Hynes won charter-school approval status in 2006, with near-unanimous staff support of SFA as the reading program. Obtaining approval turned out to be the least of their problems, however, as the newly minted Hynes Charter had “no building, no books, no furniture, no school supplies and no staff,” according to Douglas, who is now school principal. Yet assisted by what she refers to as the “powers that be,” Hynes opened its doors for a new school year on August 14, 2006.

Hynes has continued to work with the SFA program, making adjustments as needed to improve performance even further. For example, the school schedule was tweaked to give teachers 75 minutes a day for professional learning community meetings.

Such adjustments have allowed the staff to dedicate themselves to the data-driven instruction championed by SFA: “We have the ability to vertically and horizontally involve teachers in their planning to discuss data and talk about observation,” Douglas says.

## THE RESULTS

While the school had to start from scratch in 2006, it soon surpassed pre-Katrina levels of performance. In 2009, 82% of eighth graders were proficient on the Louisiana Educational



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Assessment Program (LEAP) ELA test, and 90% of fourth graders were proficient. These scores outperformed the state of Louisiana by a healthy margin, despite Hynes's Title I status.

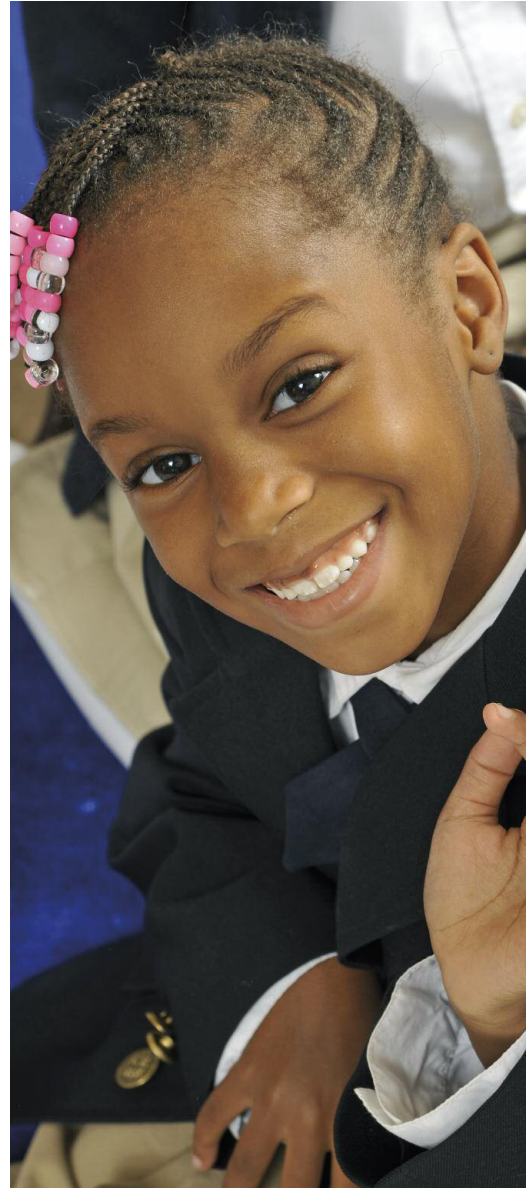
Even so, the school does not rest on its laurels. The prevailing attitude is one of continuous improvement: no matter how well the students are performing, there's always room to get better. "We've bumped up our expectations," says Douglas. "There's so much work to be done."

Striving for continuous improvement is an SFA cornerstone. "It's a whole systemic approach to improvement – a lot of blood, sweat, and tears," says Douglas.

Even though the reading proficiency numbers are striking, the overall positive atmosphere in the school is even more impressive. The staff of Hynes has truly internalized the concept of success for all. Douglas is more concerned with helping the 14% of students the school has charted as "not making the mark," rather than celebrating high scores.

Douglas credits the easy adoption methods of SFA to a number of its professional-development opportunities, especially the annual Experienced Sites Conference. "Beyond any conference I've been to, it's the most useful. It's efficient," she says. "We take eight to 10 teachers there. We shut down the entire school for two days."

On June 26, 2010, the staff and community of Edward Hynes broke ground for a brand-new school complex. Spacious and modern, the finished model more resembles a college campus than an elementary school. It's a fitting image for a staff, community, and student body that has come so far, and yet refuses to stop challenging themselves to do better.



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