



# Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District



Cleo Gordon Elementary School is one of the Program Improvement schools in the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District.

"We're proving all students can achieve at high levels with proper support and instruction," said Kris Corey, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services at Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District. Last summer, this urban and suburban district 45 miles northeast of San Francisco, California, made a commitment to move its six low-performing elementary schools out of Program Improvement (PI).

As stated by Jacki Cottingim-Dias, Ph.D., Superintendent, Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District: "During the 2010-2011 school year, our District has implemented an effective Program Improvement Model designed to boost achievement for all of our students. SchoolCity has been an invaluable partner in helping us with successful implementation."

The district worked with SchoolCity to map its benchmarks directly to state standards and establish formative assessments to guide teaching and learning. "What happened is the most powerful thing I've seen in twenty-plus years of education," said Corey.

Between the first and second benchmark exams, student performance grew rapidly, teachers and administrators began to modify their techniques, and students took more responsibility for their own learning.

Corey credits the SchoolCity platform for the success of their formative assessment program. Though state-mandated standardized test results won't be determined for several months, Corey predicts, "Achievement at our PI schools will skyrocket if our benchmarks are any indication."

## Quick Facts

Public school district in California, serving 27 schools, divided into clusters.

- 27 schools
  - 17 elementary schools
  - 4 middle schools
  - 3 high schools
  - 1 adult school
  - 1 school of choice
  - 1 alternative education school
- 1,000 teachers
- 23,000 students
  - 34% Hispanic
  - 25% White
  - 23% African-American
  - 18% other

## Snapshot

With the goal of lifting several elementary schools out of Program Improvement, educators at Fairfield-Suisun created a program of frequent formative assessments based on SchoolCity technology. Within months, the district was able to impact instruction and schools experienced significant growth in local test scores.

## SchoolCity Profile in Success

Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District

## Quick Study

### Challenges

- Increase student performance growth in elementary school sites to help lift them out of Program Improvement status.
- Inspire teachers to develop a wider range of techniques to help all learners master the standards.
- Make students aware of their own academic strengths and areas for growth.

### Solution

- STARS™, SchoolCity's Assessment and Reporting Software.
- Formative assessments created jointly by the district and SchoolCity.
- Professional Development for teachers conducted by SchoolCity.

### Benefits

- Results in tests that replicate California Standards Test Academic Performance Index (CST API) scores show gains of up to 71 points in some areas.
- Teachers have begun to modify their instruction in specific areas by adding problem solving, manipulatives, or other techniques.
- Clear, colorful graphs allow students to understand exactly where they stand and motivate them to achieve proficient status.

### Incredible growth

Six elementary schools in the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District have been designated as Program Improvement (PI) schools, which means they have not achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for at least two consecutive years. Some schools have been in PI for five years. The way out of program improvement, determined by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, was to meet annual yearly progress two years in a row. To do this, Fairfield-Suisun adopted new textbooks closely aligned to the state standards, and fully integrated a practice of weekly formative assessments.

"If we didn't have the SchoolCity system in place, I know we wouldn't be seeing this kind of incredible growth," said Martha Lacy, Principal of Weir Elementary School. "It's been a challenging year."

Some challenges included an increase in class size from 20 to 32 students and a large reduction in staff. "We lost 11 outstanding teachers," said Lacy. Physical education and music were eliminated for budgetary reasons, reducing teacher prep time and decreasing creative outlets for the kids. The student populations at the PI schools are often English Language Learners and frequently transients.

### Single best, positive change

Despite initial setbacks, all schools in Program Improvement have made incredible strides. "SchoolCity is the single best and most positive change we've had," said Lacy. "Using formative assessments, we know our strengths, we know what we have to work on, and we do immediate intervention."

"At first we just wanted awareness," said Corey. "We figured just knowing how students were doing would be helpful." After several weeks, however, Fairfield-Suisun found the SchoolCity formative data was not just helpful, but transformative. Teachers saw the worth of being able to immediately address areas of concern.

### Ingredients for success

"It's that instant feedback that's making all the difference," said Corey. "Fairfield-Suisun was able to decrease the number of far below basic students and increase the number of proficient students across the PI sites."

With the addition of the SchoolCity STARS™ system, teachers at Fairfield-Suisun now have the ingredients for success at their fingertips: a clear standards-based curriculum, formative assessment data that reveal the specific programmatic areas that require more attention—and time for remediation built into their schedules.

### Standards-based curriculum supported by formative assessments

SchoolCity worked closely with Fairfield-Suisun educators to map out an assessment blueprint, closely aligned to state standards and district pacing guides. When students in grades two through six take a math or English language arts (ELA) assessment, teachers scan the results into the SchoolCity system. Almost immediately, results appear onscreen.

The results appear in easy-to-read charts and graphs that specify each student's performance on each standard. Since the questions map closely to each standard, teachers and students alike know instantly whether they're working at far below basic, below basic, basic, proficient, or advanced level.

