SCHOOLING
VOLUME 2, NUMBER 1, 2011

A System-Wide Turnaround/Transformational Blueprint for Closing the Achievement Gap

Fred C. Lunenburg
Sam Houston State University

ABSTRACT

School reform has been ubiquitous for the past century; however, little of significance has changed. Neither the technology nor the core beliefs of schooling has changed substantively. Our restructuring efforts need to be based on a whole-school system reform model designed to ensure that all students, from all backgrounds, achieve at the highest levels. A research-proven initiative that begins to address these ideas is Success for All (SFA). SFA is a turnaround/transformational blueprint, the principles of which are related to prevention, early intervention, and relentlessness that guide content, methods of instruction, pacing, and school organization.

Although school improvement has been studied extensively since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), little of significance has changed (Evans, 2010; Hess, 2011a; Nehring & Cuban, 2010; Tharp, 2007). There are some reports that demonstrate that it is possible to find effective public schools where administrators, teachers, and parents collaborate to produce high achievement for all students (Cuban, 2010a, 2010b; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Edwards, 2011; Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011; Leithwood, 2010; Lezotte, 2010; O'Day, 2011; Schlechty, 2011); but these successes occur in only a small number of schools (City & Elmore, 2010; Fullan, 2010; Hess, 2011b). We still cannot account for the fact that some students master academic content and many others do not (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012).

The answer to this problem is to determine how to improve teaching and learning in whole school districts instead of merely in isolated schools (Fullan, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2010; Reese, 2011). The mantra "the school is the unit of improvement" was based on the misguided belief that individual teacher professionalism would produce excellent schools. The most recent literature suggests that we need to modify that belief (Chapman, 2011; Creemers, 2011; Schlechty, 2011). The school will always be the primary unit of intervention, but without a supportive policy environment and resources outside the school, the chances of enduring change and improvement are limited.

Similarly, research suggests that unless improvement efforts penetrate the classroom and affect individual teachers and students directly, we will continue to find far more variance within and between schools (Blankstein, 2010; Bulach, Lunenburg, & Potter, 2008; Murphy, 2010; Smylie, 2010).

It is now well documented that there is an achievement gap between white students and certain groups of ethnic-minority students (Darling-Hammond, 2010, 2011; Howard, 2011; Paige, 2011). *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (Public Law 107-110) was enacted primarily to close the achievement gap (Reese, 2011). The work of educators at all levels is being shaped by national accountability standards designed to improve the performance of *all* students on state-mandated tests (Blankstein, 2010; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2009; McKenzie & Skrla, 2011; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2010; Murphy, 2010). Therefore, our restructuring efforts need to be based on comprehensive whole-school system reform programs to ensure that all students, from all backgrounds, achieve at the highest levels. A research-proven initiative that begins to address these ideas is Success for all.

Success for All: A Turnaround/Transformational Blueprint for Closing the Achievement Gap

Success for All (SFA) is a whole-school reform model that includes a reading, writing, and oral language development program for students in prekindergarten through eighth grade. It was initiated in the 1980s as a partnership between the Baltimore City Public Schools and Johns Hopkins University. Johns Hopkins University researchers Robert Slavin, Nancy Karweit, and Nancy Madden (1989) had completed a review of practices effective in preventing early failure of at-risk students. The Johns Hopkins University researchers were commissioned by the Baltimore City Public Schools to apply this knowledge in Baltimore schools to ensure students' success.

The first school to use the resulting program, Success for All, began in 1987. Key research-based elements include: (a) using cooperative learning to engage and motivate students (Slavin, 1995, 2009); (b) regrouping students for reading instruction to minimize time spent on low impact "seat work" (Slavin, 1987); (c) frequent assessment and feedback in the classroom for goal-setting and celebration of progress (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991; Reeves, 2007); (d) school-wide quarterly assessments to accelerate students making rapid progress and to identify students needing more support (O'Shea, 2009); (e) one-to-one tutoring to catch students up quickly before they fall far behind (Wasik & Slavin, 1993); and (f) engaging and supporting families so that students come to school ready to learn (Epstein, 1995, 2010).

