

# The Leader in Me

## Promising Results

*The Leader in Me* is a process for teaching students personal leadership and 21<sup>st</sup> century life skills, such as goal setting, time management, teamwork, problem solving, respecting diversity, and life balance. The process:

- develops the “whole child” and sees each child as having unique gifts
- is founded on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and other proven leadership principles and tools
- creates a sustainable, safe-and-friendly school culture
- provides world-class professional development for teachers and administrators
- increases parents’ approval and involvement
- is implemented in a way that teachers do not see it as “one more thing,” but as a better way of doing what they were already doing
- impacts students of diverse backgrounds, regardless of race, intelligence, or economic upbringing

Though *The Leader in Me* had its start in 1999 at A.B. Combs Elementary in Raleigh, North Carolina, its spread to other schools and the formalization of the process is still in early stages. To date, more than 120 schools are underway across the U.S. and other parts of the world. Early results are promising and consistent, including:

### **Student Self-confidence**

The most frequent result identified by parents and staff is the visible increase in student self-confidence. Students gain confidence from learning new skills, from being given leadership responsibilities, and from constantly being recognized as unique and important. As Muriel Summers, principal of A.B. Combs Elementary, relates it: “You will hear us compliment the children all the time. We tell them we love them every single day. We have nine hundred students and it is important that we connect with each of them every day. That is part of our core value system. We let children know we believe in them.”

### **Decline in Discipline Problems**

Some of the most noticeable impact from the standpoint of teachers is found in the dramatic drop in discipline problems:

- At English Estates Elementary in Fern Park, Florida, discipline referrals dropped from 225 to 74 in just over a year.
- At Dewey Elementary in Quincy, Illinois, discipline referrals dropped 75% after its first year of implementation, and referrals of students for completion of work declined 68%.
- Joseph Welsh Elementary in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada reported a 67% drop in discipline referrals its first year of doing *The Leader in Me*.
- When asked to identify what the *7 Habits* have done for Crestwood Elementary in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada, Principal David George noted that before the *7 Habits* were introduced, when students were sent to his office to resolve quarrels or discipline issues, they would arrive pointing fingers at the other student, or offering all kinds of excuses. Now he says that they come in taking responsibility for their actions, and he can coach them using the *7 Habits* to resolve problems.
- In many cases, students use *7 Habits* skills to solve or prevent conflicts without adult intervention.

**Student Achievement**

The question that educators often get asked is: What impact does *The Leader in Me* have on student achievement?

- A.B. Combs Elementary piloted *The Leader in Me* in 1999 using one teacher per grade level. That year, the percentage of students passing end-of-grade tests jumped from 84 to 87 percent, largely due to the improved scores of pilot students. Year two, the entire school embraced the process and the percentage of passing students rose to 94 percent. A.B. Combs has since maintained the elevated scores for a steady decade, peaking at 97 percent.
- English Estates Elementary was a Title 1 school and considered a “School in Need of Improvement” when it began *The Leader in Me*. It had a dwindling student population, due mostly to disgruntled parents shifting children to charter schools. Staff morale was low. In its first year of implementing *The Leader in Me*, the school was awarded “The Most Academically Improved School” in its district, with test scores up as much as 35 percentile points in some subject areas. The state of Florida, which gives schools an A, B, C, D or F rating, moved English Estates to an “A” rating, and the school met AYP for the first time in years.
- At Dewey Elementary, teachers and parents were delighted following the first year of implementing *The Leader in Me* when they saw the following rise in Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) scores for reading and math:

	Before teaching <i>7 Habits</i> (2005)	After 3 months of <i>7 Habits</i> (2006)	After 1 year of <i>7 Habits</i> (2007)
Reading	57.4%	72.2%	89.7%
Math	77.4%	90.3%	100%

**Life Skills**

*The Leader in Me* is more than a “Character Education” program. Though it is filled with character components, embedded in the *7 Habits* and other leadership skills are basic life skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Parents and business leaders in particular are pleased that students are learning the following types of skills and character traits:

- |                       |                       |                 |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Creative thinking     | Community service     | Problem solving |
| Goal setting/tracking | Empathy               | Responsibility  |
| Conflict management   | Life balance          | Teamwork        |
| Time management       | Relationship building | Public speaking |
| Cross-cultural skills | Critical thinking     | Self-direction  |

**Teacher (Staff) Satisfaction**

Very encouraging is that teacher satisfaction is on the rise:

- It is not uncommon to hear comments such as, “I have been teaching for 30 years and this is the best thing I have ever done.” Teachers express relief in having less quarrels and less acts of disrespect, which allows them to focus more on academics.
- Some of the schools have won awards (including A.B. Combs being named the #1 Magnet School in America), and principals and teachers have likewise been honored. But the rewards that teachers and administrators value most are the stories of students whose lives have changed as a result of being taught practical skills and thought patterns that will last a lifetime

Teacher (Staff)  
Satisfaction  
continued...

