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## SPECIAL REPORT

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# Success for All at 27: New Developments in Whole-School Reform

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This article presents recent developments in Success for All, a whole-school reform approach for high-poverty schools. These include incorporation of Common Core standards, technology-enhanced methods for teaching and tutoring, and extensive use of video for students and teachers. The strong evidence base and success at scale give the program additional importance in policy.

Reforming America's 100,000 schools is a daunting task. For a very long time, two approaches to this task have predominated: broad but shallow systemic reforms, and deep but difficult-to-scale local reforms. Systemic strategies introduce policies, funding schemes, rules, and accountability schemes at the national, state, or district levels. These have the virtue of touching every school, but they cannot have a profound impact because they do little to change fundamental teaching and learning (see, for example, Cohen & Moffitt, 2009).

The other approach involves small-scale, often localized efforts to improve schools. These may range from programs made to order for a single school or district and never intended to scale up beyond that setting, up to (rarely) small networks of schools that depend on such unusual circumstances or resources that they are very difficult or impossible to take to national scale. Sometimes there is good evidence that these programs have made a meaningful difference for the students they serve, but usually they lack evidence other than an observation that test scores went up, without any way to know whether it was the program that did it or whether it was the particular principal or staff, whether test scores in the whole district or state also appeared to increase, or what about the program might have accounted for gains and could be used elsewhere.

Between the broad but shallow systemic reforms and local innovations stands a third approach, comprehensive school reform (CSR). CSR programs focus in depth on the details of teaching

and learning, including curriculum, teaching methods, classroom management, formative assessment, services for struggling students, parent involvement, leadership, and professional development to make all of these elements work. They work at the level of whole schools, and were designed from the outset for dissemination. Perhaps two dozen national CSR programs each operated in at least 50 elementary or secondary schools in the late 1990s, and these grew rapidly under the Obey-Porter Comprehensive School Reform program, in operation from 1997 to 2003. CSR programs of all kinds reached a maximum of about 6,000 schools at that time, but opposition from the Bush Administration ended almost all CSR models by the mid-2000s.

Today, the CSR idea is represented, to some degree, by charter networks, such as KIPP and Aspire, and two survivors of the non-charter CSR movement, Talent Development High Schools and Success for All, both originating at Johns Hopkins University. Among these, Success for All serves, by far, the largest number of schools and students. As of 2014, it is fully implemented in about 600 elementary and middle schools throughout the United States, plus about 100 in England. Because of its size, experience, and research base, Success for All represents the best surviving example of how whole-school reform models can be created, evaluated, and brought to scale on a national basis. Its successes, failures, and continuing challenges have meaning for larger questions of how to make meaningful improvements in high-poverty schools on a scale that matters (Peurach, 2011).

### WHAT IS SUCCESS FOR ALL?

Success for All is a whole-school reform approach used in high-poverty elementary and middle schools to try to place a high floor under the reading achievement of all students while removing the ceiling. That is, the purpose is to make certain that every child is succeeding, using a combination of professional development in reading instructional methods for each grade from pre-K to 8, ongoing assessment, tutoring for struggling readers, family support and outreach to agencies beyond the school, and a leadership strategy focusing on goal-setting and continuous improvement that engages all of a school's staff. Table 1 describes the main elements of the approach.

Extensive research comparing Success for All to control schools has consistently shown that Success for All has substantial positive effects on student reading achievement throughout the elementary grades (Borman et al., 2007; Slavin, Lake, Chambers, Cheung, & Davis, 2009; Slavin, Madden, Chambers, & Haxby, 2009), as well as reducing special education placements and retentions and improving attendance (Borman & Hewes, 2003). A major national study that randomly assigned schools to Success for All or control conditions found positive reading outcomes over a 3-year period (Borman et al., 2007), and another large third-party evaluation using a matched design also showed very positive effects (Rowan, Correnti, Miller, & Camburn, 2009). A long-term follow-up study found that eighth graders who formerly attended Success for All schools were both reading significantly better than former control students and were far less likely to have been retained or assigned to special education (Borman & Hewes, 2003). A recent benefit-cost study estimated that Success for All returned \$14.80 for every dollar invested in it over the student's lifetime (Early Years in Education, 2012).

