

The Elementary School Curriculum

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Mission

Success Academy is redefining what's possible in public education. **Our dual mission is to:**

Build exceptional, world-class public schools that prove children from all backgrounds can succeed in college and life; and advocate to change public policies that prevent so many children from having access to educational excellence and opportunity.

School Design

At Success Academy, we constantly ask ourselves: **“Would our scholars choose to come to school, even if they didn’t have to?”** The answer — a resounding “Yes!” — results from setting the bar high while providing endless opportunities for scholars to explore, engage, and laugh in our classrooms.

From elementary school through high school, we commit ourselves to the long-term development of our scholars, supporting their ultimate success in college and in life. We tailor our engaging and rigorous approach to meet the specific needs of elementary, middle, and high school, teaching the core knowledge, critical thinking, independence, and self-advocacy skills that are essential for scholars to excel.



Elementary School Curriculum

We designed our elementary school curriculum to help children fall in love with learning through reading voluminously, solving complex math problems, and engaging in scientific inquiry. Each day is filled with opportunities for scholars to find their own voice to express their ideas, collaborate on class projects, and discover new artistic talents.

We firmly believe that doing is at the core of learning. At Success Academy, scholars receive only 80 minutes of direct instruction a day — about 10 minutes per subject — leaving the majority of the day for hands-on learning, guided inquiry, and discussion to develop ideas and creative expression.

Giving scholars the opportunity to do the intellectual heavy lifting makes learning not only engaging and fun, but also deep and lasting. This progressive approach also prepares our scholars for the rigor and independence needed to succeed in college and in life.

English Language Arts

Our approach to teaching literacy stems from our deep-seated belief that if children love reading and read exceptionally well, they can teach themselves anything.

The SA literacy curriculum introduces scholars to great literature and emphasizes critical thinking, knowledge building, and the thoughtful discussion of ideas. Kids read and analyze poetry, biography, history, fiction, myths, and fables, and write copiously in a range of genres.

Reading

To promote avid reading, scholars read and participate in thoughtful, text-based discussions throughout the school day. Our reading curriculum includes:

Independent Reading

At the heart of our literacy curriculum is sacred Independent Reading time — a time when scholars get lost in books they love. Each classroom is stocked with a generous library of books selected for their rich language and storylines and beautiful illustrations. Scholars choose books that interest them and are “just right” for their level of reading fluency — whether it is emergent story books for kindergartners or chapter books for third graders — and apply the habits of great readers. We get to know our scholars as readers by listening to them read and coaching them to become better readers during this focused time. Through discussions about their books with partners and the whole class, scholars are encouraged to think critically about texts and share in the joy of reading.



Guided Reading

In Guided Reading, a teacher works with a small group of scholars who are reading at the same level. The teacher chooses a book that is just a bit too hard for them to read independently, and supports them so that they can successfully navigate the text. During Guided Reading, the teacher sets ambitious goals for scholars so they can grow as readers. Through close study, coaching, and discussion in a small group setting, scholars are able to master the more challenging content and gain tools to tackle books at this level on their own.

Shared Poem (GrK–1)

Shared Poem occurs four times a week and consists of reading poems together as a class to develop scholars' oral language, phonemic awareness, comprehension, and to enjoy the fun of language. Shared Poem inspires scholars as they revel in the enjoyment of poetry and builds confidence in their ability to make meaning from the text.

Shared Text (Gr2–4)

Together with their teacher, scholars read a one-page poem or text (for example, a fable, short story, or brief biography) in order to understand the author's main idea, or central message. Scholars learn to identify literary techniques and make inferences about the author's meaning. This daily exercise in analysis helps scholars become better thinkers and writers, as well as readers.