- Schollie Research and Consulting, which administers surveys to five hundred of Canada's schools, found the following responses from staff at Joseph Welsh Elementary after the first year of *The Leader in Me (TLIM)*:

Survey Item	Disagree	Agree
<u>Teachers</u> : <i>The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People</i> assist me in teaching students the principles needed in their daily lives.		100 %
<u>All Staff</u> : <i>The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People</i> have had a positive impact upon this school.		100 %
<u>All Staff</u> : I would like to see <i>The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People</i> continue at this school.		100 %

Survey Item	Prior to TLIM	After 1 Yr. of TLIM
Staff who agree that students are taught the attitudes and behaviors that will make them successful when they finish school.	77.8 %	100 %

**Teacher Development**

Beyond being more satisfied, teachers are also receiving relevant professional training:

- Christie Dickens, Assistant District Superintendent in Adams County, Illinois, points out, "Our focus from the beginning was on looking at how the habits could help the children. But early on we noticed that some of the real changes that were occurring were not with the students, or with their parents, but with our staff. We saw talents coming out of them that we had never seen before. And when they share the positive influences it is having on their interactions with each other, and on their personal lives and families, those are the moments I enjoy the most."
- Many teachers comment on how much the *7 Habits* have helped them to be more organized personally and in the classroom, to connect better with students, and to stay focused on what matters most

**Parent Satisfaction & Engagement**

Parents are virtually unanimous in their support and approval of the process:

- One of the objectives Dewey Elementary had in implementing *The Leader in Me* was to increase parent involvement, and that did happen. The number of parents attending PTA meetings more than doubled, as did parent attendance at monthly Parent-Child activity sessions.
- According to the annual climate survey at English Estates, parents' approval of the school rose to 98% after its first year of implementation.
- Parents speak highly of what is happening at school, but also of improved behaviors exhibited at home. In fact, after observing their children, many parents have sought out training in the same leadership concepts so that they can better integrate the principles into home activities.

*Parent Satisfaction  
& Engagement  
continued...*

- In a parent survey at Crestwood Elementary, all parents gave *The Leader in Me* a “very favorable” rating. Furthermore, the school’s parent council arranged for training in the *7 Habits for Families*, and over sixty families have taken advantage of the offering.
- In Alberta, Canada, Joseph Welsh Elementary reports that parent satisfaction with what children are being taught leaped from 67% to 98% during the first year of implementation. Parents also reported:

Survey Item	Prior to TLIM	After 1 Yr. of TLIM
<u>Parents</u> who agree that students are taught attitudes and behaviors that will make them successful at work when they finish school.	69.4 %	92.3 %
<u>Parents</u> who agree that their child is encouraged at school to be involved in activities that help the community.	65 %	100 %
<u>Parents</u> who agree that students respect each other.	84 %	98 %

Survey Item	Disagree	Agree
<u>Parents</u> : <i>The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People</i> has had a positive impact on my child’s school.	1 %	99 %
<u>Parents</u> : I would like to see <i>The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People</i> continue at my child’s school.	3 %	97 %

**Business  
Community  
Engaged**

Seeing the skills that are being taught and recognizing the importance of having those skills in the coming workforce, several business have begun sponsoring schools to be trained in *The Leader in Me* process. A few examples include:

- After visiting A.B. Combs, Andrew and Peggy Cherng, founders of Panda Express, sponsored nine schools near their headquarters in California.
- In Decatur, Alabama, a local CEO after visiting A.B. Combs decided to sponsor a school in Decatur. That school saw so much progress that the Chamber of Commerce is now sponsoring all 12 schools in the district.
- In Quincy, Illinois, the local United Way had been studying for months how it could best contribute to the community, and after reviewing several options and watching the success of Dewey Elementary, it determined to fund taking the *7 Habits* to all 8,000 plus students in the county.

**Improved School  
Culture**

According staff and teachers, one of the biggest influences the *7 Habits* have had on their school is what it has done for the school’s culture. It spans beyond individual classrooms and creates a safe-and-friendly learning environment throughout the school. The *7 Habits*, in particular, provide a “common language” that everyone shares, including parents. Indeed, it is the culture of the school which is responsible for many of the promising results described above.