*"What happened is the most powerful thing I've seen in twenty-plus years of education."*

Kris Corey  
Assistant Superintendent  
of Educational Services  
Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District

*“If we didn’t have the School-City system in place, I know we wouldn’t be seeing this kind of incredible growth.”*

Martha Lacy  
Principal  
David Weir Elementary School

*“SchoolCity has changed the atmosphere here,” said Brown. “The teachers are more accountable and the kids are eager to try again.”*

Cindy Brown  
Principal  
Cleo Gordon Elementary School

As soon as the very next class meeting, teachers can use the results to inform their instruction. “They know the problem areas they need to focus on,” said Corey. “Teachers use the assessments within a unit, not just at the end, and make timely adjustments.”

#### **Achieving targeted learning goals**

The students are shown their results as well. Because they now have a clear understanding of where they are and aren’t proficient, they can ask questions and work through areas of confusion. The fine-tuning is helping students achieve targeted learning goals.

At Weir Elementary, 90% of students are on free-and-reduced lunch. “Our achievement data is amazing,” said Lacy. Seventy-six percent of third graders are currently proficient in math. Last year, only 28% of the same group achieved proficiency. “Growth is phenomenal in English Language Arts, too,” noted Lacy. “SchoolCity has put the foundation in place where we can work with the kids effectively.”

#### **Re-teaching for proficiency**

Students take either a math or English Language Arts assessment every Thursday morning. That afternoon, teachers review the results with the students by displaying the questions and answers on smartboards. On Friday, the students break up into study groups based on their results.

“The kids know they’ll be re-taught if they didn’t get it,” said Cindy Brown, Principal of Cleo Gordon Elementary School. “They understand the concept of proficiency.” Over time, more students are beginning to achieve proficiency the first time. “They know the better we do on the first round, the less we have to do later,” said Brown.

#### **Exceeding goals**

“So far in all benchmarks we’ve exceeded our goals,” said Brown. “Our goal was a 30 to 35 increase in API points. Our weekly benchmarks indicated an increase of 50 to 60 points.” In most grades at Cleo Gordon Elementary, 70% to 80% of students are proficient in math. The third grade no longer has any students in the far below basic category.

“SchoolCity has changed the atmosphere here,” said Brown. “The teachers are more accountable and the kids are eager to try again.”

#### **Immediate and accessible**

In previous years, student data systems had been used, but they had not succeeded in improving teaching and learning. “Benchmark tests were few and far between,” said Kris Corey. “When an assessment was given, results trickled back to the classrooms in two to three weeks—far too late to make any impact on teaching and learning.”

SchoolCity is different. “It’s so accessible,” said Brown. “The feedback is so immediate, we’re more in charge of our own data.”

#### **Teacher excitement and rejuvenation**

Vital to the effectiveness of the SchoolCity program is its adoption in the classroom. Teachers have adopted it readily into their daily routine. “Things are happening,” said Corey. “Teachers are now motivated. I’m seeing excitement and rejuvenation.”



SchoolCity provides teachers with the information they need to see exactly how their students are grasping the concepts in their lessons. Teachers are no longer blaming their performance on external factors.

“Instruction is now standards-based, not page-by-page,” said Lacy. “And the immediate intervention moves the kids forward.”

### **Teaching students to believe in themselves**

On the SchoolCity reports at Fairfield-Suisun, the proficient scores are printed in green ink. One principal began to wear green on test days to encourage his students to achieve proficiency or above. His enthusiasm was contagious. “Students and teachers now wear green on test days,” said Corey.

Children in all SchoolCity schools have begun to take more responsibility for their own work. Many have responded eagerly to the challenge of meeting the standards now that they know exactly what is expected of them. Many have a newfound initiative to learn.

“We’re not just teaching the standards. We’re also teaching them to believe in themselves,” said Lacy. “When a student who’s never been proficient in anything achieves proficiency, it changes the way they look at themselves.”

### **Giving parents a voice**

Research has shown that parental involvement has an effect on student success. For reasons ranging from language barriers to shyness to busy schedules, however, parents in many of the Fairfield-Suisun Program Improvement schools had been reluctant to approach educators to discuss their children’s progress.

SchoolCity, however, helps Fairfield-Suisun educators open the channels of communication between school and home. The reports can be printed out for parents. These colorful, easy-to-read snapshots inform families which standards are being covered in the classroom and how well their students are meeting them. The reports help foster conversations between parents and teachers. “This is now giving parents a voice,” said Corey.

### **In the best interest of the kids**

Fairfield-Suisun originally set up the SchoolCity system in its seven elementary schools in Program Improvement. An additional school that had been performing consistently well was included in the pilot program to act as a control site. Each of those seven schools has seen “very astounding growth, compared with growth at PI sites, our non-PI sites are not experiencing the same rate of growth,” said Corey.

This incredible progress has caught the attention of educators around the district. The third graders at a PI school using SchoolCity recently achieved the second-highest score on a district benchmark assessment, just under the highest performing elementary school. Schools throughout Fairfield-Suisun have begun to notice. They’re now requesting the SchoolCity system.

“We all deserve SchoolCity,” Corey reports saying all around the district. “It’s in the best interest of the kids.”



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