



Success From Within: The \$10 Scholarship Changing Lives in Fresno

The Challenge Facing Fresno

Fresno community grapples with significant obstacles. The city consistently ranks among the most poverty-stricken areas in the United States, with poverty rates nearly twice the national average. This hardship does not exist in isolation; its impact is felt most acutely in our classrooms. In Fresno Unified, only **37%** of students meet grade-level standards in reading and just **27%** do so in math.

These academic struggles threaten to define a child's future before it has even begun.

Your Past Does Not Define Your Future

This is why AJ Rassamni, president of the Blackstone Merchants Association, founded the nonprofit [Success From Within](https://www.successfromwithin.org) in 2022, with a simple and profound purpose: to ignite belief in students who may never have considered themselves worthy of success.

Fresno Unified students who struggle in reading and math have never imagined themselves eligible for a scholarship. Success From Within emphasizes one important idea: **success comes from within, regardless of where you start.**

A \$10 Scholarship With Generational Impact

In 2024, Success From Within launched the **Wind & Wave Scholarship Program**, an innovative, and effective model that awards **\$10 monthly scholarships** to elementary students who demonstrate excellence or meaningful improvement in academics or behavior.

Every month, six students in each of the 20 classrooms are honored:

- Top performer in reading
- Top performer in math
- Most improved in reading
- Most improved in math
- Most improved in behavior
- Most improved in attendance

For many students, it is the first time someone has said:

“You earned this. You deserve this. Your hard work matters.”



Ten dollars may seem modest; However, it is the very first time they have ever heard the word *scholarship*. For a child who's never been recognized academically, it becomes a spark, an affirmation that their effort and potential have value.

The Wind Behind the Wave

When you see a massive wave, you often admire its height and power, but the true force behind it is the wind, an invisible push creating unstoppable momentum.

The “wind” of this program comes from motivational speakers who inspire students before each award ceremony. Former professional athletes, entrepreneurs, civic leaders, and educators share stories of struggle and triumph, reinforcing the message:

“If it is to be, it is up to me.” “Success comes from within.”

Students begin to sit taller. Their eyes widen. Their confidence shifts. Suddenly, a different future feels possible, they begin to imagine a future shaped not by circumstance but by their own choices.

And Then Comes the Wave

At the end of the year, the outcomes speak louder than words.

At Del Mar Elementary School, where the program was launched in the school year 2024-2025, students achieved:

- **Up to 300% growth in iReady reading**
- **Up to 500% growth in iReady math**

This is what happens when a child encounters the right wind and learns how to ride the wave. They soar when guided toward better choices. And they transform when they discover their future is shaped not by circumstance, but by mindset. Del Mar Elementary is not an outlier; it is **proof of concept**. Fresno Unified students do not lack potential. They lack encouragement, recognition, and systems that reward their effort.

The principal at Del Mar has publicly credited the Success From Within scholarship and mentorship model for these dramatic gains. Even the teachers felt renewed and motivated by the students' progress and inspired their own work and relationships with the children. Fresno's children have limitless potential. They simply need the wind to lift them and the wave to carry them.



More Than Scholarships: A Full Investment in Students

[Success From Within](#) is not simply an academic incentive program.

It is a human-development engine that provides other programs to students such as:

- **Mentorship** from high schoolers, professionals, and community leaders
- **Character development** grounded in responsibility, honesty, and resilience
- **Financial literacy**, a skill rarely taught but foundational to breaking cycles of poverty • **Entrepreneurship training**, empowering students to imagine themselves as creators, builders, and problem-solvers

A Community Responsibility

[Success From Within](#) is not just another nonprofit; it is a spark that can change lives in our community. But that spark only grows with support.

An average elementary school serves about 500 students, and for only \$10 per child, just \$5,000 per school year, the Wind & Wave Program can reach them all.

Ten dollars may seem small, but to a child, it can mean everything. When a student earns even a modest scholarship, they feel seen, they feel capable, and they begin to believe they can succeed.

Our students make up 17% of our population, yet they are 100% of our future

Fresno's children are not defined by their circumstances. If we can help them to change the way they look at the world, the world they look at changes. With wider support from donors and community leaders, this program can reach every elementary school in our city and help build a generation of young people who know their dreams are possible. With help of the community leaders we can keep the wind blowing, keep the wave rising and help Fresno grow from the inside out.

