



Students enjoying the annual Whiskers Walk as the end of the year school-wide celebration.

GREATER JASPER CONSOLIDATED  
SCHOOL CORPORATION

# **Fifth Street Elementary:** **A LEADER IN ME SCHOOL**

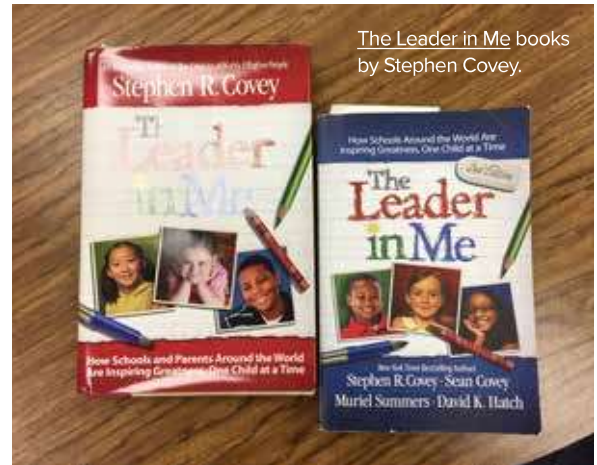
*By Heather Goodhue, School Social Worker; Lisa Guthrie, First Grade Teacher; and Angie Cox, Second Grade Teacher*



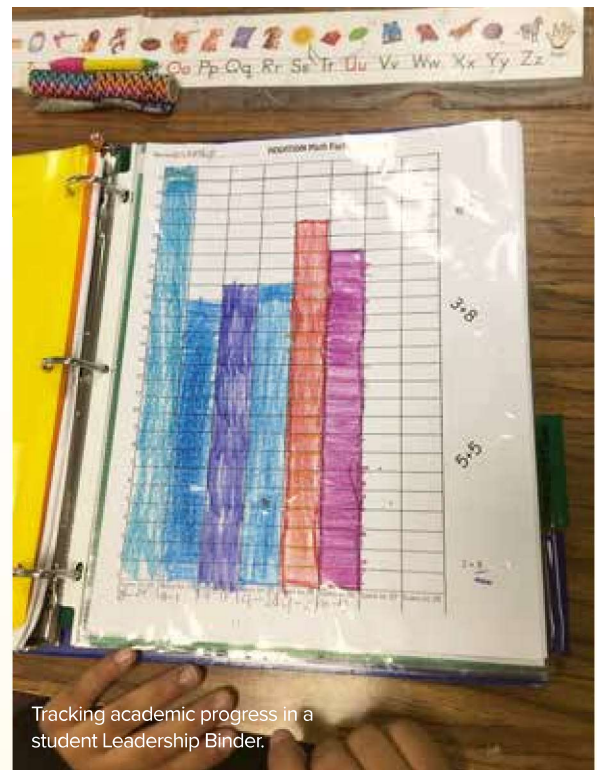
**A**t the start of the 2013-2014 school year, Fifth Street Elementary School principal Leah Jessee spoke with her staff about the increasing number of state mandates, asking how they might try to streamline things. Discussion led to The Leader in Me by Stephen Covey, with its premise that schools could focus all programs through the lens of leadership. Mrs. Jessee was intrigued by the book's ideas, but wondered what they would "look like" in daily school life. She arranged for the school's librarian and social worker to attend a symposium on *The Leader in Me* in Bowling Green, KY. They were able to visit schools and meet with students who had learned The 7 Habits of Happy Kids. Those students were able to articulate what leadership means and how they show leadership at school. The schools visited had similar demographics as Fifth Street School. The school librarian and social worker were excited to share what they had observed with their colleagues. Their observations sparked interest in *The Leader in Me*, so additional staff were sent to a Leadership Day at a school in Evansville, Indiana. However, this school had very different demographics, and some felt the program would not be a good fit for our school. In trying to come up with a win-win solution between those who were ready to jump in with both feet, and those who were wanting more time and information, everyone received a copy of the book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens. Over the course of the next school year, staff took turns leading discussions regarding the book. At the end of the book study, everyone was united in their desire to pursue "The Leader in Me" program for the students of Fifth Street Elementary School.

The most significant hurdle to pursuing "The Leader in Me" was cost. The initial price tag was over \$60,000 for the first three years of implementation. The cost covered annual training and materials for all staff each of the three years, training for the Lighthouse Team, annual coaching days, activity guides for each student, and online access and intellectual property license. Speakers at the symposium had stressed that the lack of staff buy-in was the only reason schools did not implement the program, and that resources were available to help defray the cost. Our financial support first came from our Dubois County Community Foundation. They believed in the program and the benefits it could provide for our students. The Foundation gifted us with a \$10,000 grant to begin the first phase of training. This was soon followed by a \$5,000 dollar commitment from our PTO. Ultimately, the Community Foundation partnered with us and connected us with the Old National Bank Foundation to secure the rest of the funding.