Success for All (GrK–1)

Successful reading requires a foundation of excellent decoding skills — the ability to sound out unfamiliar words and connect them to spoken language. In kindergarten and first grade, scholars learn these crucial skills through a research-based phonics program, Success for All. In daily direct instruction that is fast-paced and engaging, scholars build phonemic awareness and decoding skills that strengthen oral language and build reading fluency and comprehension. Direct instruction is followed by a period of application and practice, during which scholars read and discuss decodable books aligned with the skills covered that day and in prior lessons. Through this powerful program, kindergarten and first-grade scholars quickly master the foundational reading skills they need to read independently.

Read Aloud

We build scholars' critical thinking skills and passion for reading by reading aloud rich and engaging books to scholars. These books are often more challenging and sophisticated than what scholars can currently read on their own and have been selected for the quality of their writing and the complexity and resonance of their ideas, themes, and arguments. Teachers guide scholars to unpack the meaning of the text, think analytically about the author's choices, and discuss and debate the ideas with partners and the whole class. Our goal is for scholars to apply these same habits of mind to understand the books they read independently.

POSSIBLE READ ALOUD TITLES

GRADE

K

The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams
The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats
The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf

1

My Father's Dragon by Ruth Stiles Gannett
Pippi Longstocking by Astrid Lindgren
Horton Hears a Who by Dr. Seuss

2

Charlotte's Web by E.B. White
Uncle Jed's Barbershop by Margaree Mitchell
The BFG by Roald Dahl

3

My Name is Truth: Life of Sojourner Truth
by Ann Turner
The Whipping Boy by Sid Fleischman
The Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum

4

The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster
We Are the Ship: Story of Negro League Baseball
by Kadir Nelson
The Rescuers by Margery Sharp

Writing

Our approach to writing sets scholars up to become skilled, passionate writers who convey their ideas with clarity and purpose. Scholars write every day. Their writing assignments respond to literature, book reviews, letters and opinion pieces, historical fiction stories, poems, and myths and fables.

At the heart of our writing program is the belief that writers improve through frequent practice and revision. By providing regular opportunities for scholars to write independently, receive feedback, revise, and publish their work, we build authentic engagement and the habits of great writers.

Strong writing rests on the grammatical rules underpinning language, and we believe it is our responsibility to help scholars master these rules. We teach scholars grammar by holding them accountable for using correct grammar in their speech every day and through short, weekly lessons of direct instruction on the rules of grammar. Scholars also learn spelling through nightly practice of weekly spelling words, which increase in difficulty throughout the year.



Core Knowledge

We believe that students need a base of knowledge, often referred to by scholars and education experts as “core knowledge,” to learn and explore topics that are important to understanding the world around us. For example, if you do not know anything about the history of kings and queens in Europe — which our scholars explore in first grade — it is impossible to understand the American Revolution and why our government is structured the way it is.

An increasing number of kids today have extreme deficits in core knowledge, which impede reading comprehension and their acquisition of further knowledge. We address this challenge primarily through reading, but also through quick hits of background knowledge imparted in our Core Knowledge units.

CORE KNOWLEDGE TOPICS

GRADE

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Medieval Times: Castles, Knights, and Maidens |
| 2 | Wampanoag and the Pilgrims |
| 3 | Ancient China |
| 4 | Inventions |
-

Math

Our approach to math gives scholars powerful conceptual understanding along with computational speed and fluency, so they can confidently and productively apply mathematical skills in new and unfamiliar contexts, and use their understanding to solve real-world problems.

Success Academy's acclaimed and highly rigorous math program incorporates elements from a variety of curriculum and approaches, including TERC Investigations, Contexts for Learning, and Cognitively Guided Instruction. The elementary school sequence develops scholars' number sense, counting ability, place value understanding, and builds mastery of geometry, fractions, measurement, and data.

Lessons within a math unit are centered on tackling complex, multidimensional problems that have correct answers but innumerable ways to arrive at these answers. Scholars must think creatively and independently to develop their own approach, which strengthens their ability to apply prior knowledge to new contexts, and deepens their conceptual understanding. Our math program also develops scholars' computational fluency through, daily practice of "math facts."

