

## A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS



A pair of schools in Franklin County, VA, has consistently made remarkable academic achievements since implementing SFA.

# NOT ONLY HAS IT CHANGED THE ATTITUDE TOWARD READING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF READING, BUT IT ALSO CHANGED THE CLIMATE OF THE SCHOOL AND MADE IT MUCH CLOSER.

BRENDA HOPKINS, Principal of Windy Gap Elementary

## THE CHALLENGE

As two of Franklin County, VA's five schools implementing Success for All Programs, Dudley Elementary and Windy Gap Elementary have both been getting great results. Dudley followed in the footsteps of Windy Gap, dissatisfied with its scores on state Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Wanting to boost its numbers, school administrators looked at the other school's experience with SFA – where students made remarkable gains in the first year of the program – and decided to follow suit.

## THE SOLUTION

Although adjusting to any new program takes time, teachers at both schools report that the transition to SFA was much smoother because of enthusiastic staff participation. "Everybody was on board and ready to do it," says Dudley principal Lisa Newell. "They're excellent with their implementation."

After a few bumps on the road, Windy Gap teachers quickly became comfortable with SFA and were encouraged by what they experienced in the classroom. They "saw the growth of the children and the exceptional results we were getting from having that consistent format, that consistent language, that consistent procedure," says Principal Brenda Hopkins.

Rewarding positive behavior and academic gains is another of SFA's core concepts and both schools fully embraced these celebrations of success. At Dudley, an assembly every nine weeks highlights the school's recent achievements, giving kids feathers in their caps and showing teachers how quickly kids are learning.

Windy Gap staff takes pride in its creativity when planning incentives and celebrations. Colorful flags, balloons and

Alphie the Alligator (SFA's mascot) alert students a celebration day is happening. Not only are students lauded for their achievements, but teachers are acknowledged as well, with a personal note, gift card or other token of appreciation from the principal.

Both schools also work hard to include parents and he wider community in their efforts. Windy Gap, for example, shows its appreciation to parents and community members by providing donuts, hot chocolate, coffee and witty gifts such as a pair of gloves to thank them for a "helping hand."



It also hosts evening workshops for parents, in which teachers discuss classroom activities and various SFA components, and address any concerns or questions. During one workshop, SFA Facilitator Shelia Fields received the "biggest compliment of all" from a parent. "He said, 'My children couldn't read until they came here, and within two or three weeks I could see a huge difference!'"

For its part, Dudley has taken great care to emphasize the importance of SFA's 90-minute block, eschewing all other activities during this time. Parents have also gotten into the spirit of this commitment, ensuring that they don't disturb this reading time, making sure their kids are in class and not away at, say, a dentist appointment.

With the help of its Parent and Family Involvement team, Dudley staff worked to get students to complete their homework and read at home each night, and started an incentive program. Newell reports that, as a result, many more kids are reading for pleasure at home.

Dudley also used its Community Connections team to give more direction to its large volunteer network, perhaps pairing a volunteer with a specific student who needs help with reading.

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SHELIA FIELDS, SFA Facilitator

## THE RESULTS

With the implementation of SFA, both schools saw immediate results. At the beginning of the 2011-12 school year, 58% of Dudley students were reading on or above grade level. At the end, that number jumped to 80%, and its SOL scores went from an 86% pass rate to 92%.

One year ahead of Dudley, Windy Gap started with 46% of students reading on or above grade level. In the first nine weeks the number rose to 52%, and it continued to climb to 82%. "SFA gave us a common language, a common goal," says Principal Hopkins. "It is total school support system and truly leaves no one behind."

So enthused by its results, Windy Gap shared their success at the Virginia School Boards Association Conference in 2012, speaking about how SFA has helped to boost scores, lower discipline issues and influence school culture. "Not only has it changed the attitude toward reading and the importance of reading, but it also changed the climate of the school and made it much closer," says Hopkins.

The schools noticed other benefits as well. SFA Facilitator Fields saw SFA's influence throughout the school day. She says: "I think our teachers are stronger in other subjects because of it, because they carry over those strategies they use in reading into science and social studies and all the other programs we have."

Both schools continue to reap the rewards of a solid SFA implementation. At Dudley, "Kids are speaking in complete sentences," says Newell. "It's really a delight to see them giving feedback based on the rubrics."

At Windy Gap, Hopkins has noticed that students are generally happy and excited to be at school, reflected in the average monthly attendance rate of 97%. "Our kids like coming to school," she says. "Even when we have snow days or holidays they want to be here. I think that speaks volumes."

## Cooperative Culture Breeds Caring

With the help of Success for All, both Dudley and Windy Gap elementary schools report a thriving cooperative culture at the schools, ranging from student interactions to staff cooperation. Classes regularly see new configurations of desks to support group learning.

Dudley principal Lisa Newell notices that SFA stimulates collaboration among staff, helping them to work towards specific targets. "Ultimately that's what it's about – knowing exactly where we are and where we want to go."

The cooperative culture also goes a long way to addressing behavioral problems. At Windy Gap, Principal Brenda Hopkins notes that referrals have been diminished to almost nothing. She attributes the improved school culture to cooperative-learning strategies and to Getting Along Together, a component of SFA that teaches children how to deal with social, emotional and behavioral issues.

**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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