In the summer of 2015, 95% of all Fifth Street Staff, including teachers, instructional assistants, custodial and cafeteria staff participated in the two-day 7 Habits training. No stipend or comp time was provided; everyone



The *Leader in Me* books by Stephen Covey.



Tracking academic progress in a student Leadership Binder.



Kindergarten students working in Leader in Me student activity guides.

participated because of a belief in the program and how it could benefit our students. There was an additional day of training for the identified Lighthouse Team. This team is responsible for maintaining fidelity and progress with the program. Prior to the start of the 2015-2016 school year, there was a day of “Creating Culture” training for all staff. “Aligning Academics” was the training for all staff the following summer, and the final school-wide training was “Empowering Instruction” in the summer of 2017.

After all the training, how has day-to-day school changed for the students and families of Fifth Street Elementary? Every student is taught the 7 Habits of Happy Kids, which are:

- HABIT 1: Be Proactive** – I am in charge of me.
- HABIT 2: Begin with the End in Mind** – Have a plan.
- HABIT 3: Put First Things First** – First I work, then I play.
- HABIT 4: Think Win-Win** – I win, you win, we all win.
- HABIT 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood** – I listen before I speak.
- HABIT 6: Synergize** – Teamwork
- HABIT 7: Sharpen the Saw** – Balance is best.

These lessons are taught directly through Student Activity Guides; incorporating the principles and habits into read-alouds, weekly texts, and writing prompts; and mini-lessons taught to all students during morning announcements. Leadership language is used by all staff in interactions with students and the adults model the 7 Habits for students on a daily basis.

Every student has a Leadership Binder. Each student tracks their attendance, their



Left: School-wide behavior goal tracked on the scoreboard.



Classroom celebration of making cookies.

behavior, and their progress on both academic and personal goals, also known as WIGS (Wildly Important Goals). Students understand that improving in all areas at a personal level also helps in meeting grade-level, school-wide, and even district level goals. The Leadership Binders are sent home periodically for students to share their progress with their families. Student achievements, such as Whiskers Awards and Leadership Roles are also included in the Leadership Binders.

Grade-level and school-wide goals are tracked on our Fifth Street Scoreboard. One of the premises of The Leader in Me is that goals are a vehicle, but celebrations when goals are reached, are the gas. Classrooms have celebrations when all students reach an identified benchmark in an academic area. There are quarterly school-wide celebrations when attendance and behavior goals are reached.

One of the most impactful pieces of The Leader in Me has been the relinquishment of responsibility from the adults to the students. Many tasks have been turned into Leadership Roles that provide opportunities for students to take initiative and ownership. When a Leadership Role is identified, students have the opportunity to submit an application stating why they want the leadership role and what strengths they would bring to the role. They are then interviewed by at least one adult while

demonstrating their ability to fulfill that role. Current leadership roles include Broadcaster/News Reporter, Security Guard, Restaurant Manager, Restaurant Server, and Daycare Supervisor.

As part of giving students more ownership, the Leader in Me program encourages schools to provide students with “a voice and a choice.” This is done in a variety of ways. There is a Student Lighthouse Team with a representative from each first and second grade classroom. Originally, these students were selected by classroom teachers, but this process is being revised so that students must apply and interview to be considered for this team. The Student Lighthouse Team helps generate ideas for Sharpen the Saw activities, positive behavior incentives, and Fear Factor foods to sample. Their suggestions are then given to the student body to vote on. Our past service projects for the local humane society and homeless veterans received the most student votes out of three options. Students can also submit recommendations or ideas in our 7 Habits Mailbox.

Since becoming a Leader in Me school, we have hosted two community Leadership Events. Students had an active role in hosting teachers from interested schools and our community partners. Students served as tour guides, explained their Leadership Binders and our school-wide scoreboards, participated in a question and answer panel, and performed in a talent show.

Again, they had the opportunity to apply and interview for roles that they were interested in fulfilling. There was a significant amount of review and practice, but the students rose to the occasion and proved they could handle the responsibility.

One year ago, we hosted a 7 Habits Family Night. We provided a meal of pizza, breadsticks, and brownies. As parents learned more about the 7 Habits, the school-aged students learned a song and made a trail mix associated with the 7 habits. Child care was provided for the younger children by a local Girl Scout troop and high school-aged volunteers. At the end of the evening, the students performed their song for their parents. Insert Figure 14. Over 350 people attended, which is by far the largest turn-out we have ever had for a parent program.

Fifth Street Elementary has been a K-2 school since 1990.