Success for All was first piloted in one Baltimore elementary school in the 1987–1988 school year. Throughout the 1990s, the number of schools grew substantially each year. In 2003, Success for All was used in about 1,500 schools in 600 districts in 48 states. Opposition to comprehensive

TABLE 1  
Major Elements of Success for All

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<p><b>A Schoolwide Focus on Literacy.</b> During reading periods, students are regrouped across age lines so that each reading class contains students all at one reading level. The program in grades pre-K and kindergarten emphasizes language development and comprehension skills; kindergarten and grade 1 focus on phonics, sound blending, and shared stories that students read to one another in pairs. In grades 2–8, students use basals or trade books to build fluency, strategic reading, and comprehension of complex texts. A balance of literary and informational texts prepare students for success in increasing complex coursework.</p> <p><b>Cooperative Learning.</b> The instructional process emphasizes cooperative learning to engage and motivate students and provide frequent opportunities for rigorous discussion. Students read with partners, develop graphic organizers to summarize their comprehension, and evaluate and challenge each other to explain their thinking and provide evidence from the text to support their positions. Rubrics guide the development of common, high expectations within team and class discussions. Team goals and individual accountability promote a culture of peer support for the learning of every student.</p> <p><b>Quarterly Assessments.</b> Students in grades 1–8 are assessed four times a year to determine whether they are making adequate progress in reading. This information is used to suggest alternate teaching strategies in the regular classroom, changes in reading group placement, provision of tutoring services, or other means of meeting students' needs.</p>	<p><b>A Schoolwide Leadership Model.</b> Teams of teachers and school leaders take on responsibility for schoolwide tasks such as attendance, school culture discipline, parent involvement, community connections, and continuous improvement in instruction. An online data management system helps staff members set goals and monitor progress in each area, and to provide detailed feedback on student achievement regularly. The whole school reviews progress against goals quarterly, and identifies a common focus for intervention. The process provides a way for staff members to communicate and collaborate to identify barriers and solve problems, working together to ensure student progress.</p> <p><b>Facilitator.</b> A program facilitator works with teachers to help them implement the reading program, manages the quarterly assessments, assists the family support team, makes sure that all staff are communicating with each other, and helps the staff as a whole make certain that every child is making adequate progress.</p> <p><b>Tutoring.</b> In grades 1–3, specially trained certified teachers and paraprofessionals work in small groups or one-to-one with any students who are failing to keep up with their classmates in reading. Most schools use a computer-assisted tutoring strategy that enables teachers to effectively tutor from one to six students at a time, depending on students' needs.</p> <p><b>Schoolwide Systems for Student and Family Support.</b> Faculty teams take responsibility for insuring a positive school and cooperative school culture with consistent behavior management strategies across classrooms, high attendance, and common strategies for development of social/emotional and self-regulation skills.</p>
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school reform from the Bush administration reduced the number of Success for All schools by half, but the program is growing again today, assisted by a scale-up grant under the federal Investing in Innovation (i3) program. Over the 27 years that Success for All has partnered with schools, more than 2 million students have benefitted.

### Program Characteristics Affecting Dissemination

Several unique characteristics of Success for All have an important bearing on the strategies we use in disseminating the program. First, although Success for All is always adapted to the needs and resources of each school using it, there are definite elements common to all, including regrouping, cooperative learning and other instructional processes, and quarterly assessments. Schools vary in the number of tutors, the staff time devoted to family support, and other features. Yet despite this variation, we believe that the integrity of the program must be maintained if

schools are to produce the results we have found so consistently in our research. The whole school must make a free and informed choice to adopt Success for All; in most schools we require a vote by secret ballot of at least 80% of teachers.

Success for All involves substantial change in many aspects of curriculum and instruction. It requires a great deal of professional development done over an extended period of time. Although the initial training period is only 3 days for classroom teachers, many follow-up visits from Success for All coaches take place each year. Schools usually budget for 26 person days of training in the first implementation year, 15 in the second, 12 in the third, and 5 to 8 in each subsequent year.

