

A REVIEW OF THE LEADER IN ME By Dr. Stephen R. Covey

This book introduces us to a new way of educating students in the 21st century. By the title we assume it is to make every student a leader. Not so; this is a unique method to teach every student to rise to his\her full potential.

The exemplary school that is presented is A. B. Combs Elementary in Raleigh, North Carolina. Before leadership became their theme, they were a magnet school about to be turned back into a traditional school because of the low number of students.

In 1999 Ms. Muriel Summers, principal at A. B. Combs, had attended the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People taught by the author, Dr. Stephen R. Covey. She had not been in the class long before she realized how valuable this information was to anyone. At the end of the training Muriel asked Dr. Covey if this would work with children. Dr. Covey asked, "How young?" She said, "Five years old." He replied, "I don't see why not, and let me know how it goes."

When Ms. Summer's administrator told her she would no longer be a magnet school if she couldn't attract more students. She and her teachers got together to brain storm for a solution.

Parents, teachers and community leaders were asked what they wanted to see developed in their children and future workers. The overwhelming response was character traits and basic life skills. Because of the No Child Left Behind Act we see pressure put on schools for their test scores. So much so, that teachers are evaluated based on their students' year end criterion referenced test scores. Community leaders, parents and teachers weren't asked what they want to see taught to students. Since its enactment into law in January 2002, no other theme is more prevalent than "testing in April." All activities at school come to a halt to review and get ready for testing week. To quote Ms. Muriel Summers, "If we are putting all of our efforts on the almighty test score alone, I am quite afraid that we are going to create a generation of children who know how to do nothing but take a test well." Another principal was asked to identify the greatest pain educators are feeling these days, and her reply was "regret". "Educators are feeling enormous regret from the realization that over the past decade so much emphasis has been placed on raising test scores that it has come at the expense of students not learning some of the most basic skills needed for everyday life."

That is why Muriel and her staff looked at other techniques. After Muriel had taken the 7 Habits course, she was pretty sure she had found the technique. A. B. Combs did not begin with the entire school. She began a pilot program with one class in each grade, and only with a teacher who embraced the new idea. Ms. Summers knew this would not work if teachers were forced to implement it. Ms. Summers and her staff built a program of leadership that is integrated into every aspect of a student's curriculum each day.

After that first year, they saw self-esteem and confidence rise in the children. Teachers were having fewer discipline issues, and seeing an overall improvement in student achievement. As the pilot teachers reported the results, more teachers wanted to come on board and give it a try. Parents are praising the success of the 7 Habits so much that they are taking the course and using it in their homes. They are

seeing their shy, “wall flower” child speaking before a group of adults, or leading in a classroom activity. Business leaders are seeing students who have character and competence and are well prepared for the business world.

Ms. Muriel Summers and her staff have rewritten many times their original plan from 1999, but one factor has never changed. They are committed to bringing out the potential in every child by building on the foundation of the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People and the Malcolm Baldrige Tools. These tools are the criteria schools are evaluated on for the Baldrige award; visionary leadership, valuing relationships, data-driven decision making, citizenship, agility, learning-centered education, innovation, and alignment to local, state, and national standards. Because of the vision of the principal at A. B. Combs, there is an extensive wait list for enrollment into the school. Young students are getting a good, well-rounded education. Parents, teachers and community leaders are well aware of that fact, and they see the difference in their children and the future workers in the business arena.