

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 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 read more complex texts with increasing independence.

Shared Poem (Gr K–1)

Shared Poem occurs four times a week and consists of reading poems together as a class to develop scholars' oral language, phonemic awareness, and 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.

Success for All (Gr K–1 SFA)

In kindergarten and first grade, scholars learn phonemic awareness and phonics — the foundation of reading development—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 ample time to apply and practice by reading and discussing 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 literature 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** *My Father's Dragon* by Ruth Stiles Gannett
The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams
The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats
The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf
-
- 1** *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl
Moonshot: The Flight of Apollo 11 by Brian Floca
Fireflies! by Julie Brinkloe
The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind by William Kamkwamba
-
- 2** *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White
Uncle Jed's Barbershop by Margaree King Mitchell
The Year of the Dog by Grace Lin
The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson
-
- 3** *The Magician's Elephant* by Kate DiCamillo
My Name is Truth: Life of Sojourner Truth by Ann Turner
The Whipping Boy by Sid Fleischman
The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum
-
- 4** *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster
We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball by Kadir Nelson
Wonderstruck by Brian Selznick
-

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 include responding to literature, narrative writing, 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. In grades 3 and 4, scholars have daily mini-lessons that improve their ability to write with clarity and precision. Scholars also learn spelling through nightly practice of weekly spelling words, which increase in difficulty throughout the year.



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 six to eight weeks from a cross-disciplinary perspective — social studies, science, reading, writing, math, and art. Scholars work collaboratively to build expertise, develop insights, and apply their knowledge through project work. 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.

PBL UNITS

GRADE

K	Bread: Beyond the Baking; Farm to Table
1	School: How it Works!; the Arctic
2	Brooklyn Bridge; The Wonder and Diversity of Birds
3	Iroquois and Lenape; Ellis Island
4	American Revolution; Westward Expansion

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, and 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 speed and fluency through, short 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.

Jar (Gr K–3)

Counting is the foundation of all math. Counting Jar helps scholars to become fluent with number names and 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; counting money

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 discuss their conclusions or write 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 whether earthworms prefer dark or light habitats (designing and executing fair tests)

1 Combine different scientific tools to attempt to create “super senses” (human senses); design multiple rides and games for an amusement park (engineering/knowledge of properties); use Code.org to write a computer program (coding)

2 Use your knowledge of molecules to determine whether a mystery object is 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 Explore, using chocolate, whether it is possible to create infinite matter (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 coverage, temperature, and precipitation (water cycle); build a race-car track (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); explore with liquids to determine whether their volume is definite or indefinite (properties of matter)



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, broadening 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.



Fourth Grade Typing

As we increasingly become more of a paperless society, we prioritize preparing scholars to actively participate in a digital world. In fourth grade, scholars improve their keyboarding skills through the use of a robust typing program, which includes customizable assessments and self-pacing to increase scholars' preparedness for Middle School and beyond.



Choice Time and Blocks

Five days a week for hour-long periods, our kindergartners head to the Blocks Room or stay in their classrooms and choose among stations dedicated to sensory materials (clay, play dough), building materials (Legos, Tinkertoys), dramatic play, art, reading, creative writing, or board games. Scholars participate in each activity — Blocks or Choice Time — for two days in a row, giving them extended time to work on projects in which they are deeply engaged. This dedicated playtime fosters creativity and teamwork by giving scholars the opportunity to freely engage in self-directed play with their peers.



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 electives 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.



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 have an opportunity to join their school's competitive chess team and may be selected to compete in local, state, and national tournaments — at which our teams regularly place among the top in the nation!



Sports & Clubs

We offer a variety of school-based clubs open to all scholars at each school — considered vital outlets for creativity, self-expression, and leadership. There are two tiers of club offerings at every elementary school:

- **After-School Clubs:** After-school clubs are offered to select students based on fall tryouts. These clubs run year-round with weekday practices once or twice a week, as well as some weekend and travel commitments. Offerings include soccer, basketball, and chess (M, T, Th, or F), competitive chess (W), a performing art (W), and a visual art (W).
- **Network Clubs:** These competitive and selective programs are comprised of scholars who try out from across multiple Success Academy schools. Mostly year-round commitments, these clubs participate in multiple levels of competition, including local, regional, and national. Sports Network Clubs, which will include soccer, basketball, track, and volleyball, typically practice twice during the week and once on weekends. The Music Network Club practices on Wednesdays (Choir) and twice a week during the week (Band). All Network Clubs require travel to centralized locations for practice and other locations for competitions.



