

## SPREADING THE WEALTH



Two schools' success in implementing SFA has prompted all schools in West Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to adopt the program and see their reading scores rise.

## THE CHALLENGE

When David Corona became West Baton Rouge Parish's superintendent in June 2004, he knew right away that the district was doing something right. Children were learning to read, test scores were increasing, and the students were getting the attention they needed to be successful.

"It was very obvious to me that the people within the district were very faithful in the implementation of SFA, very diligent in how it was implemented, and very happy with the success that we were seeing," he says.

At that time, four schools were using SFA. Since then, three more schools have implemented this successful whole-school reform strategy, bringing the district total to seven schools. With the entire parish committed to SFA, the whole-school reform program needed to show it has evolved its methods to inspire further excellence in the long adopters and to prove to newcomers that it is at the forefront of innovation.

## THE SOLUTION

West Baton Rouge schools are using all of SFA's programs, ranging from Curiosity Corner (for pre-K students) to the Reading Edge High School. SFA is valued by the district because it provides students with a strong reading foundation to build on. "Reading is the gateway to



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DAVID CORONA, Superintendent  
of West Baton Rouge Parish

everything," says Corona, "and the ability to read and comprehend is critical to being able to function satisfactorily in this world."

With schools using SFA from pre-K through high school, students receive a consistent, continuous education, each stage built upon the tenets of the previous.

Corona also appreciates that with SFA, students are encouraged to learn and enjoy themselves simultaneously, keeping them engaged. "School becomes fun instead of a struggle," he says. "And when it's fun, people seem to do better – there's no great secret in that."

The active involvement teachers report in reading time has seeped into the rest of the school day. In social studies and science, the students continue to use cooperative-learning techniques and critical-thinking skills "because it's a natural thing that the kids understand, and it's a good tool for the teachers," says Elementary Supervisor and Title I Director Cindy Ourso.

She's also found that SFA's focus on nonacademic aspects of the school day has improved the school climate. There's rarely a discipline issue, rarely an issue that [teachers] need to deal with because students are always actively engaged," she said. "They really are excited about it."

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## A Long, Productive Partnership

West Baton Rouge and Success for All have enjoyed a long partnership. Looking to boost reading scores in 1997, West Baton Rouge (WBR) administrators chose SFA because of the “solid research behind the program and the instructional processes that were in place,” according to Elementary Supervisor and Title I Director Cindy Ourso.

After just one year, “people began to see improvement in children’s ability to read [and] comprehend,” adds David Corona, WBR Parish superintendent. Seeing Port Allen and Brusly Elementary Schools progress so quickly, other parish elementary schools moved to adopt SFA the following year.

Administrators in WBR have continued to partner with SFA for so long for one simple reason: It works. “[Administrators] were searching for something to help improve the ability of children to read, and they found it. And they’ve been very faithful with this implementation ever since,” says Corona.

## THE RESULTS

Corona credits SFA with helping schools continue to raise student scores year after year. “Every year we get better. And SFA is at the top of the list [of contributing factors] because it involves the gatekeeper of everything, which is the ability to read and comprehend,” he says.

Corona is proud of WBR’s track record during his tenure. Beginning in the 2006–07 school year, WBR’s District Performance Score (which indicates results on state standardized tests in language arts, math, science, and social studies for third through 11th graders) was 81.1. The following year it was 87.5, and it has increased every year since then. In the 2011–12 school year, the score was 105.5, bringing the school’s rating up from a D to a B grade on the state scale. He notes that SFA’s critical components have been a “great part of our rise in our District Performance Scores over the last several years.”

West Baton Rouge Parish has found that assigning all staff members to Leading for Success Schoolwide Solutions teams renewed interest in committee participation.

Both Ourso and Corona like the fact that SFA continues to evolve with national academic trends and keeps pace with the school district’s continual goal setting. “As different parts of SFA have progressed over time, we’ve progressed with them,” says Ourso. “It’s like a marriage made in heaven, really.” Key elements, such as critical thinking and cooperative learning, are especially relevant to impending Common Core State Standards.

Though West Baton Rouge continues to see academic achievement gains, Corona is pushing for even greater accomplishments. “We’re not going to be happy until we can get every child in our district on level with the ability to soar and thrive just like any other child,” he said. “They all deserve that opportunity.”

**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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