The Success for All program has continued to use new research findings to refine and continuously improve its services to students at risk. Examples include: (a) incorporation of direct instruction in reading strategies (Carnine, 2010); (b) enhanced coaching strategies to improve the quality of implementation (Kidman, 2011); (c) introduction of multimedia tools into phonics instruction (Chambers, Cheung, Madden, Slavin, & Gifford, 2006); (d) elaboration of conflict-resolution strategies school-wide

(Kalyva, 2011); and (e) development of leadership academies to develop school guidance skills in the context of Success for All (Gartrell, 2010).

By 2008, Success for All served more than 3,000 schools and about two million children (Slavin & Madden, 2008). Baltimore, Memphis, Philadelphia, Miami, Houston, Montgomery, Fort Wayne, Little Rock, Tucson, Riverside, and Modesto are some of the school districts who tried the Success for All program. The creators of SFA believe that every child should be able to read, unless they have some type of severe organic retardation (Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989). The goal of the program is to actively seek early elementary students who struggle as readers and to implement every possible intervention to improve their reading skills before the students get discouraged (Slavin, 1994). Success for All is influenced by the Title I program belief in preventing failure of any reader by creating a successful preschool and kindergarten curriculum for reading. Early intervention means that supplementary instructional services are provided early in students' schooling and that they are intensive enough to bring at-risk students quickly to a level at which they can profit from high quality classroom instruction. Parent involvement is essential to Success for All (Epstein, 2010).

The family support team keeps parents up to date on how their children are doing in school, encourages parents to volunteer, and suggests strategies that families might use to resolve issues that affects their children's education. Some requirements are important to make the program work: (a) there must be a strong commitment of resources such as money for new positions, materials, staff development and time; (b) the school must re-conceptualize preschool through third grade priorities of curriculum; and (c) full support of the administration and faculty is essential if the model is to be done successfully and effectively.

Success for All has several different components: reading tutors, reading groups, eight-week reading assessments, preschool and kindergarten, family support team, program facilitator, teacher training, special education, and an advisory committee. Each one will be discussed in turn.

Reading Tutors

Success for All uses certified teachers as one-on-one reading tutors to help students become successful readers. Tutors do not have to create a curriculum. They can use the students' regular language arts and reading curriculum and can focus on areas of special needs. Other than one-on-one instruction, tutors work with the regular reading teachers during the daily 90-minute reading periods. Students with the most difficulty learning to read are the highest priority.

Reading Groups

Students are grouped each day. The groups are a mixture of gender but all are on the same reading level. The groups average 15 to 20 students. Each group begins in the same manner. It begins with a story read by the teacher, followed by a discussion of new vocabulary, oral language production and comprehension, and story structure. The reading program builds on students' experiences as they grow, and the students move on

to increasingly difficult material. Kindergarten and first grade students focus on basic language development relying on Story Telling and Retelling (STAR), big books, oral and written composition, and Peabody Language Development kits. Next, students read shared stories in which students read books that use a phonetically controlled vocabulary. The program also uses STAR, writing activities, and other elements. At the next level, the district's textbooks are used with cooperative learning strategies to continue students' whole language experiences alongside a non-structured approach to reading and writing. As a part of the program, students are told to read for 20 minutes each night at home under a parent's supervision.

Eight-Week Reading Assessments

Students' progress is checked after eight-week periods. The assessments are used to place the students in one-on-one tutoring relationships, to move students to more appropriate reading groups, or to identify students who might benefit from other health or social support interventions.

Preschool and Kindergarten

Because the Success for All program philosophy is to promote prevention as opposed to dealing with problems after the fact, many schools have preschool and full-day kindergarten using SFA principles. The goal of the program is to develop successful learners from the start. The preschool and kindergarten SFA program emphasizes academic and nonacademic activities.

Family Support Team

Depending on the school's resources, the family support team usually is made up of a social worker, an attendance monitor, and other staff in addition to school staff such as administrators, teachers, Title I teachers, and an SFA facilitator. The team helps involve parents through frequent contact, recruits parents to be volunteers in the school community, refers families to other services as necessary, and works to coordinate family-level activities with the school's academic program.

Program Facilitator

Each program has a facilitator who works with the principal. The facilitator helps with scheduling and works directly with teachers and tutors. The facilitator often meets with teaching and tutoring staff on a weekly basis.