## Praise for *The Leader in Me*

### What Parents Are Saying

My children are being educated to open the door to their future rather than waiting for the door to open. ~Jennifer Collins, Parent, Stuard Elementary, Aledo, Texas

My son was very shy when he first came to A.B. Combs Elementary. But they identified his strong areas and gave him opportunities to use them. It turns out he is quite bright, and this school gave him the opportunity to blossom. ~Paul Zevgolist, Parent, A.B. Combs Elementary, Raleigh, North Carolina

I didn't know the 7 *Habits* until my kids started teaching me. My second-grade daughter used to sit in the corner and read. She was quite introverted. The 7 *Habits* have helped her to be social. They help all the students to not be afraid to try something new. ~Christi Woodward, Parent, Dewey Elementary, Quincy, Illinois

The 7 *Habits* have been not only a positive influence in my children's lives but in my own life. Once I was trying to tell my son, "You're not listening, you're not being proactive." But then he said to me, "Mom, you are not listening to me. You are being reactive." And I had a huge paradigm shift, a moment of, "Oh my goodness, it is me." So it is a two-way street. It has been really good for us, really good. ~Megan May, Parent, Crestwood Elementary, Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada

The confidence and self-esteem that students have acquired through the 7 *Habits* is phenomenal. ~Jennifer Wood, PTA, Chestnut Grove Elementary, Decatur, Alabama

My son is in third grade. One time we were at a day care center and a little girl was having trouble with her shoes. Some of the kids started picking on her, but my son stood up and said, "You guys are not being leaders. We need to think win-win. Let's help her." He helped her put her shoes on and then they went outside and played. I thought, "Wow, is that my kid?" It is so amazing how he learns these things from school and then uses them outside of school. The leadership program provides the foundation. ~Joetta Moore, Parent, English Estates Elementary, Fern Park, Florida

When our five-year-old son started coming home and using catchphrases like "win-win" and "begin with the end in mind," it hit home with me. So I decided to take the training, and now we're putting it into place 24/7 as a family. It seems to help in my son's daily routines, my daily routines, my wife's daily routines, our family's daily routines. ~Dean Harrison, Parent, Crestwood Elementary, Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada

### What Business and Community Leaders Are Saying

*The Leader in Me* is focused on building the future leader. Starting from elementary school, students are allowed to be leaders, and truly come to believe they can be leaders in the future. So when I tell my friends about the schools we are sponsoring, I tell them we are supporting the future. In this way, we are able to pay back to a community that has really been so kind to us. ~Peggy Cherng, Cofounder, Panda Express and Panda Cares, Rosemead, California

When I went to school we stuck only to academics. So when I see children learning about ethics, involvement in the community, and leadership, I find it very impressive, very worthwhile. ~Kathleen Cresswell, Member, Rotary International, Florida

The best thing about *The Leader in Me* is that it is not just for the elite kids or the troubled kids. It is for every single student. It does not matter what their economic background is or what their social history is, it is for everybody. ~Peggy Crim, United Way Board Member, City Treasurer, Quincy, Illinois

We expect a lot of technical skills from our employees, but we also believe that successful operations require a real strong foundation of interpersonal skills. Some of our employees had taken the *7 Habits*, so when one of them heard Crestwood Elementary was teaching the habits, we saw a real win-win between what the school was trying to do and what we were trying to do at our plant. The life skills they are learning in the *7 Habits* are so critical to their future success. ~Rick Redmond, Vice President, Criterion Catalysts and Technologies, Medicine Hat, Canada

Our company sponsored the leadership program at Chestnut Grove Elementary. It was so successful the first year that we decided to hold our Decatur Morgan County Chamber of Commerce board meeting there one month. The kids came in and spoke to us. The adults were so impressed with the young children's confidence that now we are working with our local businesses to support this as a district-wide effort. Starting with kindergartners, in thirteen years, we've got the opportunity to change the mindset of an entire community. In only thirteen years! ~Donnie Lane, CEO, Enersolv, Decatur, Alabama

Our Chamber of Commerce does what is called "Business After Hours," where we showcase businesses in the area. Two years ago was something special because, instead of a business, we showcased English Estates Elementary. Over a hundred people from the business community attended. The children spoke about leadership and the *7 Habits*, and we had a tour of different classrooms. A child's eyes are like windows right into their minds, and we could see that the children had been changed by what they had been learning. ~Carlos Giraldo, Member, Chamber of Commerce, Florida