Our sister school is Tenth Street Elementary for grades 3-5. In 2017, the Greater Jasper school board approved the building of a new elementary school, which will combine Fifth and Tenth Street schools and house grades K-5. While we were excited about the possibilities, there were a lot of questions regarding how to continue the Leader in Me program since staff at Tenth Street had not participated in our Leader in Me trainings. Franklin Covey worked with us in customizing training to get all teachers and staff on the same page before merging into the new and combined Jasper Elementary.

For the past few years, the vision statement of Fifth Street Elementary School has been “By the year 2020, Fifth Street Elementary School will be a Lighthouse school and ranked in the top 15% of all elementary schools in Indiana.” Becoming a

Lighthouse School means that a school has embedded the principles of The Leader in Me program in all areas of the school. The school must be designated as “mature” or “sustaining” on all 32 criteria on the Lighthouse School rubric. Once the Lighthouse School designation is achieved, the school must be recertified every two years. With encouragement from our Leader in Me coaches, Fifth Street Elementary is striving to become a Lighthouse School by the end of the 2019-2020 school year. As we merge into Jasper Elementary in the fall of 2020, we will carry the Lighthouse Status with us and will have two years at our new school before needing to recertify.

So, has the expense and effort been worth it? The amount of positive feedback from diverse sources over the past few years convinces us that it has.

Last year, the elevator maintenance men shared this with our Title One teacher: “This school is one of our favorites to work at because the students are so well-behaved and kind to us.”

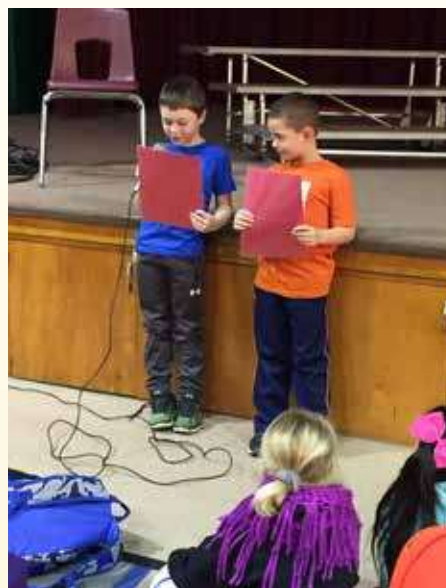
When the first class of students who were taught the 7 Habits from kindergarten through second grade arrived at Tenth Street School for third



Student-led question and answer panel at our Leadership Day event.



Students can leave ideas and recommendations in the 7 Habits Mailbox.



Student Broadcasters doing morning announcements.

Students perform at the end of the 7 Habits Family Night.



grade, an instructional assistant felt compelled to write to us: “Good morning, Mrs. Jessee! I just wanted to take a quick minute to thank you for the fantastic group of kids you sent to 10th Street this year. This group of third graders is absolutely fantastic! I know it’s still early, and this could just be a “honeymoon phase,” but I already see so much more respect and helpfulness and overall maturity from these kiddos than from other groups. I attribute these strong character traits to the commitment you and your staff have to the children and to the Leader In Me program. It is working! In the first week of school, I had multiple staff members here report to me that there was something different about this 3rd grade group.”

A parent emailed the following to our librarian: “It was cute hearing Grace explain to her dad that she filled out a job application and that she was hired by the librarian! Glad to hear she did a good job Sabrina! Thanks for all that you do for the kids!”

Our students demonstrate regularly that they understand the 7 Habits and how it can positively impact them in day-to-day life. For example: “Two students were having a conflict at recess and based on what Mrs. Messick observed, she talked with both of them and told one student he needed to walk for the rest of recess. The other student left the area to swing, but then came back to Mrs. Messick and said that he was really the one who should be walking. Mrs. Messick praised him for taking responsibility for his actions.”

This is from our cafeteria staff: “I have noticed too that a lot of students reply with a “thank you” and also help fellow students in time of need. For example, when a student has trouble scanning their lunch card, they help them scan it or when we have a new student, they help them and show them what they are supposed to do and last but not least, they ALL want to help us in the cafeteria. They are a great help to us washing off the tables, putting up the lunch cards, writing the menu on the menu board, filling up the breakfast trays into the dishwasher so the cooks can run them through etc. They are becoming “future leaders” of America. I am very proud of our Fifth Street students. Let’s keep doing what we’re doing!!”

A second grade teacher shared the following: “Students were working in groups to illustrate a page from a book. Terry said ‘I’ve heard that Heidi can be hard to get along with. But we synergized and she worked well with the group.’ Blake said ‘My group synergized and noticed that Betty was a good drawer, so she was in charge of that part of the project.’”

Students are getting constant opportunities to learn and practice life skills of setting goals, tracking their progress, identifying their strengths and passions and pursuing those areas of interest, advocating for themselves in both written and oral interviews, and taking ownership of their own learning and behavior. We see great things for our students’ futures and we feel the Leader In Me program has been a huge asset for every child in our school. 🐼