Mini-lessons

During Mini-lessons, scholars gather on the rug and are asked to solve a series of problems in quick succession and discuss their thinking. This practice develops skills and fluency in counting, number sense, and in concepts such as rounding and telling time.

Math Workshop

Math Workshop introduces scholars to new math content in topics such as geometry, fractions, measurement, and data. It also supports conceptual understanding of counting, number sense, and place value. Scholars work together to solve problems, and learn from each other during whole-class discourse.



Number Stories

During Number Stories, scholars develop problem-solving skills by independently working to solve unfamiliar, contextualized problems. Rather than showing scholars how to solve these problems and directing them to copy a particular approach, teachers challenge scholars to come up with their own strategies so that they become increasingly flexible mathematical thinkers. Selected scholars share their strategies for whole-class discourse.

No Hesitation Math (NHM)

NHM ensures scholars can quickly, accurately, and flexibly solve mental math facts. Scholars begin in first grade with addition and subtraction facts. Beginning in third grade, they expand to multiplication and division. By progressively solving groups of math facts, scholars move beyond rote memorization to see the relationships between facts, which in turn supports fluency.

Counting Jar (GrK–3)

Counting is the foundation of all math. Counting Jar helps scholars to become fluent with number names, number sequences, and to understand the way in which numbers correspond to objects. Scholars begin in kindergarten, using Counting Jar to learn the basics of counting and then moving toward strategies involving grouping.

In second grade, scholars move on to Money Jar, in which they develop knowledge of money and also grapple with the pre-multiplication concept of grouping.

In third grade, scholars move on to Array Jar, in which they grapple with properties of multiplication and division.

MATH TOPICS

GRADE

K

Falling in love with counting; measuring length; place value; combinations of 10; counting games; shapes and navigation; extending number sense (comparing amounts); organizing and collecting (the number system); patterns

1

Counting; place value; early addition and subtraction; paths, turns, and polygons; linear measurement; grouping and remainders; addition on the open number line; data analysis (pictographs); patterns

2

Counting money; exploring geometry; early Algebra; subtraction on the open number line; measuring length; place value, addition and subtraction; even and odd numbers; data analysis (bar graphs); patterns

3

Early multiplication and division; area of rectangles; equivalent fractions and comparing fractions with same denominators; rounding data (bar graphs and line plots); measuring length, weight, and mass; identifying and comparing shapes; multiplicative comparison

4

Place value and large numbers; multiplication with large numbers; place value and division; equivalent fractions and comparing fractions with different denominators; data analysis (line plots); drawing and measuring angles and analyzing shapes; decimals; unit conversion

Science

The Success Academy science program is like none other in the country. Five days a week, beginning in kindergarten, Success Academy scholars receive hands-on, inquiry-based science with a dedicated science teacher. Our unique commitment to science ignites a passion for the subject early in life, builds a comprehensive foundation of knowledge, and teaches scholars to investigate and analyze real-world problems critically and systematically, grounded in a strong base of evidence.

Every day, scholars conduct experiments and discuss observations, data, and results in the same way true scientists do. We incorporate the three main disciplines of science — Life, Physical, Earth — into each year's curriculum, as well as engineering and computer science. On any given day, a scholar might dissect a squid, build a simple machine, or conduct scratch tests to identify minerals.

Science lessons launch with hands-on exploration of a challenge or question presented by the teacher — scholars may be asked to program a robot to reach a set destination, or compare the speed at which different objects fall to the floor. After scholars work collaboratively on the challenge and record their observations, they participate in rich discussion about their discoveries, during which the teacher guides them to a deeper understanding of the scientific principles embedded in the lesson. Finally, scholars write up their conclusions in reports that grow in sophistication over the course of elementary school.

Scientific concepts are revisited at increasing levels of depth, complexity, and rigor as scholars progress through elementary and middle school. By high school, they are prepared to excel in Advanced Placement exams across scientific disciplines.





