

Child TRENDS RESEARCH BRIEF

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BUILDING AN EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAM TO IMPROVE SCHOOLS: THE STORY OF SUCCESS FOR ALL

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OVERVIEW

In education, programs and practices often gain and lose popularity over time, with little regard to evidence. As a result, important decisions about educational programs are frequently made primarily based on marketing, word of mouth, tradition, and politics. However, there is a movement in education toward evidence-based reform and at the forefront is Success for All, the most extensively and successfully evaluated of all reading reform models.

Since its development, Success for All has been providing research-based programs for Title I schools that feature an engaging instructional approach based on cooperative learning, extensive and ongoing professional development for teachers and administrators, data tools for improving instruction, interventions for struggling readers, and a variety of activities and strategies for helping all children succeed in school. More than two million children have attended Success for All schools.

This brief summarizes the origins of Success for All, research on its achievement outcomes, lessons learned from scaling up the program, and implications for policy.

ABOUT SUCCESS FOR ALL

First implemented in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1987, Success for All was created to show how schools could ensure that virtually all children learn to read and write. Currently, Success for All is implemented in more than 1,000 elementary schools across the country. That number is expected to double over the next five years due to an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

Success for All puts into practice strategies known from research to enhance students' achievement, including:

- School-wide systems to support rapid school improvement, including leadership strategies to create a sense of urgency, use of cooperative learning school-wide to engage students in instruction, use of data to drive instruction and improvement, and a classroom management and conflict resolution curriculum to create a positive school climate.

¹ Robert Slavin is co-founder and Chairman of the Success for All Foundation. He is also Director of the Center for Research and Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Slavin presented Child Trends' 2010 Kristin Anderson Moore Lecture on "Turning Around 1,000 Schools: The Story of "Success for All."

- Integration of instructional processes with curriculum objectives in literacy supported by daily lesson guides and materials.
 - Preschool and kindergarten programs that focus on building language, self-concept, and early literacy skills.
 - A beginning reading approach that uses phonetic mini-books, partner reading, brief video, and fast-paced instruction to help children develop phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency, as well as a love of reading and confidence as readers.
 - An upper-elementary reading approach that emphasizes cooperative learning, teaching of metacognitive skills, fluency, comprehension in many genres, writing, and vocabulary.

- Constant assessment of children’s progress and regrouping across grades and classes to ensure that all children are challenged.

- One-to-one tutoring for children, especially first graders, who are struggling in learning to read.

- A Solutions Team that works on nonacademic issues to help ensure that all children are ready to learn. This includes increasing parent involvement, addressing attendance and behavior issues, ensuring that children have vision and hearing screenings, addressing health and social issues, and reaching out to community members to support children’s learning and well-being.

- Extensive professional development for teachers, administrators, and others in the school, including a full-time facilitator who works to ensure high-quality implementation of all program elements. Detailed initial training and ongoing coaching from the Success for All Foundation are provided to all Success for All schools.

EVALUATING SUCCESS FOR ALL

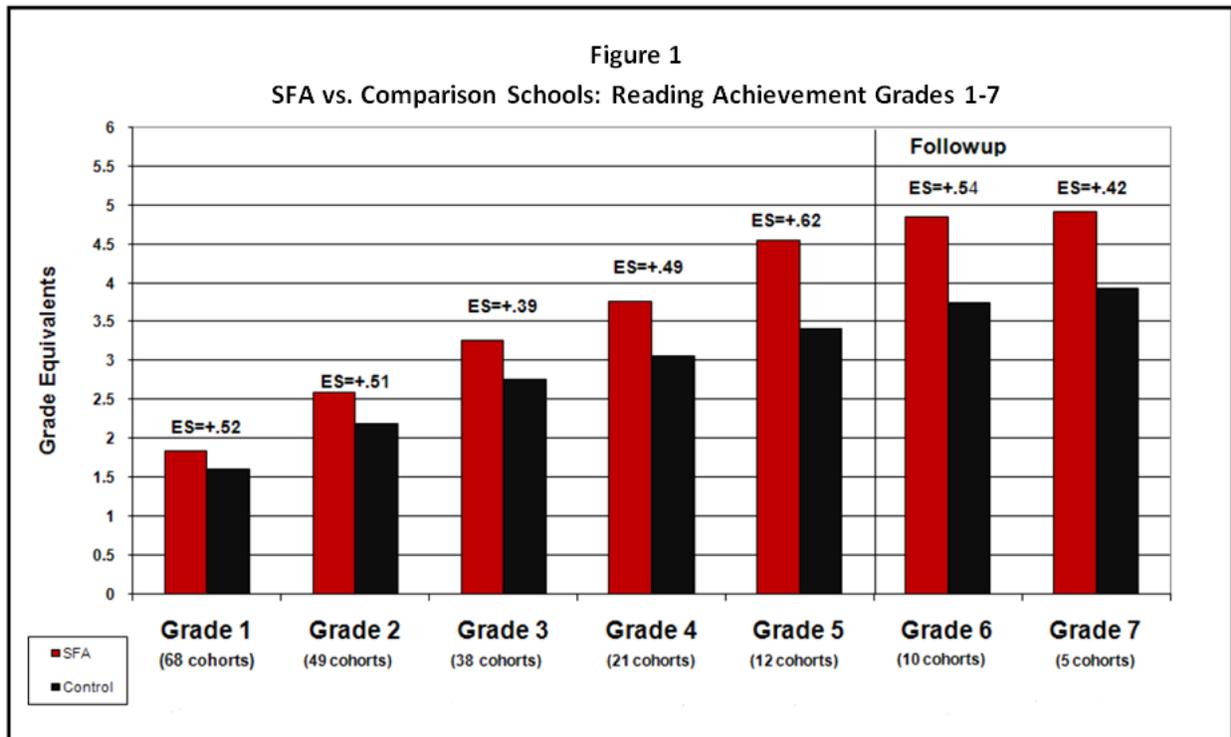
Studies in many locations by many researchers have found that Success for All improves students’ reading performance, reduces special education placements, and has positive impacts on other important outcomes as well.