If you believe in Fresno... if you want to make a difference... if you want to leave a legacy that matters, join us. **Support the mission.** Visit [SuccessFromWithin.org](#) and take the next step, [donate](#). Together, we can help every child in Fresno rise.

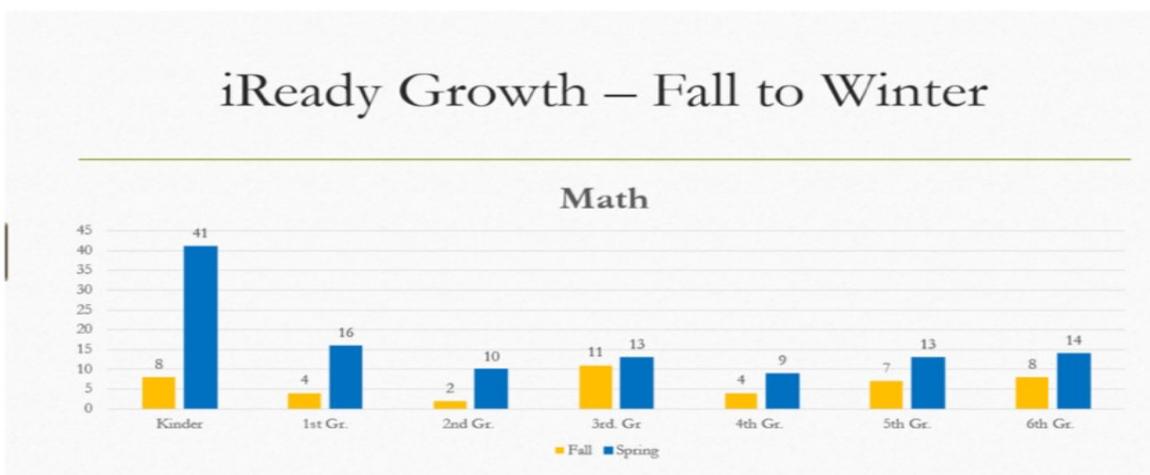
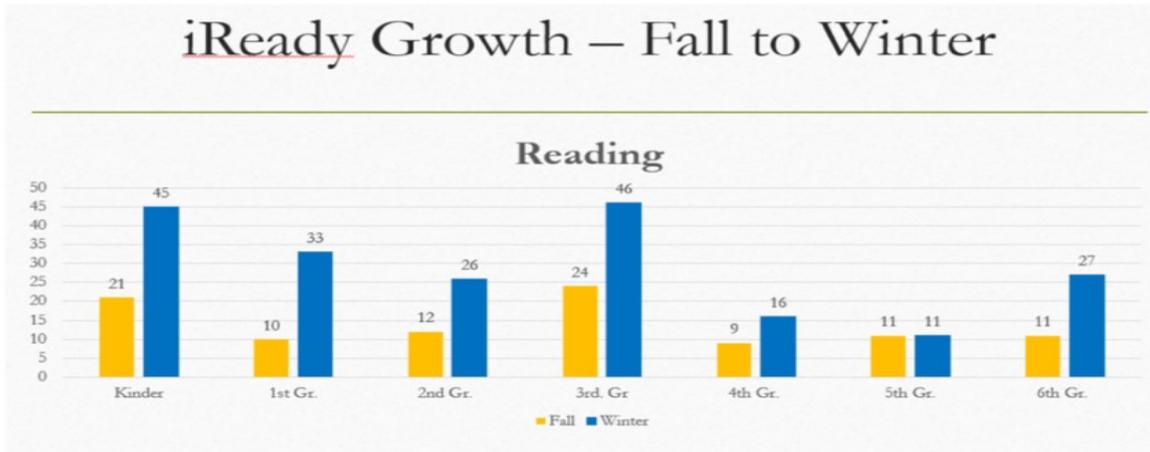
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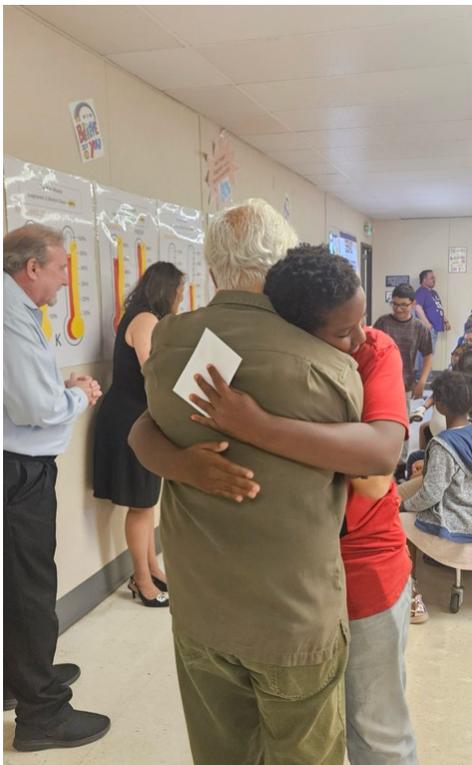