Success for All requires that schools invest in tutors, a facilitator, materials, and extensive professional development. Because of the focus of the program and its cost, the program is primarily used in high-poverty schools with substantial Title I resources. Most Success for All schools have never received funds beyond their usual Title I allocations, so in one sense the program has no incremental costs, but many schools could not afford a credible version of the model.

In fall, 2013, our training staff consists of approximately 80 full-time coaches. Almost all of our coaches are teachers; almost all have been building facilitators or teachers in Success for All schools. The coaches who work for Success for All are organized in nine areas of the United States, each with a very experienced coach as an area manager. A coaching resource center builds and maintains the coaches' skills, and technology support is provided to help coaches and school staff with the growing technology demands of the model.

### New Features of Success for All

Over the years, Success for All has had the need and the opportunity to develop its approach, both to take advantage of new technologies (such as computers, tablets, and interactive whiteboards), and to respond to new policy conditions, especially state standards and assessments and, most recently, the Common Core State Standards. Further, we constantly learn from our schools. For example, at annual conferences we have focus groups of school staff members to discuss various aspects of the program. We then use their ideas to improve the program (see Peurach, 2011).

#### *Member Center*

A major addition to Success for All's whole-school, data-driven approach is Member Center, a computerized data-management system. Teachers, facilitators, and other staff members enter student assessment data into Member Center, which then suggests placements in reading groups, forms cooperative teams, and identifies individual children who are in need of attention. Data on attendance is also monitored, and data on students receiving additional services (such as tutoring or family support) are kept in an integrated file, so all staff members involved can easily see data from others involved with the same child. Data from Member Center forms a key focus of conversations within schools and between school staff and Success for All coaches.

#### *Computer-Assisted Tutoring*

Although tutoring of struggling readers has always been an important component of Success for All, our schools have had difficulty finding enough resources to provide one-to-one tutoring

from certified teachers to all children who need it. To confront this problem, we created two strategies that use computers to help paraprofessional or volunteer tutors to do a good job in tutoring. One approach, called *Alphie's Alley*, operates one-to-one. The computer provides stimulus materials for the tutor to use with the child to review letter sounds, sound blending, fluency, and other elements of early reading. The second program, *Team Alphie*, allows a teacher or paraprofessional to work with up to six children. Students work in pairs, sharing a laptop, and take turns as coach and player in a peer coaching format. Frequently, the computer voice asks questions and the player answers out loud. The computer voice then asks the coach, "Did your partner say \_\_\_?" The coach then keys in *yes* or *no* and the computer responds appropriately. The tutor circulates among the pairs to be sure that the system is working and reads with individuals at key assessment points. Studies of both *Alphie's Alley* (Chambers, Abrami, et al., 2008) and *Team Alphie* (Chambers, Slavin, et al., 2011) have found that these approaches add to program outcomes. The two programs are used as Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, respectively, in a Response to Intervention framework (Chambers, Abrami, Slavin, & Madden, 2011). That is, children who are not making adequate progress based on ordinary classroom teaching receive (group) *Team Alphie* instruction, and only if that is not sufficient might they receive one-to-one *Alphie's Alley*. If students are still not succeeding, a reading specialist may provide tutoring using other tools or behavioral, health, or family interventions to find a way to help the student get on track to success.

### *Video for Students*

We have added a great deal of video content to enliven lessons at all grade levels, to strengthen key skills, and to model effective cooperative learning skills, metacognitive strategies, and so on. Videos are always brief, usually 30 s to 2 min, and are shown on interactive whiteboards or projected from computers or tablets. Evaluations of the use of these *embedded multimedia* strategies in first grade found that they significantly enhanced program outcomes (Chambers, Cheung, Madden, Slavin, & Gifford, 2006; Chambers, Slavin, et al., 2008).

***Animated Alphabet.*** A series of humorous cartoons introduces letter sounds and key words linked by a story. For example, the sound /b/ is represented by "bat" and "ball," and the story shows a boy repeatedly hitting a ball against a wall, each time producing the *b* sound, until the ball flies into a bird's nest. The *Animated Alphabet* is used in kindergarten and first grade.