SAMPLE SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS

GRADE

- K** Use a hand lens and your senses to describe sand (human senses); design a cage too tall for a kangaroo to jump out of (engineering); program a Bee-Bot to spell a word by going to different letters on a mat (coding); determine if earthworms prefer dark or light habitats (designing and executing fair tests)
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- 1** Combine different scientific tools to create super senses (the brain); design a bicycle bridge for an amusement park (engineering/knowledge of properties); use Kodable to guide the Puff through a maze (coding)
-
- 2** Use your knowledge of molecules to determine if a mystery model is of a solid, liquid, or gas (structure of matter); plan and design a harbor bridge for the town of Craggy Rock (engineering); use your knowledge of amplitude and frequency to model different sounds (sound/graphing); explore how feathers affect how birds feel different temperatures (adaptations/modeling)
-
- 3** Can we create more chocolate out of one chocolate bar? (conservation of matter); use models of DNA to determine the traits of the next generation of Eggies (heritability); use weather maps to determine the relationship between cloud cover, temperature, and precipitation (water cycle); build roller coaster slopes (simple machines, force and motion)
-
- 4** Make a magnetic crane (properties of a magnet); build a circuit tester to explore properties of conductors and insulators (electricity); create a series of edible moon phases to model how the phases change as the moon revolves (Earth's movement); does the volume of a liquid change? (properties of matter)
-

Project-Based Learning

Our scholars learn the thrill of becoming experts in a subject through Project-Based Learning (PBL), when they have extended time to immerse themselves in a fascinating topic.

Two times each year, Success Academy scholars explore subjects in depth over several weeks from a cross-disciplinary perspective — science, reading, writing, math, and art. Scholars work collaboratively to build expertise, develop insights, and apply their knowledge in creative projects. Our scholars become obsessed with these topics, and that’s the idea! At the close of each unit, families are invited to classrooms to view PBL museums and performances showcasing scholars’ newly gained expertise.

In kindergarten, teachers and scholars spend four to six weeks studying everything about bread. Scholars learn about yeast and mold in science, survey their classmates’ bread preferences and graph the results in math, and read about different kinds of bread from around the world in ELA (with geography thrown in). Our scholars go on a field trip to a local bakery, learn about wheat farming, and even learn to make bread from scratch in their classrooms.

During our Brooklyn Bridge study, second-grade scholars conduct experiments to learn the engineering principles behind bridge construction, build their own model bridge, read about how Emily Roebling became the project’s chief engineer, write letters as 19th-century New Yorkers advocating for the bridge or for safer working conditions, and visit the Brooklyn Bridge to interview pedestrians and record their own observations.



PBL UNITS

GRADE

K

Bread; Farm to Table

1

Schools Around the World; the Arctic

2

Brooklyn Bridge; Birds

3

Iroquois and Lenape; Ellis Island

4

American Revolution; Westward Expansion

Field Studies

The field studies program at Success Academy ignites curiosity, infuses joy into the school day, and exposes scholars to cultural experiences and institutions across New York City and beyond.

Our scholars live in the greatest city in the world, and we take advantage of it! Through trips that include visits to farms, museums, theaters, and the circus, Success Academy scholars make connections between classroom learning and the real world and broaden their knowledge and experience. We believe so strongly in the value of our field studies that our scholars take an average of two excursions per month, or about 20 per year.



Blocks

Blocks time fosters creativity and teamwork by giving scholars the opportunity to freely engage in self-directed play with their peers.

Inspired by images and stories of some of the greatest engineering marvels in the world, kindergartners create increasingly complex structures, make decisions with their classmates about what to build and how to build it, and construct storylines about their structures. Block play develops our kindergartners cognitive, social-emotional, and motor skills, and gives them opportunities to engage in collaborative problem-solving.



Recess

Recess is a critical part of a scholar's day — and it is not optional!

Our scholars want (and need) a break from the rigors of the academic day and the opportunity to exercise outside and socialize with their peers. Scholars have the option of free play, or to participate in organized games and activities supervised by teachers.



Whole Child

A great education consists of more than just rigorous academics. We provide numerous opportunities for scholars to explore talents and interests outside of reading, writing, math, and science.