Teacher Training

Both regular classroom teachers and the reading tutors are certified in elementary, early childhood, or reading. All faculty members attend a two-day professional development workshop before the beginning of school, along with an additional four

days of professional development throughout the school year. The professional development provides a comprehensive set of teaching guides. The content of the professional development varies according to grade level. Tutors spend another day during the year on tutoring strategies and assessment.

Special Education

Success for All includes services for special needs students within the context of the classroom. Tutors, some of whom are special educators, work with individual students requiring special assistance.

Advisory Committee

An advisory committee should be made up of the principal, the facilitator, the teacher, and a member of the family support team. The group oversees the program's progress.

Research

Success for All is the most extensively evaluated of all comprehensive reform programs. Studies have used the most rigorous standards, which correspond to the U.S. Department of Education's standards for the School Improvement and Race to the Top Grants. These standards for research studies include: (a) data systems that track student growth and provide data necessary for teacher and principal participation in a continuous-improvement coaching model for capacity building; (b) research-based and research-proven instructional programs vertically aligned from one grade to the next, and (c) a comprehensive community and parental-involvement plan geared toward partnerships and wrap-around services.

A meta-analysis of research on twenty-nine models categorized Success for All as one of only three programs with "strongest evidence of effectiveness" (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003). Furthermore, Success for All was evaluated in a three-year randomized control trial, the "gold standard" of research, funded by the U.S. Department of Education between 2002 and 2006. 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, & Chambers, 2007).

In addition to increasing reading achievement, schools who implement Success for All have fewer students assigned to special education and fewer students who must repeat grades (Borman & Hewes, 2002). Six studies have involved English language learners, and have shown that Success for All teachers are prepared to support their special needs and are successful in increasing their reading levels substantially more than control schools (Cheung & Slavin, 2005).

In a series of studies involving more than 6000 students over 10 years, students in Success for All were on average a full grade level ahead of students in similar control

group schools by fifth grade. This difference was maintained during middle school even though the intervention was finished (Borman & Hewes, 2002). Research on the Success for All middle school programs was reviewed by the federally funded What Works Clearinghouse. No middle school was given a higher rating for research quality and effectiveness (Chamberlain, Daniels, Madden, & Slavin, 2007; Daniels, Madden, & Slavin, 2005).

Conclusion

School reform has been ubiquitous for the past century; however, little of significance has changed. Neither the technology nor the core beliefs of schooling has changed substantively. Our restructuring efforts need to be based on a whole-school system reform model designed to ensure that all students, from all backgrounds, achieve at the highest levels. A research-proven initiative that begins to address these ideas is Success for All (SFA). SFA is a turnaround/transformational blueprint, the principles of which are related to prevention, early intervention, and relentlessness that guide content, methods of instruction, pacing, and school organization.

References

Bangert-Drowns, R. L., Kulik, C. C., & Morgan, M. (1991). The instructional effect of feedback in test-like events. *Review of Educational Research, 61*(2), 213-238.

Blankstein, A. M. (2010). *Failure is not an option: Six principles for making student success the only option* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Borman, G., & Hewes, G. (2002). The long-term effects and cost-effectiveness of Success for All. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24*(4), 243-266.

Borman, G. D., Hewes, G. M., Overman, L. T., & Brown, S. (2003). Comprehensive school reform and achievement: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 73*(2), 125-130.

Borman, G., Slavin, R. E., Cheung, A., Chamberlain, A., Madden, N. A., & Chambers, B. (2007). Final reading outcomes of the national randomized field trial of Success for All. *American Educational Research Journal, 44*(3), 701-731.

Bulach, C., Lunenburg, F. C., & Potter, L. (2008). *Creating a culture for high-performing schools: A comprehensive approach to school reform*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Carnine, D. W. (2010). *Direct instruction reading*. Upper saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Chamberlain, A., Daniels, C., Madden, N., Slavin, R. (2007). A randomized evaluation of the Success for All middle school reading program. *Middle Grades Research Journal, 2*(1), 1-21.

Chambers, B., Cheung, A., Madden, N., Slavin, R. E., & Gifford, R. (2006). Achievement effects of embedded multimedia in a Success for All reading program. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*(1), 232-237.

Chapman, C. (2011). *Structural solutions for educational improvement*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Cheung, A., & Slavin, R. E. (2005). Effective reading programs for English language learners and other language minority students. *Bilingual Research Journal, 29*(2), 241-267.