***The Sound and the Furry.*** A series of puppet skits introduces sound blending strategies. For example, a furry monster sees a sign that says "Watch out for stick." He carefully sounds out "stick," and then finds out that there is glue on the stick, so when he picks it up, he's in big trouble. The *Sound and the Furry* is used in grades K–1.

***Word Plays.*** In grades K–1, children read decodable stories. The *Word Plays* are live action skits that introduce the vocabulary in the stories.

***Backgrounders.*** In grades 2–8, students usually read novels or trade books to build comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. To facilitate their motivation and background knowledge, we

have recently introduced *backgrounders* for each book. A backgrounder may be a brief video giving the historical or scientific background for a story. For example, if children are about to read a story set in the Great Depression, they might first see a backgrounder on that time period. Others show appealing characters who set a purpose for reading and give enticing clues about what the students will read. For example, one character, Shirleylock Holmes, introduces anything with a mystery theme. Lurleen LaVoyage introduces books involving travel or faraway places, and other characters equally engage students with books, much as movie trailers motivate people to see movies. Backgrounders exist for each of 132 books used in grades 2–5, plus many books in middle school.

*Strategy videos.* Numerous videos model for children specific learning strategies. These include cooperative learning, clarification, prediction, summarization, and graphic organizers. A series of videos involves a writing team, The Write-On Dudes, learning to use a writing process approach and then apply it to many writing genres. This series also includes animations illustrating grammar and punctuation.

*Getting Along Together.* A series of videos models ways to solve interpersonal problems, exert self-control, and make friends. These revolve around animated animals who help solve each other's social and emotional problems. For example, a penguin named Chilly has a terrible temper when he's frustrated. His friends remind him to count to 10 and give himself a "Chilly hug" before he blows his stack. Teachers reinforce the same strategies with children.

*Videos for teachers.* We have created numerous videos to model for teachers all aspects of Success for All: cooperative learning, tutoring, classroom management, social-emotional development, and more.

*Home Links.* Our most recent addition in applications of video technology involves *Home Links*, video presentations that review and extend themes and skills introduced during the day for students to view with their parents and family members in the evening, 4 days a week, in preschool and kindergarten. In partnership with Sesame Workshop, we have created a sequence of content that covers themes, sounds and letters, math, a daily narrated story, and music and movement. The idea is to extend from school to home and to inform parents about what children are doing at school so they can reinforce it at home. Home Links will be formally evaluated beginning in fall 2014.

## NEW POLICY DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING SUCCESS FOR ALL

From its earliest days, Success for All has been consciously directed toward important policy goals. At first, it was intended to serve as a replicable, effective means of organizing Title I schoolwide projects, and this is still its main focus, providing a systematic alternative to haphazard collections of interventions, programs, books, technology, and professional development all too common in Title I schools.

In recent years, Success for All has taken on additional importance as evidence of effectiveness has begun to play an increasing role in federal policy. In this context, the strong research

base of Success for All, and its ability to scale up to serve many ordinary public schools, provide a unique example of what evidence-based policies can produce. For example, the Obama administration has strongly emphasized evidence and supported a funding program called Investing in Innovation, which provides differentiated funding to support programs with strong, moderate, or limited evidence of effectiveness. Success for All received one of very few scale-up grants, designed to increase the use of programs with strong evidence of effectiveness, to disseminate its approach to hundreds of additional elementary schools. The evidence-based reform movement may change how federal funds are used in many areas, and wherever these include elementary and middle schools, Success for All is likely to play a role (see Slavin, 2011).

## CONCLUSION

After 27 years, Success for All remains strong and supple. It continues to innovate, incorporating new technology and adapting its materials to the Common Core State Standards, and it continues to update and approve its approaches. Further, Success for All plays an increasing policy role in demonstrating that high-poverty, low-achieving schools can greatly improve their outcomes, and this demonstration on a large scale matters for policy as well as practice. For example, it provides one model of how Title I funds might be used to support comprehensive, integrated approaches known to improve learning. It shows how systemic reforms could be directed toward improving daily practices in high-poverty schools, and how detailed and well-evaluated practices can be broadly disseminated. Most important, perhaps, Success for All demonstrates that low achievement in high-poverty schools is not inevitable, but can be greatly improved using replicable whole-school strategies.

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