Success Academy schools offer a robust selection of “specials” and electives that include art, chess, sports, and, depending on the school, dance, music, or theater. We view these non-academic subjects as a critical part of learning that adds joy, builds confidence, and fosters a love of school.

Scholars participate in one special (grades K–2) or elective (grades 3 and 4) for 45 minutes per day. In grades K–2, scholars rotate through all specials available at the school; in grades 3 and 4, scholars get to select two to study all year long.

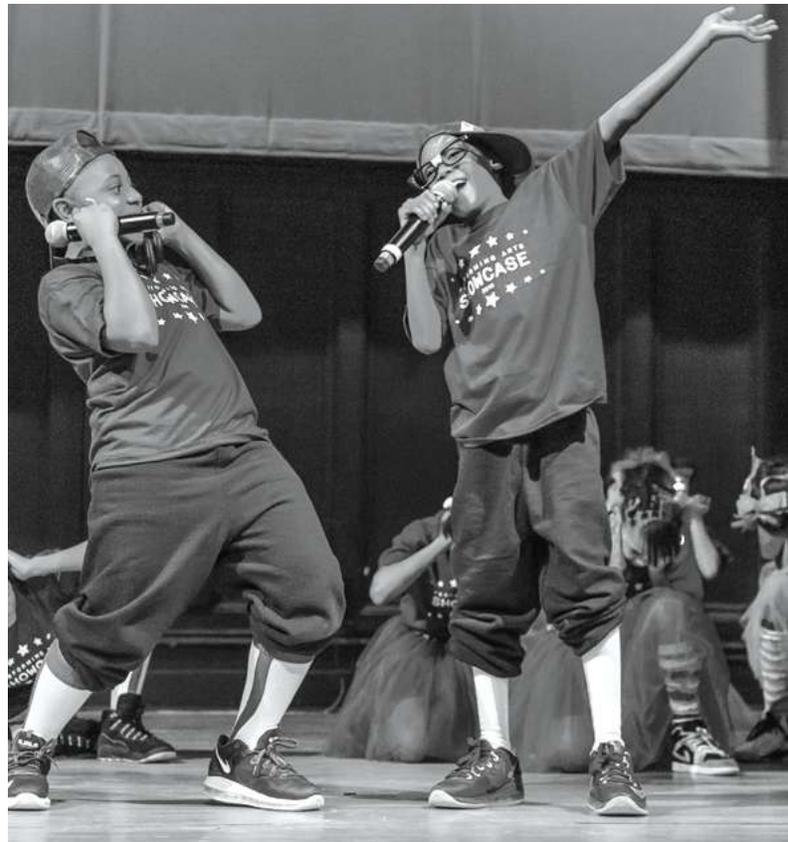


The Arts

The Arts are a vital way for scholars to express themselves, develop new talents, and explore their own creativity.

In Visual Arts, scholars gain the tools they need to navigate the visual world while becoming careful observers and problem-solvers. As artists, they grow into passionate “meaning-makers,” using art to explore and engage with their own ideas and the world around them. Through independent and collaborative experimentation with various materials and mediums — including clay, collage, digital art/photography, drawing, painting, printmaking, and textiles — scholars gain technical skills and confidence in their ability to express themselves visually. Scholars are also exposed to the work of great historic and contemporary artists and art history concepts, which provide them with a baseline for critical thinking, points of connection, and an understanding that they are part of a larger global artists’ community.

In Performing Arts, scholars focus on music, dance, or theater and explore a variety of genres, styles, influences, and artists. Scholars develop technical and creative facility in the subject while telling the stories of their imaginations, their lives, and their communities through a combination of existing work and original pieces. Scholars showcase their work from performing arts classes at performances open to the entire school community.



Gamesday

Every Wednesday is Gamesday at Success Academy elementary schools. Gamesday is an incredibly joyous time when scholars drop everything to play board games, and in the process, grow as strategic thinkers and social learners. Playing board games strengthens scholars' problem-solving abilities and develops their social, emotional, and communication skills as they learn to work well with others by taking turns, making decisions, asking questions, and winning or losing with grace.