City, E. A., & Elmore, R. F. (2010). *A network approach to improving teaching and learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

Creemers, B. (2011). *Improving quality in education: Dynamic approaches to school improvement*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Cuban, L. (2010a). *As good as it gets: What school reform brought to Austin*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cuban, L. (2010b). *Against all odds: Insights from one district's small school reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

Daniels, C., Madden, N. A., & Slavin, R. E. (2005). The Success for All middle school: Adding content to middle grades reform. *Middle School Journal, 36*(5), 4-8.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2011). *From inequality to quality: Reviving our public schools*. New York, NY: Wiley.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2009). *Raising the bar and closing the gap: Whatever it takes*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2010). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work* (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Edwards, C. (2011). *Educational change: From traditional education to learning communities*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*, 701-712.

Epstein, J. L. (2010). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Evans, R. W. (2011). *The tragedy of American school reform: How curriculum politics and entrenchment dilemmas have diverted us from democracy*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Forsyth, P. B., Adams, C. M., & Hoy, W. K. (2011). *Collective trust: Why schools can't improve without it*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. (2010). *All systems go: The change imperative for whole system reform*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Gartrell, D. (2010). *A guidance approach for the encouraging classroom*. Belmont, CA: Delmar Cengage Learning.

Hess, F. M. (2011a). *The same thing over and over: How school reformers get stuck in yesterday's ideas*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hess, F. M. (2011b). *Customized schooling: Beyond whole-school reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

Howard, T. C. (2010). *Why race and culture matter in schools: Closing the achievement gap in America's classrooms*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Kalyva, E. (2011). *Peer interpersonal conflict resolution in children with and without disabilities*. Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers.

Kidman, L. (2011). *The coaching process*. New York, NY: Routledge.
Leithwood, K. (2010). *Leading school turnaround: How successful leaders transform low-performing schools*. New York, NY: Wiley.
Lezotte, L. (2010). *What effective schools do: Re-envisioning the correlates*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
Lunenburg, F. C., & Ornstein, A. O. (2012). *Educational administration: Concepts and practices* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning.
Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2010). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
Marzano, R. J., & Waters, T. (2010). *District leadership that works: Striking the right balance*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
McKenzie, K. B., & Skrla, L. (2011). *Using equity audits in the classroom to reach and teach all students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
Murphy, J. (2010). *The educator's handbook for understanding and closing achievement gaps*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
Nehring, J., & Cuban, L. (2010). *The practice of school reform: Lessons from two centuries*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
No Child Left Behind Act, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 20 U.S.C. § 6316 (b) (2002).
O'Day, J. (2011). *Education reform in New York City: Ambitious change in the nation's most complex school system*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.
O'Shea, M. R. (2009). *Assessment throughout the year*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Paige, R. (2010). *The black-white achievement gap: Why closing it is the greatest civil rights issue of our time*. New York, NY: Amacom.
Reese, W. J. (2011). *America's public schools: From common school to No Child Left Behind*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Reeves, D. B. (2011). *Finding your leadership focus: What matters most for student results*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Schlechty, P. C. (2011). *Leading for learning: How to transform schools into learning communities*. New York, NY: Wiley.
Slavin, R. E. (1987). *Ability grouping and student achievement in elementary schools: Best evidence*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
Slavin, R. E. (1994). School and classroom organization in beginning reading: Class size, aides, and instructional grouping. In R. E. Slavin, N. L. Karweit, B. A. Wasik, & N. A. Madden (Eds.), *Preventing early school failure: Research on effective school strategies*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
Slavin, R. E. (1995). *Cooperative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
Slavin, R. E. (2009). Cooperative learning. In G. McCulloch & D. Crook (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Slavin, R. E., Karweit, N. L., & Madden, N. A. (1989) (Eds.). *Effective programs for students at risk*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Slavin, R. E., & Madden, N. A. (2008). *2 million children: Success for all*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Smylie, M. A. (2010). *Continuous school improvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Taylor, B. M. (2011). *Catching schools: An action guide to schoolwide reading improvement*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.

Tharp, J. M. (2007). *Breaking the cycle of failed school reform: What failed reforms tell us*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Wasik, B. A., & Slavin, R. E. (1993). Preventing early reading failure with one-on-one Tutoring: Review of five programs. *Reading Research Quarterly, 28*(2), 178-200.