Academic Intervention and Sprint

Success Academy has a profoundly innovative schooling model that achieves outstanding results at scale, and our approach to supporting children with the highest educational needs, which we call Sprint, is just as radical. Many of the techniques associated with special education classrooms — such as small-group instruction, the use of manipulatives, frequent assessments, and individualized learning goals — are standard for *all* of our scholars at Success Academy. We believe that the best way to support most children requiring special education services is not to offer a separate education, but to help them close in on the academic benchmarks we set for *all* children. We purposefully expand on our general model to help these scholars make academic progress.

All of our schools offer Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classes in grades K–12, and 12:1:1 classes in the grades that we believe to be most appropriate for those scholars requiring this academic service; these may change over time. For school year 2019–2020, the elementary schools with 12:1:1 classes are SA Bed Stuy 2, SA Bronx 2, and SA Union Square in fourth grade, and SA Union Square in third grade. We also provide a targeted reading intervention program to accelerate the learning of readers who are behind in grades 2–4. Each school has a dedicated Sprint Specialist and/or Associate who manage the entire Sprint process and work alongside parents, the Department of Education, school leaders, and teachers to ensure scholars are being assessed and receiving the services that will help them reach their highest potential.

Our approach enables scholars with special needs to thrive:

- On the 2019 state exams, 95% of our scholars with disabilities passed math, and 77% passed English (compared with 18% and 16% citywide).
- In 2018, the NYC Department of Education surveyed parents, and 87% of Success Academy parent respondents with children who have disabilities strongly agreed or agreed: “My child’s school works to achieve the goals on my child’s Individualized Education Program.”

English Language Learners

English language learners (ELLs) at Success Academy are not assigned to a separate program or track; rather, they are fully immersed in the English language from day one, right alongside their English-speaking peers. ELL scholars receive a range of special supports, including one-on-one tutoring and small-group instruction as needed. Like all scholars, they are encouraged to present their ideas to their class and actively participate in discussions.

This approach — full immersion with support — allows scholars to quickly develop their English language skills and reach high levels of academic achievement.

- On the 2019 state exams, 97% of our English language learners passed math, and 86% passed English (compared with 19% and 9% citywide).
- At SA, most ELLs become proficient in English within two years, compared with five or more at district schools.

Para obtener información en español y presentar una solicitud, visite es.SuccessAcademies.org

Schedule

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

7:30–8:00 a.m. Scholars are greeted with a handshake, unpack, and dive into morning work. An optional breakfast is provided for all scholars.*

8:00–9:45 a.m. Literacy Block

9:50–10:35 a.m. Guided or Independent Reading

10:40–11:05 a.m. Read Aloud

11:10–11:55 a.m. Specials (arts, chess, sports, theater)

12:00–12:55 p.m. Recess and Lunch*

1:00–1:45 p.m. Science

1:50–2:00 p.m. Snack*

2:00–2:35 p.m. Number Stories

2:35–2:45 p.m. Math Mini Lesson

2:45–3:25 p.m. Math Workshop

3:25–3:30 p.m. No Hesitation Math

3:30–3:45 p.m. Pack up and Dismissal

* Breakfast, snack, and lunch are provided free of charge to all scholars.

** Specials offerings will vary by location.

Please note: This is a sample schedule. Daily schedules will vary by school and grade; however, the curriculum is the same across all schools. Starting in first grade, for example, the block schedule for literacy and math allows more time for discussion and revision in the school day. The content within blocks differs depending on the day — scholars may focus on writing during the literacy block on one day and on close reading of a short text during that block on the following day. The longer period of time dedicated to particular content or skills allows scholars to deepen their knowledge and strengthen connections across subject areas.

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 which 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 and reading to them at home to practicing math facts and spelling words with them and checking that homework is done, your ongoing effort and oversight are essential to helping your child excel.



Welcome to Success!

Success Academy's powerful, rich, and comprehensive curriculum — developed, scrutinized, and refined over 13 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!

