

“What we have here should be in every school in the world, because this is what an excellent education is all about!”

—Principal Summers

## THE JOB TO BE DONE

In 1999, A.B. Combs Elementary School was the lowest performing school in their district. They were issued a challenge of mammoth proportion: to invent a learning model in just one week that was different than that of any other school in the nation and would use no additional budget or staff.

While the task was great, Muriel Summers, principal of A.B. Combs Elementary, said of the challenge, “We faced many barriers in order to make this model happen, but we looked at the challenge as an opportunity for change.”

Drawing on her past studies and knowledge of the 7 Habits, Principal Summers suggested a dynamic leadership development model based on the 7 Habits. After researching the idea and finding that no other school in the nation focused on leadership development in children, the school administration presented this model to the school board and proceeded to remake A.B. Combs into the first elementary leadership school in the nation.

## SOLUTION

To achieve their mission, “to develop leadership, one child at a time,” the administration worked together to create a unique leadership model which would cultivate leadership development in young children. The system was intended to increase each student’s individual accountability and improve the school’s culture and academic performance.

With the help of FranklinCovey, A.B. Combs Elementary also implemented annual training for the entire staff of educators teaching The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, FOCUS: Achieving Your Highest Priorities, The 4 Disciplines of Execution and The 4 Roles of Leadership. Principal Summers attributes the success of the program to the teachers’ creative genius in first implementing the principles individually and then in modeling and teaching them within their classrooms in a way that a five-year-old can understand.

## RESULTS

“As a result of the program, A.B. Combs Elementary has increased the percentage of students who perform at or above grade level from 67% to 97% in six years,” says Principal Summers.

These test scores speak to the success of the leadership development model despite the challenges they continue to face with one of the most culturally and economically diverse student bodies in the world. They currently have the largest number of students in the district for whom English is a second language with students from 58 countries who speak 27 different languages. They are also a Title 1 school where 45% of the student body receives federal aid for school lunches.

Because of their success, AB Combs is respected and revered as a model for other elementary schools who desire similar results. AB Combs receives countless requests for site visits, training and advice on how to replicate their leadership program not only from the education sector but also from businesses and government entities.

“What we have here should be in every school in the world, because this is what an excellent education is all about!” says Principal Summers. “It is so much more than ABC’s, it is teaching children to be successful, good, caring, and compassionate human beings.”

By daily living their vision “to become a model learning community of academic excellence and personal leadership,” A.B. Combs Elementary has successfully transformed their school into the first magnet leadership school in the nation and has received numerous awards, including international recognition as the founder and forerunner of elementary school leadership programs, The National Magnet School of Excellence and is one of two finalists as the #1 Magnet School in America.