## What Teachers Are Saying

When I first walked into this school, I could tell it was where I wanted to be. Students have the utmost respect for adults and each other. This is all about real life skills. I love helping kids to believe in themselves. ~Rick Weber, Third-grade Teacher, A.B. Combs Elementary, Raleigh, North Carolina

When I observe children these days, sometimes I feel they lack certain skills, like interpersonal skills or teamwork skills. Singapore is a fast-paced society, and our education system is very exam-oriented. Often when students go home, their parents are busy, their families tend to be small, and they have tons of homework. As a result, they do not have the chance to interact much with other children or to develop these skills through play. So as a teacher, I feel privileged to be at a school where I can teach skills like "think win-win" and "synergy." They help students to be more effective as students and better able to handle life's challenges. ~Mrs. Limmengkwang, Teacher, Chua Chu Kang Primary School, Singapore

What I love about teaching the *7 Habits* is that it is not something more on my plate. This is a method, a strategy. I have been teaching sixteen years, and since teaching the *7 Habits* my students have the best test scores. And people ask, "How can the habits increase test scores?" Well, when children are in a risk-free environment because they are applying the habits, they feel good about themselves and are more prone to pay attention to what is being taught. ~Dana Farris, Kindergarten Teacher, Chestnut Grove Elementary, Decatur, Alabama

The *7 Habits* greatly help with discipline and classroom management. A lot of times I do not even have to get involved when there is a disagreement between children. They know the habits and they can work through the problem-solving steps without taking my time to solve or get involved. When it does require my help, we work through the steps of asking what is most important, what is putting first things first, and what ideas can we come up with to reach an understanding. ~Emily Hardee, Fifth-grade Teacher, A.B. Combs Elementary, Raleigh, North Carolina

I have children who are autistic, speech and language impaired, and physically impaired. They like being leaders and making good choices. The *7 Habits* provide a language that I can use with them in making that happen. ~Winnifred Hunter, Pre-KVE teacher, English Estates Elementary, Fern Park, Florida

I recently received a new student along with notes from her previous school. Her previous teacher said, "She does not follow directions or get along with peers." I had to read it twice since I got the record a month after she enrolled. That was not the child I am experiencing. In this classroom she is wonderful. She is so anxious to come to school and walks in with a smile every day. Students will learn the academics, but kindness, respect, and leadership is what this school is about. It is about teaching them to be leaders and doing the right thing when no one is looking. ~Debbie Falkner, Kindergarten Teacher, A.B. Combs Elementary, Raleigh, North Carolina

As a teacher, I am in awe as I observe our student leaders step up to visitors at our school, look them in the eye and give them a strong firm handshake welcoming them to our wonderful school. Their self-confidence and self-esteem has grown tremendously. ~Waydean Waller, Reading Specialist, Nash Elementary, Texarkana, Texas

I think the 7 Habits are the greatest thing that we can teach students. They teach them how to be a leader and how to function in society, including how to deal with people who are hard to get along with. ~Vicki Mallory, Third-grade Teacher, Dewey Elementary, Quincy, Illinois

I have taught twenty-one years and fully believe the 7 Habits have helped the discipline of our children. When students come into the classroom, they know we expect them to follow the leadership model, and to use the 7 Habits. Because of that, there are less interruptions and less disruptive behaviors, which means I can really focus on whatever it is I am teaching. ~Martha Bassett, Art Teacher, A.B. Combs Elementary, Raleigh, North Carolina

Teaching leadership skills and the 7 Habits has changed me as a teacher, as a parent, and as a wife. It has helped me to organize my life better. It has helped me to prioritize and to put my attention on the things that are most important. I feel I am doing more than just teaching reading, writing, and math. Those are important subjects, but more important is that they learn that someone cares about them, that they are special and that they matter in this world. It is about more than test scores. ~Pam Almond, Kindergarten Teacher, A.B. Combs Elementary, Raleigh, North Carolina

After just one year of implementation, we have seen leadership skills emerge in both students and teachers. It is refreshing to see students taking responsibility and ownership for their learning and self discipline, and it is a joy to see children attempting to create Win-Win situations as they seek to understand others and resolve their differences. ~Marian Holder, Third-grade Teacher, Nash Elementary, Texarkana, Texas

