



SUCCESS STORY

Coleman Elementary School

PINE BLUFF, ARKANSAS

In less than three years, Coleman Elementary School went from a failing school with more disciplinary referrals than students to increasing testing standards and creating a thriving school culture.

Coleman Elementary School

PINE BLUFF, ARKANSAS

DEMOGRAPHICS

- **401** Students
- **1%** Special Education
- **13%** English Proficient Learners
- **100%** Eligible for Free or Reduced lunch

RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES

- **84%** African American
- **14%** Caucasian
- **2%** Hispanic
- **1%** Asian
- **1%** Multiracial
- **1%** Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Located in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Coleman Elementary School (CES) serves grades 4–6 in Jefferson County. The city is the eleventh-largest in Arkansas. CES is a part of the Watson Chapel School District. Their mission is to achieve excellence for every child, every day, at every opportunity.

➤ CHALLENGE

In the past, Coleman Elementary School has struggled in a number of areas.

When Principal Marcia Merritt took over, the school was an F school with a record number of out-of-school and in-school suspensions. Students were strongly disciplined for the smallest infractions, with more than 700 disciplinary actions recorded. Learning had stopped becoming a priority.

Another major challenge Merritt noticed was the school culture. The infrastructure at CES had students separated by grade levels in individual buildings. Teachers and students rarely saw anyone outside their grade level. Each building operated as its own school. Faculty meetings and teacher teams were nonexistent.

Principal Merritt, who is passionate about unity and collaboration, wanted immediate change for the students of Coleman Elementary School.

➤ IMPLEMENTATION

While Merritt was the assistant principal of CES, she attended one of Solution Tree's Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work® Institutes and immediately wanted to implement her takeaways. It wasn't until she became principal that the process began.

CES received a grant from the Department of Education and more guidance from Solution Tree.

With the assistance of PLC at Work associate Paula Maeker, Merritt was able to create a schedule that allowed CES teachers to have an 80-minute block once a week for uninterrupted collaborative planning.

Shortly after, a guiding coalition was formed, followed by lead teachers and teacher teams. Across grade levels, teachers began to interact with one another and build solid agendas, norms, and strategies for collecting data.

Once teams brought their data together, they were then able to identify what needed to be improved and work in units to grow CES scores as a whole, providing intervention and enrichment times for individual students.

Their intervention and enrichment strategies consisted of tacking on more time for students at the end of each class period. The school's guiding coalition was able to support the different subject areas that needed the most attention.

“It was important to me that the teachers were able to collaborate, but we had to teach them what that looked like at first. I also emphasized to my team that we are one school; we may have three buildings, but this is one school. This is Coleman.”

—Marcia Merritt, principal, Coleman Elementary School, Arkansas

► RESULTS

Around Merritt’s second year at Coleman Elementary School, a culture shift began to take place.

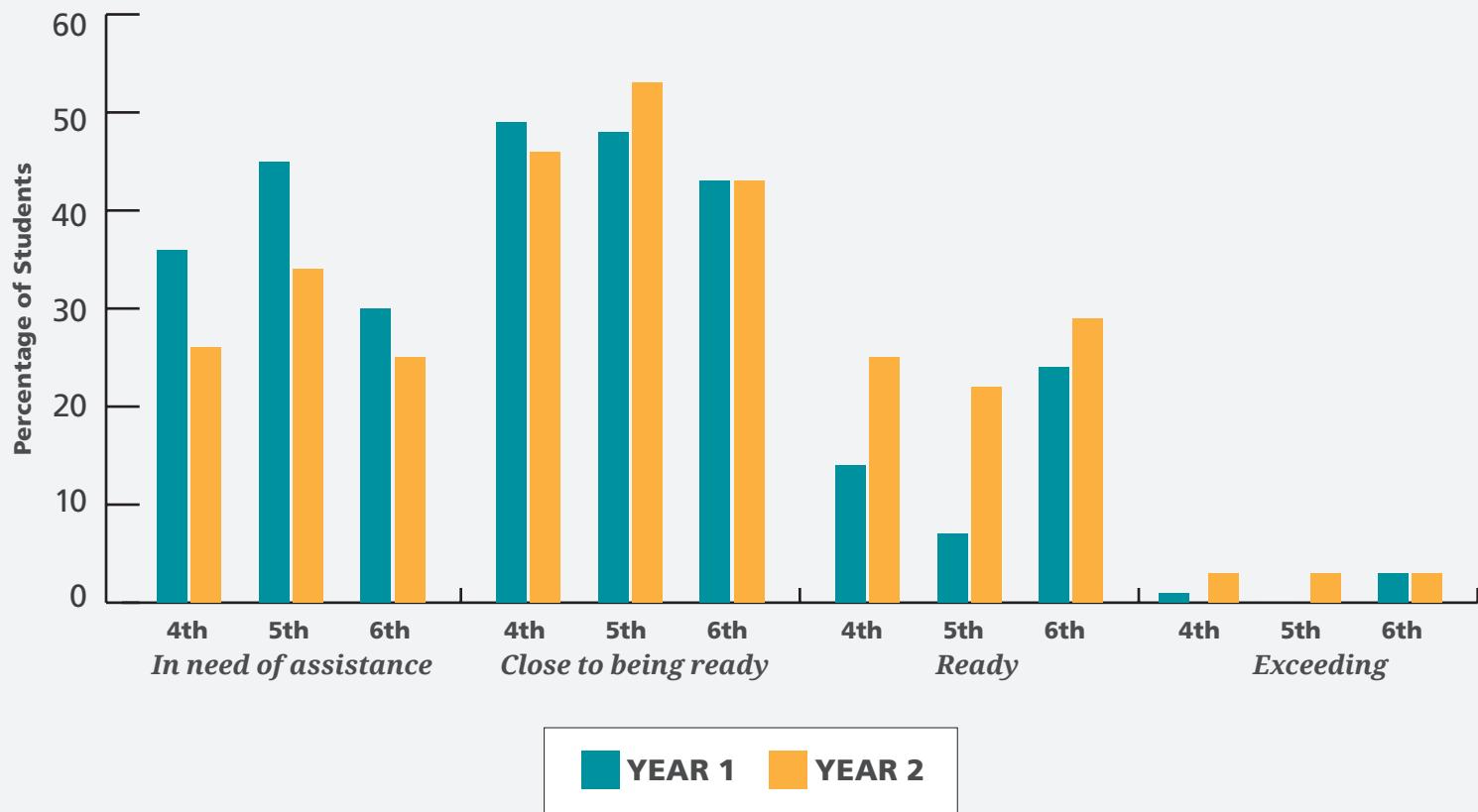
Student learning was now at the forefront of everyone’s mind and collaboration was in full effect. It no longer was about individual grades in individual buildings but about one school reaching student achievement.

Principal Merritt attributes her school’s success to her assistant principal, Mrs. Cage, the teachers and staff at CES who made the 180 shift, and her coach, Paula.

“Paula is awesome. She is one of the reasons I am still here today. We still need Solution Tree, and I still need my coach,” Merritt said.

For the teachers and staff at CES, their collaboration extended into learning walks where teachers across grade levels could learn different teaching styles and strategies from one another. Disciplinary referrals, which included detention, in-school, and out-of-school suspension at CES, decreased drastically from more than 700 to just under 160. This improvement moved CES’s overall letter grade from an F to a D school.

ACT Aspire Data: Mathematics





Start Your Success Story

You have a vision for change and improvement in your school or district. You want to see results in the classroom for the lifelong betterment of your students. Like many educators, you may be doing more with less, and you are always looking for ways to improve.

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