AJ Rassamni, Author; business consultant; community advocate; president of the Blackstone Merchants Association; and founder of Success From Within, a nonprofit organization with a core mission to improve the neighborhood One block at a time, one community at a time, and one person at a time.



Below are two charts showing academic growth from the Fall of 24 to Winter of 24:





*Children Are Not Things
To Be Molded But Are
People To Be Unfolded.*



JERRY P. DYER
MAYOR

May 31, 2024

Dear Prospective Donor,

As the City of Fresno's Mayor, I am writing in support of Success from Within, a local nonprofit that focuses on education as a way out of poverty but has also expanded its horizons to include business prosperity and finding housing for our unhoused population. My One Fresno vision seeks an inclusive, prosperous, beautiful city where people take pride in their neighborhoods and community. Nonprofit organizations – along with business and government – are critical to enacting this vision.

AJ Rassamni is Success from Within's Founder and President. I have long known AJ and consider him a trusted partner and someone who is genuinely interested in making Fresno a better city. In 2016, he established the Blackstone Merchants Association, which has around 3,000 members representing 350 businesses located along north Fresno's Blackstone Corridor, which once was the city's main commercial strip heading north toward Yosemite National Park. He pivoted from the business group in 2022, founding Success from Within, which has a mission to uplift neighborhoods, as his organization says, "one block, one community, and one individual at a time."

While private businesses are buoyed by profits and government is supported by tax dollars, nonprofits such as Success from Within rely on the generosity of donors big and small, as well as grants and donations from organizations that believe in and support a vision. One example of Success from Within's focus is afterschool activities. Before being elected Mayor, I served 40 years in law enforcement, the final 18 as the City of Fresno's police chief. I know what can go wrong when our youth have unstructured lives and little external guidance. Success from Within's afterschool activities help provide youth a boost in the right direction.

Fresno needs organizations like Success from Within to succeed. If students are empowered, if businesses prosper, and if the homeless are housed, then Fresno will succeed. Because of that, I am in full support of Success from Within's mission, and am confident AJ and his team are running a top-notch nonprofit. Thank you for your consideration of this worthwhile effort.

Sincerely,


Jerry P. Dyer



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May 27, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing on behalf of Del Mar Elementary School to express our enthusiastic support for the continuation of the "**Success from Within**" **Scholarship Incentive Program** in the upcoming school year. This initiative has had a profoundly positive impact on our students, and we believe it is essential to maintain the momentum it has generated.

Since the implementation of the program, we have observed notable improvements in student behavior, attendance, and academic performance. Office referrals have decreased significantly since the first semester, indicating a positive shift in student conduct. Teachers have consistently reported increased levels of engagement and motivation among their students, which we attribute in large part to the incentives provided by the scholarship program.

Perhaps most encouraging is the improvement in attendance among students previously identified as chronically absent. These students are now attending school more regularly, which has directly contributed to their academic growth. Our most recent District assessments reflect this progress, showing measurable gains in student achievement across multiple grade levels.

The "Success from Within" program has proven to be a powerful motivator, helping students recognize the value of consistent effort and positive behavior. It has fostered a culture of perseverance and pride in personal growth—values that will serve our students well beyond the classroom.

We are deeply grateful for the support this program has provided **and** strongly advocate for its continuation. The progress we've seen this year is just the beginning, and we are confident that with sustained support, our students will continue to thrive.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to student success.

Sincerely,

Nicole Woods
Principal
Del Mar Elementary School