

## THE KEY TO CONSISTENT PERFORMANCE



Its 11-year partnership with SFA has enabled Florida's Learning Elementary Charter School to remain one of the district's top reading scorers.

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JANET KEARNEY, Principal

## THE CHALLENGE

When Choices in Learning (CIL) Elementary Charter School in Florida established its charter in 2001, it was looking for a curriculum that offered something different, something based on proven results. When administrators found Success for All, they knew they were on to something.

“The people involved had seen and heard about what SFA could do,” says principal Janet Kearney. “And they liked what they saw.”

For her part, Kearney had previous teaching experience in an SFA school that gave her a deep appreciation for the program’s consistent, systemic approach. “I can’t imagine being in a school where every teacher can be implementing whatever they feel like implementing,” she says. “SFA gives me a lot of comfort. I know that teachers are very clearly aware of what my expectations are and what the expectations of the program are.”

## THE SOLUTION

When paired with its ongoing professional development, in-school coaching and other built-in supports, SFA gives teachers and administrators a common language, ensuring that everyone is on the same page and using the same teaching techniques. It helps teachers “get to a higher level of expertise and understanding [of] learning behaviors and kids,” Kearney says. “I think it’s helped us all become better educators.”

With myriad components and learning strategies, SFA provides teachers a strong instructional foundation. This structure is especially valuable for first-time teachers. Grade 4 teacher Denni Breen knows firsthand how all of SFA’s elements come together to help students achieve: “I think success comes from the combination of all [the pieces],” which include teaching students at grade level, using novels instead of basals, making quarterly assessments and using research-based methods.

SFA coaches and facilitators also give teachers an outside perspective, allowing them to address issues that otherwise may be overlooked. “I think having other people help you determine root causes for things when you’re seeing it every day is very beneficial,” Kearney says.

## THE RESULTS

More than a decade later after establishing its partnership with SFA, CIL continues to achieve academic excellence. The school has maintained an A grade for four years running and is consistently ranked among Seminole County’s top schools. As well, in 2010–11, 93% of CIL students were proficient in reading on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT).



# WITH THE CONTINUED SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE OF OUR PRINCIPAL, THE AWESOME COMMITMENT OF OUR STAFF AND THE GREAT PROGRAM OF SFA, I CAN SEE US BECOMING NUMBER ONE.

DENNI BREEN, Teacher

“A lot of it can be attributed to SFA,” Kearney says. “An excellent program with really strong teachers and really strong follow-through from administration and staff is the key to making anything happen successfully.”

Furthermore, in the 2011–12 school year, CIL recorded the highest writing scores in Seminole County. All students met the curved score of 3.0, and 80% of students received a 4.0. That 80% led the district by a wide margin, of nearly 50%.

In other measures, in the same year, 91% of CIL’s third graders tested proficient on the Gates-MacGinitie reading assessment in the third quarter, and 85% of Hispanic students in grades 3 to 5 were proficient – a 9% increase from the first quarter.

For their part, parents appreciate “how the program meets the needs of their children and allows them to advance at a faster pace when they are placed appropriately,” says Breen. She also notes that struggling students “are able to catch up easier since they are being met at their level.”

SFA’s rigorous standards require students to think critically and challenge one another. As Kearney walks through classrooms to observe, she is proud to see students engaged in deep conversations, asking thought-provoking questions and providing insightful answers. “I think cooperative learning and the built-in expectation for kids to discuss and talk and challenge each other – that to me is probably the biggest and strongest factor of what SFA does.”

Staff members are also proud of the school’s consistently high academic achievements and are optimistic about CIL’s future. Says Breen, “With the continued support and guidance of our principal, the awesome commitment of our staff, and the great program of SFA, I see us becoming number one.”

## Overcoming Behavioral and Social Issues

Choices in Learning Elementary Charter principal Janet Kearney credits Success for All cooperative-learning methods and consistency in instruction with creating a schoolwide culture of achievement. “I think that’s another reason we have few behavior problems – just the consistency and the follow-through at every grade level, at every area,” she says.

Indeed, SFA is designed to address the whole school. Resources, such as the Leading for Success program, provide staff with the tools to deal with behavioral and social issues that may hinder a student’s academic progress, something that Kearney has found especially valuable. “We’re a very successful school overall, not just academically, and I attribute a lot of that to SFA,” she says.

**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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