I see a very big difference in being a social worker at Dewey, where we have the 7 Habits, versus at other schools that do not have the habits. The biggest difference is found in the common 7 Habits language that is used throughout the school. I can use the same words whether I am working with a kindergartner or a third grader, because the kids all know the 7 Habits. Also, the students at Dewey tend to know how to solve many of their own problems. I might facilitate the process using the 7 Habits, but then I can step back as they take responsibility for solving many of their own situations. ~Denise Poland, Social Worker, Dewey Elementary, Quincy, Illinois

## **What Principals and Other Administrators Are Saying**

This is more than character education. We are not just teaching perseverance, patience, and kindness, we are teaching leadership. We are teaching children that not only can they develop leadership traits in elementary school, but that we expect them to take these skills with them when they go on to middle school and high school, and to embrace them as lifelong skills. ~Lauretta Teague, Principal, Chestnut Grove Elementary, Decatur, Alabama

As educators and parents, our ultimate goal for our children is to have them be successful in life, and to do the things we would like them to do when we are not around. Our job, therefore, is to prepare them for life, not to guide every moment of every day of their existence. What better way to do that than through teaching timeless principles? ~Dr. Beth Sharpe, Principal, English Estates Elementary, Fern Park, Florida

When we looked at how the *7 Habits* might benefit students, we began by asking, "What are the characteristics we want students to have when they go to the workplace? How will the *7 Habits* build in students the character traits needed for the twenty-first century?" We concluded that students who go through the *7 Habits* will be planners, they will take responsibility for their learning, and they will choose to have a positive attitude. They will work together and they will have a vision for their future. These are traits and skills that will help them do better in school, in college, in the workplace, and will allow them to lead families when that time comes. ~*Jeanne Payne, Professional Development Coordinator, Decatur City Schools, Decatur, Alabama*

When I first came to A.B. Combs, I thought, "Can this be real or is this just a show for the day?" Spending just a little bit of time here, I realized that this is a way of life. These are people actually living their dream. The minute you walk in the door you feel something special. ~*Michael Armstrong, Magnet Coordinator, A.B. Combs Elementary, Raleigh, North Carolina.*

A lot of times people say, "We need to get back to the basics, or the three "R's"—reading, writing, and arithmetic." We look at the *7 Habits* as a fourth "R"—relationships. It is an "R" that allows us to teach kids how to relate to themselves and how they can relate to those around them. ~*Ed Nichols, Assistant Superintendent, Decatur City Schools, Decatur, Alabama*

It has been a joy to watch this leadership program flourish and grow at English Estates. The results of the school academically have been phenomenal. It has changed the whole spirit of the school and the community around it. These are lifelong skills that they get an opportunity to learn at age six that many adults do not get a chance to learn in their entire lives. ~*Barry Gainer, School Board Member, Seminole County Schools, Florida*

The *7 Habits* for students in Adams County started with Dewey Elementary and shortly thereafter at Washington Elementary, both of which are K-3 schools. Six other district schools and four county schools followed the next year. Now the preschool, parochial school, and day-care centers have also taken the training, and the intermediate schools will start this summer. We tried to put some of this off so we could do the training at a more even-keel rate over a three-year period, but the schools have been so interested that it has gone like wildfire. ~*George Meyer, retired Superintendent of Schools and Dean of the School of Education at Quincy University, Illinois*

Leadership can be such an obscure term to elementary students, but the *7 Habits* break it down into "doable" actions and concepts for students. When students are given the opportunity to practice life skills in a safe and loving environment, they eventually add those skills to their everyday skill set. ~*Robin Seay, Principal, Stuard Elementary, Aledo, Texas*

Having a very diverse population of students, there is a great need at our school to teach students positive skills that will have a profound impact on their lives. We strongly feel that we are meeting those needs by introducing these effective habits with our students. Amazing things happen each day as our students develop stronger academic skills, as well as better skills in relationships and in decision making. This is definitely one of the most exciting things I have done during my thirty-six year career in education. ~*Bertie Norton, Principal, Nash Elementary, Texarkana, Texas*

Kids need this, and the teachers and the community embrace it. It makes the kids feel good about coming to school each day, and that is a big part of what they need because there are a lot of external forces that present them with daily challenges. This is a shining star, or a light, that they can latch on to and use to help themselves and each other. It just makes sense. ~*Thomas F. Leahy, District Superintendent, Quincy Public Schools, Quincy, Illinois*

By engaging students early on in the importance of leadership, students will develop habits in their lives that will lead to success throughout their academic career. ~*James Henry Russell, Superintendent of Schools, Texarkana Independent School District, Texarkana, Texas*