

# STATEWIDE SUCCESS



Three different Ohio school districts credit Success for All for making sweeping schoolwide improvements.

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BRENDA MILLER, Principal of Lincoln Heights Elementary

## THE CHALLENGE

While distinctly different in some aspects, three school districts in Ohio all have one thing in common: their schools have seen significant academic and behavioral improvements by implementing Success for All. More than 10 schools in Alliance, Princeton City and Steubenville have enjoyed significant benefits after adopting the SFA whole-school reform strategy.

Looking to improve test scores among its large, economically disadvantaged population, Wells Academy in Steubenville City School District, near the Ohio-Pennsylvania border, adopted SFA in 2000 after receiving a grant. The district chose SFA for its clear implementation process and research-proven effect on student achievement. “We liked it because it placed students where they needed to be based on their individual needs,” says Wells principal Joe Nocera.

Northside Elementary School in Alliance City School District – a medium-sized district situated in the state’s northeast corner – sought a strategy that would boost stalled academic progress. For five years, test scores at Northside showed slow but steady improvement; however, the staff wanted to do more.

Brenda Miller, principal of Lincoln Heights Elementary in Princeton City School District, was looking for a whole-school reform strategy with proven results. Just north of Cincinnati, the district serves a large, urban population. “I really was drawn to the idea of making changes that would not only impact our students academically,” Miller says, “but would help with the climate and culture of our building – the attendance of our students, the overall discipline.”

## THE SOLUTION

All three districts were attracted to SFA’s comprehensive whole-school reform approach. With a multitude of resources, such as built-in professional development, on-

site coaching, and teams to address nonacademic issues, SFA provides a comprehensive support structure. “The entire reform includes not just the reading implementation but the network. And all of the things fit within the SFA model,” says Miller. “We were able to just build on them and strengthen them or align them with our goals and objectives like we had not been able to do in the past.”

Part of that SFA network is the Leading for Success Schoolwide Solutions teams, which help address nonacademic issues that can hinder learning, such as absenteeism, disciplinary problems and personal issues. All three districts, for example, have used their Parent and Family Involvement teams to drive home to parents their important role in their children’s learning.

Northside informed parents that doing schoolwork at home was crucial to their children’s success at school and offered them encouragement and support. “Every time our kids did something wonderful in SFA or did their homework for a week, we sent postcards home to those parents and said thank you,” says Janet Stoner, Alliance’s director of elementary education. “It made them buy in and feel really good about themselves that they were also helping their kids in school.”

At Wells, Nocera made it clear that “parents are expected to take time to evaluate and then sign off on their children’s Read and Respond assignments.”

The Schoolwide Solutions Community Connections team at each SFA school helps it tap into community resources. “We have had the benefit of a lot of volunteers from the community and of businesses around us, as well as support from various churches in the community,” says Miller. “We’ve been able to do a lot of incentives and celebrations to really make this the focus and the priority.”

Teachers unfamiliar with SFA often worry that it may be overly rigid, not allowing creativity in their classrooms. But that changes when they work with the program. “The thing I love about SFA is it’s not completely scripted so that you cannot add a teacher’s personality,” says Alana

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Parsons, SFA facilitator at Lincoln Heights. “You can add our school’s personality and our individual teacher’s personality, and that’s what helps make it successful.”

Miller credits SFA’s emphasis on program fidelity with igniting both student and staff enthusiasm. “With first-year implementation, the entire focus and energy in the building was on reading. I think there was such a buzz and so much energy around reading that it caught fire. For the adults, it was a feeling of frenzy and anxiety, but in a good way. And I think the kids definitely felt and caught on to that buzz and excitement.”

## THE RESULTS

During its many year partnership with SFA, Wells Academy has accumulated an impressive list of accolades. It was named Ohio’s top school in 2011–12 based on state standardized test scores. The Education Trust awarded a Dispelling the Myth Award to the school in 2008, and the U.S. Department of Education designated it a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in 2003–04 and 2004–05. As well, Wells boasts a remarkable academic record: Since 2005, 100 percent of Wells students have scored on or above grade level on the Ohio Achievement Assessment in reading.

Schools in Princeton City and Alliance are also making great strides with SFA. Princeton City’s Lincoln Heights launched SFA in fall 2011 with a baseline of 25.5% of students reading on or above grade level. By the fourth quarter, the school – where 96% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches – had more than doubled that rate to 52%.

After just two years of using SFA’s whole-school approach, results at Northside in Alliance –where 90.9% of students receive free or reduced-price lunches – have exceeded expectations. At the beginning of the 2011–12 school year, 57% of students were reading on or above grade level. By the end of the year, that number had jumped to 80%.

As SFA continues to act as a trusted partner to help schools across Ohio to improve how their teachers teach and students achieve, it looks forward to working together to raise that bar even further.

## A True Love of Reading

At Northside, principal Lori Grimaldi credits SFA not only for higher scores but also for instilling in students a true affection for reading. “They love going to reading. If you see them walking in the hall, they can’t wait to go,” she says. “It’s not only gotten them to read better, but it’s gotten the children to love to read.”

After implementing SFA, Miller also discovered that Lincoln Heights students were eager to read, especially in the lower grades. “They’re hungry for success,” she said. The data support her claim: In the first quarter, 34% of the school’s kindergartners were reading on or above grade level. By the end of the year, the number had jumped to 75%. “[We] had tears in our eyes when little kids who came in barely [able to] speak were actually reading.”

Wells found that SFA’s pre-K program, Curiosity Corner, helps beginning readers build a solid foundation. Incoming kindergartners were more familiar with and prepared to use SFA, which led to greater performance throughout the elementary school. “For the majority of our students who go into kindergarten through Curiosity Corner, there is a marked difference in performance from those who don’t,” says Nocera.

**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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