For example:

- Figure 1 summarizes results from a series of studies over a 10-year period carried out by many researchers in various parts of the U.S. Results indicate that students in Success for All schools were on average a full grade level ahead of students in similar comparison schools by fifth grade.² This difference was maintained during middle school. (Borman

² A "grade equivalent" is a measure used by educators that indicates performance on a test relative to national norms for that grade. For example, a child scoring at a 5.0 level early in fifth grade would be "at grade level," but another fifth grader might score at the 6th grade level, ahead of grade level, and a third at 4.0, below grade level. The graph shows average grade equivalents for experimental and control groups. For example, it shows that in fifth grade, Success for All students are a full year ahead of controls, so they perform at a level that the controls might be expected to reach a year or more later.

and Hewes 2002) In Figure 1, effect size (ES) is the proportion of a standard deviation by which Success for All students exceeded comparison students.



- A meta-analysis of research on 21 whole-school reform models categorized Success for All as one of only three programs with “Strongest Evidence of Effectiveness.” (Borman, Hewes, Overman, and Brown 2003)
- Success for All was evaluated in a three-year cluster randomized control trial, the “gold standard” of research,³ funded by the U.S. Department of Education between 2002 and 2006. The evaluation showed that students in Success for All schools achieved at significantly higher levels than similar students in control schools. The difference in only three years was enough to cut the black-white achievement gap in half. (Borman, Slavin, Cheung, Chamberlain, Madden, and Chambers 2007)
- In addition to increasing reading achievement, schools that implement Success for All have far fewer students assigned to special education and fewer students who must repeat grades. (Borman and Hewes 2002)
- Six studies have involved English language learners, and have shown that Success for All teachers are prepared to support these students’ special needs and are successful in

³ Moore, K.A. & Metz, A. (2008). Random Assignment Evaluation Studies: A Guide for Out-of-School Time Program Practitioners. (*Research-to-Results* Brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends.

increasing their reading levels substantially more than comparison schools. (Cheung and Slavin 2005)

- Research on the Success for All middle school program was reviewed by the federally funded What Works Clearinghouse. No middle school program was given a higher rating than Success for All for research quality and effectiveness. (Chamberlain, Daniels, Madden, and Slavin 2007) (Slavin, Daniels, and Madden 2005)
- Correnti (2009) and his colleagues at the University of Michigan carried out the largest matched evaluation of Success for All over a four-year period. The study compared three comprehensive school reform models, Success for All (30 schools), America's Choice (28 schools), and Accelerated Schools (31 schools). These were compared to 26 comparison schools. Two cohorts of students were followed from kindergarten to grade 3. Success for All students performed significantly better on Terra Nova tests than the comparison students, controlling for pretest scores.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM SCALING UP SUCCESS FOR ALL

As schools across the country implemented Success for All, numerous lessons were learned:

- *Build national coaching capacity.* Being a part of a consistent national organization helps keep staff in different states focused on the mission.
- *Provide adequate coaching and monitor quality.* Even though on-site professional development is expensive to provide, it is the only way to bring about change. Professional development needs to be constantly monitored to make sure it's doing what it's intended to do.
- *Be explicit but adapt to local needs.* Innovation and adaptation can be made along the way, but there needs to be an overall understanding of the "big idea" from the beginning.
- *Obtain informed buy-in from teachers.* It is essential that teachers be on board from the outset. Before Success for All is implemented, teachers are asked to vote. Adopting Success for All requires endorsement by a supermajority of at least 75% of the teachers.
- *Use school-based facilitators.* School-based facilitators ensure that schools aren't just "going through the motions." There has to be someone in the school to make sure that the program is being implemented as intended.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

- *Success for All demonstrates that reform can happen in ordinary Title I schools on a very large scale.* If Title I schools have help and support, they can make large differences in student achievement without a system overhaul.
- *Fund and encourage promising programs.* Title I schools should have the opportunity to choose among a variety of programs, all of which have strong evidence of effectiveness and are attractive and replicable.
- *Insist on rigorous evaluations.* The role of evaluation is absolutely essential. Evaluations have to be applied throughout the process so there is an awareness of what is working (or not) and changes can be made if positive results are not shown.
- *Provide grants to schools to adopt proven programs.* There needs to be an outside investment in what works. Providing grants will help to expand the implementation of research-proven programs.
- *Proactively disseminate information on proven approaches.* Schools need to know which programs have been proven to increase student achievement, so that schools can review their options and choose the program that best fits their needs.

CONCLUSION

In a time when educators are increasingly being asked to use proven programs, Success for All demonstrates that rigorous research on practical programs can be done and can show substantial positive effects. The quantity and quality of research on Success for All, and the positive outcomes found in almost all studies by more than 50 investigators in many places, clearly establish that Success for All is highly effective in increasing student reading. The effects can be quite substantial, averaging more than half of the national white-minority achievement gap and almost a full grade equivalent by fifth grade (Borman et al., 2007). Every child should have a right to participate in a program with this level of evidence.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, visit the Success for All website, www.successforall.org, or write to the Success for All Foundation at 200 W. Towsontown Blvd., Baltimore, MD 21204 (tel. 1-800-548-4998).

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