

## BEST FROM THE BEGINNING



Immediately after opening in 2001, Liza Jackson Preparatory School become one of the highest-scoring schools in the district. Many years later it continues to rank near the top – thanks to Success for All.

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JULIE JENZEN, Elementary Education Assistant Principal

## THE CHALLENGE

When Liza Jackson, a K-8 preparatory school in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, received its charter, school administrators started searching for a research-based curriculum with best practices that would provide teachers with a solid instructional framework. “We were just looking for something different,” said Julie Jenzen, elementary education assistant principal. “[SFA] had all the things we were looking for in a program.”

Jenzen, principal Mary Gunter, and other administrators knew that SFA’s cooperative-learning strategies, built-in support systems, and rigorous standards would make it the ideal choice. “This program lends itself to every teacher being effective,” Jenzen says. “Whether they’re working in a low school or whether they’re working in a high school, it still works.”

## THE SOLUTION

Liza Jackson found that SFA’s in-school coaching and instructional consistency give teachers the tools they need to effectively educate their students. Jenzen notes they have helped the teachers to excel and that as they become familiar with SFA’s methods, the structure is internalized as a natural part of what they do and how they teach.

SFA helps schools gather extensive performance data and then, through the Member Center database, shows teachers how to use it to improve instruction. At Liza Jackson, administrators used the information to revise the school schedule to allow every teacher a one-hour planning period daily, exploring ways to use the program even more effectively in their classrooms.

Students also become heavily involved in their own learning by looking at their performance numbers, many using that information to set goals for themselves. “They know instantly by their rubrics score how they can get better for the next time and what they need to do to get a higher score,” says Jenzen.

She’s also seen firsthand how students embrace SFA’s cooperative-learning tactics. “They can tell you what strategy they’re using, why they’re using it,” she says. “They give feedback to other students on how they could improve their answers.”



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MARY GUNTER, Principal

## THE RESULTS

Usually it takes a new school a few years to find its stride. But that wasn't the case at Liza Jackson. After opening in fall 2001, the school marked its first year by meeting all the requirements to earn an A ranking from the state. That was only the beginning. Liza Jackson has received the A ranking each year since, and in 2012 ranked 18 out of 3,146 schools in the Florida Department of Education's school ranking system.

After its first year, Liza Jackson was setting the bar for other schools in the Okaloosa County School District. "I think it made a difference to have this one charter school that was excelling, and everybody else wanted to do as well," Jenzen says of the friendly competition that developed. "That's when we saw the whole district really improve and skyrocket to the top."

Since SFA places students at their own academic levels, teachers report that their fear of failure dissipates, creating "a very safe environment," says Jenzen. "The thing I love about SFA is that each kid gets an individualized program." The data backs that assertion: 84% of Liza Jackson fourth graders scored above average in reading on the 2011-12 FCAT.

Gunter adds that students are eager to learn. "When they leave in the afternoon, they all have smiles on their faces. Some of them don't want to leave," she says.

Success at school makes for happier children at home. Jenzen has found that they especially value SFA's 90-minute block of uninterrupted reading time. The difference in reading skills is palpable, especially among struggling readers. "It's amazing how fast they start picking it up," she says. "Their parents will come to me and say, 'My child never read like this when they were in other schools!'"

## Constantly Evolving Tactics

Liza Jackson administrators appreciate how Success for All stays on top of an ever-changing academic climate. SFA is "constantly evolving—it's not a stagnant program," says elementary education assistant principal Julie Jenzen. "They're constantly out there looking at the research."

That adaptability is something Liza Jackson staff experienced firsthand. Though test scores were consistently high at the preparatory, a few years ago they reached a plateau, causing teachers to re-evaluate how SFA was working. The school looked into some alternate programs but concluded that SFA was still by far their best choice, with its continuous upgrades and improvements.

Scores have again risen steadily, thanks in part to the staff's close collaboration with the school's SFA Facilitator and area manager. Jenzen credits these vital support staff with offering a different perspective to teachers, helping them to re-evaluate methods and set new goals.

"That's another reason why our scores have really rocketed," Jenzen says. "It just makes all the difference in the world when you've got somebody supporting those teachers, keeping them focused, helping them read the data."



**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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