Our scholars play Blokus in kindergarten, Monopoly in first and second grades, and Settlers of Catan in third and fourth grades. We selected these games because they require planning, logic, and strategic thinking, and develop number, shape, and pattern recognition, as well as counting skills.

Chess

The Success Academy Chess program provides rigorous, engaging, and hands-on chess instruction that gets kids to fall in love with thinking. Our chess teachers explain the basic moves and rules of the game, and after learning these mechanics, scholars quickly develop the strategies needed to checkmate their opponent. Learning and playing chess sharpens scholars' analytical instincts and teaches them to think strategically, control their impulses, make well-considered decisions, and compete with confidence.

Scholars also have an opportunity to join the chess team and compete in local, state, and national tournaments — at which our teams regularly place among top teams.



Sports

We introduce scholars to a variety of sports — such as basketball, soccer, and volleyball — so they can find one they truly enjoy. Sports classes focus on skill development and learning the rules of the game, and each class concludes with a fun and competitive mini-match.

Success Academy third- and fourth-grade scholars have the opportunity to try out for our after-school sports teams. Throughout each season, scholars play against other Success Academy teams.

Special Education

At Success Academy, we are committed to helping *all* of our scholars including those with special needs tackle challenging academic work and meet sky-high expectations. At SA we service kids with a wide range of supports from speech and occupational therapy, to inclusion classrooms with Integrated Collaborative Teaching. We also serve scholars who are in need of a small student-teacher ratio. Our small class settings have no more than 12 scholars with 1 or 2 dedicated teachers (12:1 or 12:1:1), where children benefit from individualized instruction and flexible scheduling.

Our special education teachers receive ongoing training to ensure they are experienced in the most current, research-based practices for supporting students with specialized learning needs. Currently, 65 Success teachers are pursuing a Master of Science in Special Education and Professional Certificate in Students with Disabilities through a partnership with Hunter College School of Education, one of the most highly rated education schools in the country.

ACTION Values and Building Moral Character

We believe that schools share an obligation with families to teach kids right from wrong, and that character development is an important part of schooling. To maintain a school culture that promotes learning and respect for others, Success Academy has an honor code that applies to the entire school community. Adhering to the honor code means that scholars will act truthfully, with high moral character, both on and off school property.

We hold dear six core values that we teach and preach! These are not simply slogans on a wall — they are true values that everyone in our school community lives and breathes every day. Starting with adults and filtering to children, respect for others and proper behavior are taught, modeled, expected, and rewarded.

Agency	Every member of our community takes ownership. We take responsibility for making sure that our schools and scholars are reaching the highest possible standards across the board.
Curiosity	Our schools are fueled by wonder. Scholars, teachers, and staff always ask, “What if?”
Try & Try	Our entire community understands that tackling tough challenges takes elbow grease, grit, and perseverance.
Integrity	We are honest, open, and transparent.
Others	We never forget to look out for one another. From helping someone on a project to smiling in the hallways, we build a community of mutual respect and support.
No Shortcuts	Excellent learning takes time and effort.



Parent Engagement

At Success Academy, we work hard to ensure scholars achieve the highest levels of academic mastery — but we can't do it alone. As parents, you play an essential role in supporting your scholar's academic progress. From getting your child to school on time every day, to reading to them at home and practicing math facts and spelling words with them, your ongoing effort and oversight is essential to helping your child excel.

Success Academy's powerful, rich, and comprehensive curriculum — developed, scrutinized, and refined over 12 years — is designed to ignite scholars' curiosity and love of learning, while cultivating an analytical and investigative mindset. We want all scholars to take ownership of their learning and develop keen interests and passions, and we encourage you to visit your scholars' classrooms to observe the curriculum in action. Reach out to your teacher to schedule a visit anytime. We look forward to working with you to support scholars on this exciting intellectual journey!

